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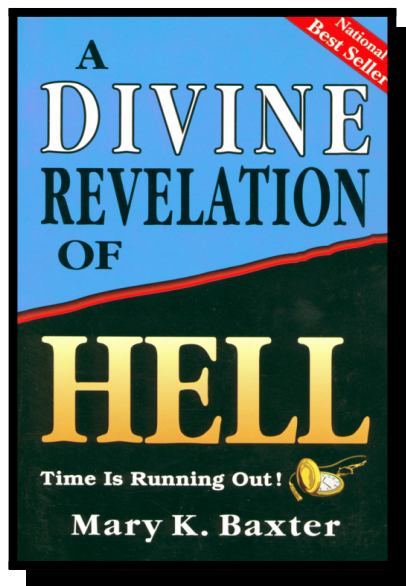
## Mary Baxter's Vision of Hell

### Divine Revelation or Deluded Ranting?

by G. Richard Fisher

Years ago, Audie Murphy starred in a movie titled, *To Hell and Back*, the story of a World War II hero. Mary K. Baxter, in her book, *A Divine Revelation of Hell*, claims to have been literally to hell and back, escorted by Jesus Himself on a 40-day journey in an out-of-body experience. Baxter's publication has established itself on the best-seller list and has received the patronage of Marilyn Hickey and David (Paul) Yonggi Cho (see the *Bookstore Journal*, June 1995).

According to her publisher, Whittaker House, "Mary K. Baxter was an ordinary housewife until, through a series of revelations and dreams, she was taken to the very body of hell. She was guided through the levels and degrees of hell by Jesus Himself, who then



gave her the commission and task of warning the world that hell exists and that time is short. ... Mary was

born in Chattanooga, Tennessee where she was raised in a Christian home."

She was ordained at the Full Gospel Church in Taylor, Mich., in 1983 and claims to have had many visitations from the Lord and a calling in the area of visions, dreams and revelations. Among her other beliefs is that a believer can lose his salvation and must maintain works to remain saved.

Dr. L.T. Lowery of the National Church of God, Fort Washington, Md., whose name was given as a contact for Baxter's speaking engagements, confirmed that she is a member of that congregation, which is part of the Church of God of Cleveland, Tenn.

The Church of God, Cleveland, Tenn., is a small but fast-growing Pentecostal denomination of a few hundred thousand that approximates the Assemblies of God in doctrine, except its practice of foot-washing. Its history can be found in Charles Conn's book, *Like a Mighty*

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# Editorials

## THE NEW CATHOLIC CATECHISM: ADVANCEMENT OR ENTRENCHMENT?

The paperback edition of the new *Catechism Of The Catholic Church* was released in April 1995. In just a short time, over 8 million copies of the Catechism were in print worldwide in twenty languages. The 825-page tome took six years to complete and is purported to be the definitive word for Catholics on the Catholic faith. Bishops and theologians worldwide helped produce the text, which Pope John Paul II calls "the 'symphony' of the faith" (pg. 4) and "A sure norm for teaching the Faith" (front cover).

The Pope further lauds the new Catechism, calling it "a sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine" (pg. 6). No higher approval or endorsement could be given.

The question that many ask is: "Has Roman Catholicism changed, become more biblical, or modified some of the hard stands on some of their traditional and extrabiblical teachings?"

The following is not an attempt to refute or rebut, simply a report on where the Catechism stands on certain issues through a small but representative sampling. Readers can decide for themselves in the

light of the Scripture whether Catholicism has really made any advancements or real changes in doctrines that would separate them from more Bible based groups.

**1. Baptism.** The Catechism states, "Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God" (pg. 342). Later it affirms, "The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation" (pg. 352).

**2. Tradition.** "The Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, 'does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'" (pg. 31).

Explaining why some Catholic teaching can change from time to time the volume announces, "In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's magisterium" (pg. 32).

**3. Transubstantiation** (Christ literally, physically present and the communion becoming His body). "'He is present...most especially in the Eucharistic species.' ... In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole

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# News Updates

## ADVENTISTS REJECT ORDINATION OF WOMEN

North American members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church recently sought the right to select its clergy "without regard to gender," thereby allowing the ordination of women. The solicitation was made in July at the sect's 56th World Session in the Netherlands. Following a "passionate debate," the petition was rejected, 1,481 to 673.

Church spokesman Ray Dabrowski indicated that the majority of supporters of the request were from North America and Europe, while those opposing the proposal were from Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. According to a Religious News Service report, Dabrowski said, "This vote is significant in the sense that it will put the question to sleep, at least for the general conference session, for a while."

During the past two decades, a contingent of Adventists has repeatedly campaigned for the ordination of women. Five years ago, members rejected the motion, 1,173 to 377.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew from the repeated false anticipations of William Miller of Christ's imminent return. In 1860, it officially adopted its name and in 1863 organized the General Conference or ruling body of the sect. It currently claims 8.5 million members worldwide.

—MKG

## CLEARWATER SETTLES SUIT WITH SCIENTOLOGY

Following a legal battle which lasted more than a decade, the city of Clearwater, Fla., will pay more than \$700,000 to various religious sects, including the Church of Scientology. The agreement, approved June 1 by municipal officials, is intended to resolve a dispute over the city's effort to mandate churches and religious organizations to retain fund-raising records for city inspection upon demand.

The city's ordinance, first written in 1983 and

revised in 1984, never was enforced because of swift opposition in the courts by the Church of Scientology. According to a Religious News Service report, the ordinance "required religious and other charitable organizations to maintain fund-raising records that were subject to subpoena if ten or more individuals accused an organization of fraud or misrepresentation."

The Church of Scientology will receive \$635,000 of the \$715,000 settlement. The balance of \$80,000 will be distributed among several other churches, including Seventh-day Adventists and Baptists, who collaborated in the suit against the city ordinance.

The public affairs director for Scientology in Clearwater announced that the city's concession "totally vindicated" the sect's charge that the ordinance was unconstitutional and that the monetary settlement was "reasonable." The church, however, claimed it had spent \$1.5 million on litigation.

City officials stated that they were also satisfied with the agreement and indicated relief that the suit was behind them.

—MKG

## CHARISMA PERPETUATES HOLYFIELD STORY

An article by Ken Walker in the August issue of *Charisma* magazine says, "those who question healing accounts from [Benny] Hinn's televised meetings are hard-pressed to explain the return of former heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield to the boxing ring in May" (pg. 41). Hinn, a faith healer, says God told him He healed Holyfield's heart completely in June 1994 at a crusade appearance in Philadelphia.

However, as PFO reported in its spring 1995 *Journal*, "a medical mixup, not divine intervention, has allowed Holyfield to return to the ring. The lifting of the [boxing official's] ban had nothing to do with Hinn's 'revelation' or the boxer's 'miraculous' encounter with the controversial faith healer" (pg. 3). The case is dealt with in more detail in the PFO book, *The*

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# FROM THE Plain Truth to the Real Truth

## A Former Worldwide Church of God Writer Tells Why He Left

Most people who are acquainted with the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) know it as the church that publishes a free magazine — *The Plain Truth*. Some who recall its late founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, might have an impression of him as a fiery, fundamentalist preacher on “The World Tomorrow” program. But I know the WCG as the legalistic, scripture-twisting cult that entangled me for 13 years.

### Raised in a Cult

My parents raised me, until about ten years old, in the Christian Science church — Mary Baker Eddy’s mystical, “Mind Science” cult. My father also received literature from and occasionally attended the services of a similar organization, the Unity School of Christianity. Also — through the influence of his mother who once attended a small, seventh-day Sabbath-keeping church — he subscribed to *The Plain Truth*.

Fortunately, I never understood what was being taught in the Christian Science Sunday school, and Christian Science made no lasting impression on me. It simply left me completely ignorant of the basics of

by Peter Ditzel

Christianity. Nevertheless, I had a yearning to understand the Bible. While attending a state college, I set out to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I got no further than Leviticus.

### Plain Truth Reaches Out to Ignorance

After graduating, I read the New Testament a couple of times, finding it engrossing and perplexing. Then I read an anti-evolution article in one of my father’s *Plain Truth* magazines. I didn’t believe the article, but found the arguments challenging. As I read more *Plain Truth* articles, they slowly began to convince me against evolution.

Being interested in British history, I read Armstrong’s *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*. What followed is difficult to explain except in terms of the adage, “The bigger the lie, the easier it is to swallow.” *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* presented such a startling answer to understanding much of the Bible that I believed it

without question. This book brought me from a zero level of understanding to a point where I could pick up a Bible and understand (so I thought) much of prophecy.

Elated, I started reading all of the articles in *The Plain Truth* and found that they reached out to my ignorance and taught me fascinating things. I was impressed by the generous use of scriptures; to my untrained mind, this church appeared to be solidly founded on the Bible.

The WCG has traditionally worked with a tiered system of literature: introductory, second-level, more advanced, etc. Therefore, as I read and agreed with booklets that were on one level, I then found it easier to read and agree with more heavily doctrinal booklets on the next level. By doing this, I eventually found, for example, that I believed that the WCG was the one and only true Church. I say I *found* that I believed because when I first read this claim plainly stated in an advanced booklet, I realized that I already believed it from what I had read in other

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# HAS

# MIND CONTROL GONE HOLLYWOOD!



A Further Look at The Boston Movement  
a.k.a. The Boston Church of Christ or The International Church of Christ

by Stephen F. Cannon

Throughout the last half of 1988, Personal Freedom Outreach was inundated with requests for information on what was then known as the Boston Church of Christ (BCC). After several months of research, talking with former members and mainline Church of Christ ministers, it became apparent that the Boston Church of Christ had some real problems with both doctrine and practice. In the spring 1989 edition of PFO's *Quarterly Journal*, I prepared an article critiquing then BCC authoritarian methods and faulty theology.

Although its leadership headquarters has moved from Boston to Los Angeles and now goes under the title of the International Church of Christ (ICC), the director or leader, World Missions Evangelist Thomas "Kip" McKean, remains at the helm.

PFO continues to receive requests for copies of the original article on the BCC and now are being asked for updates of the original information.

The salient points PFO made in 1989 remain valid and the information gathered since then corroborates the original allegations.

### Showing all your cards

When an aberrational Christian group, or an unabashed cult, is publicly criticized, one of several things happens:

- The group demonstrates that a mistake has been made, that it really does not teach the doctrine in question.
- It admits that there has been error, repents and institutes necessary changes.
- It denies any error.
- It makes conciliatory gestures and cosmetic changes while in practice teaches the same thing.

The "Catch 22" of exposing aberrational and cultic methods is that one risks better educating the exposed on how to be more deceptive the next time.

If the "church" in question has no intention of becoming more scriptural, at the very least it can sound more biblically oriented by changing certain ways it presents its doctrines.

This is what the BCC/ICC has chosen to do. In the sect's own in-house magazine *Upside Down*, an article titled "Who's Brainwashing Who?" says:

"Criticism of the church also centers on the areas of leadership and discipleship. The ac-



cusation is that leadership is harsh and power-hungry, and discipleship just a fancy word for mind-control. Unlike the public attitudes in most churches, however, the concessions made by church leaders reveal an open ear to complaints and an open heart to admitting mistakes." (*Upside Down*, Issue Two, April 1992, Kip McKean, "Revolution through Restoration" and Al Baird, "Discipleship: A New Look at Authority.")<sup>1</sup>

From May 1989 to May 1990, Al Baird was lead evangelist at the Boston Church. He was then replaced by Kip McKean's brother, Randy. In 1992, Baird wrote the article, "Discipleship: A New Look at Authority." In it he is supposed to have the "open heart toward admitting mistakes." He wrote the following:

"Religious movements throughout history have died because leaders were too proud to admit error and change; let us never give Satan that chance to destroy us, but always seek to put the truths of God and his Word into practice in our lives. ... I wrote a series of articles published in the Boston Bulletin about authority and submission. In retrospect I wish that I had taken more time in prayer and consideration on the subject, because the wrong emphasis was given for discipling relationships. There was too much emphasis put on authority and too little emphasis on motivating out of love for God. ... The Bible teaches that authority is from God, and therefore, is good but can be abused and misused. When a person has to appeal to the use of his authority to accomplish God's purposes, he has usually lost the battle. ... Rather than this leader being just anyone who

leads another person in a spiritual relationship, it refers to a leader who is recognized by the whole group, such as an evangelist or elder. ... I believe that delegation is right and good, but that we delegated too much, and in some cases to disciples who were not mature enough to use wisely. ... Leaders should be able to call meetings of the body, call for greater sacrifices, call for specified evangelistic outreach efforts or prayer times, etc., but are wrong to call someone to obey such things as choice of food, car, clothes, exact amount of giving."<sup>2</sup>

### **"Be ye followers of me"**

The statements made above would be a welcome change indeed if the BCC/ICC wasn't a one-man show. The fact is, however, that at the top of the group's hierarchy is the founder and absolute leader of the BCC/ICC, World Missions Evangelist Kip McKean.

The hierarchical pyramid is arranged like this: 1. World Missions Evangelist/Apostle Kip McKean; 2. World Sector Leaders; 3. Lead Evangelists; 4. Sector/Quadrant Evangelists; 5. Zone Evangelists/Zone Leaders; 6. House Church Leader; 7. Bible Talk Leader; 8. Discippler; and 9. Disciple/Member.<sup>3</sup>

Speaking of himself, McKean declares:

"The Evangelist will determine how far a congregation will go in obeying the scriptures by how consistently he corrects mistakes, rebukes sin, encourages obedience and by impartially carrying the instructions of God even when it is not the popular thing to do. ... The Evangelist must know where the church is in the eyes of God, where it is headed and what it will take to get where God wants it to be."<sup>4</sup>

The above statement sets McKean up as the mediator between the church and God. And you can believe that all of those below him know who is turning the ultimate crank! Even though this declaration was made in 1987, it remains true today.

A statement made in 1992 by Bruce Williams, one of McKean's lieutenants, shows how much power and authority is still ascribed to the Evangelist:

"I'll never forget the time when Kip talked to me about moving to L.A., and it wasn't to be the number 1 man in L.A. That was Kip, he was in L.A. You can't be the number 1 man when he's in L.A. And it wasn't to be the number 2 man in L.A. Marty was there, he's the world sector leader, he's the number 2 man. He wanted me to be the number 3 man in L.A. Now why in the world would I leave a church of 1600, and come to L.A. a sector of, at that time, 100 people. I'll tell you why, because Kip asked me to, that's why."<sup>5</sup>

That McKean reigns supreme is further demonstrable by a statement made in the 1988 Leadership Conference, in a class on imitating your discipler, by Scott Green:

"You set your mind to be an exact replica, you set your mind to be an exact imitation, if you set your mind to do that, the Lord is going to carry you to be not only like your discipler, he may indeed carry you to someplace scary! ... One young lady came back to me (after a speech in San Francisco) and said, 'I closed my eyes and I heard Kip McKean.' I mean I gave that sister a big hug because that's my goal, that's what I want to be like. I want to be able to imitate Kip McKean. I want to preach like

him, I want to think like him, I want to talk like him. Do you see what I am saying? Are you an imitator or are you an information gatherer?"<sup>6</sup>

If the ultimate goal of the leaders of BCC/ICC is to become a clone of Kip McKean, and each disciple is to become more like his discipler on down the line until one gets to the newest disciple, then finally, one will have a whole church full of Kip McKean!

Unfortunately, in a denomination (and the BCC/ICC meets all the criteria of a denomination, despite their protests to the contrary) with an absolute leader who sets policy and beliefs, then, as he goes so goes the denomination. He can contradict the statements of others, and even reverse his own statements. The only rules are his.

A perfect example is that of Baird's "things are changing" statement, where he said, "Leaders should be able to call meetings of the body, call for greater sacrifices, call for specified evangelistic outreach efforts or prayer times, etc., but are wrong to call someone to obey such things as choice of food, car, clothes, exact amount of giving."

Just a few months after Baird made this comment, McKean countered with:

"From 8:30 to about quarter after nine we are in discipleship groups. Every member of our church is in a Bible Talk. They are expected to bring visitors every week. Everybody's expected to bring visitors every week! They don't bring a visitor, we ask why. [We will see below that numbers mean a great deal to the Evangelist — SC.] Not pressure, I'm concerned about the soul, you're not fruitful, you're going to be sawed off the vine. The unfruit-

ful Christian is the one that falls away. ... Secondly, we do the contribution in the discipleship group. You say, 'well, won't everybody see what's happening?' Mhmm, hmm, mhmm, hmm, and we make sure they give their tithe, you say, 'why do you do that?' Because the Bible says in Malachi 3, that if you don't tithe, you're robbing God, and we don't want anybody to go to Hell because they didn't, they robbed God. Say, that's awful hard line. You bet your booties it's hard line. Someone doesn't give we ask why. We know who didn't give by the end of discipleship group. Questions are asked. We have almost 100% giving in our church. Someone doesn't give they got some attitudes. That discipleship group is what really knits us together."<sup>7</sup>

The comment just quoted is taken from a talk given by McKean in the Boston Leadership Conference of August 1992 titled "The Super Church." In no uncertain terms he lets the BCC/ICC know just what kind of an organization they are:

"Let me just say something about reconstruction. Some of you guys, let me just lay it out, you flat didn't have a church of disciples till we did the cotton-pickin' reconstruction. Now remember that and flat get grateful. ... Everybody wants to move back south, everybody wants to move out west, everybody wants to move ya ya ya, garbage! God put you there in Boston, He put [you] there in New York, He put you there in Charlotte, he put you there in Atlanta, he put you there in L.A., now crank! And you better get happy at the church he put you in."<sup>8</sup>

Rick Bauer was a top leader in the BCC for more than 15 years. He

had access to inside information and worked closely with Kip McKean. He left the organization in 1991 and has since been instrumental in exposing the true nature of that group. His excellent book of analysis and documentation about the BCC/ICC (*Toxic Christianity*) is a must for those needing more comprehensive information.

In his book, Bauer comments about the above McKean statement:

"That McKean so easily equates his own decisions to move leaders around in the organization with such statements as 'God put you here, God put you there, etc.,' is equally disturbing, as it illustrates the dangerous and delusional mind set of the top leader of the organization."<sup>9</sup>

### BCC/ICC and Elitism

PFO's 1989 article pointed out how the BCC views itself as the only true Church on Earth. An editorial that appeared in a traditional Church of Christ periodical, *The Christian Chronicle* titled "Second Thoughts on Boston," offered:

"These brethren do not really believe that there are any faithful churches except the ones in their sphere of influence. They consider themselves to be the 'faithful remnant.'"<sup>10</sup>

This "thought" is just as true today as when PFO cited it in 1989.

Nick Young, in a September 1992 talk during the Tulsa Reconstruction Weekend, said:

"I'm telling you the truth, people, this church planting is for your salvation. You're lost, you're lost. If this church planting hadn't come, you would have been lost Not understandable). Frankly, some of you, your salvation is still hanging in the balance, because your heart is still not good. You're still

looking at me with a critical eye, thinking, 'Well, who does this guy think he is? Where does he get off at?' Your salvation is hanging in the balance. You're about to walk away from the movement of God. When you walk away from the movement of God, there is no where to walk to. Walking out of the light into the darkness. There is nobody else, there is nobody else in this country that has the true gospel, that is trying to make disciples of Jesus. There is nobody else in this entire world. This is the movement of God! There is no place to go."<sup>11</sup>

Later, he said:

"I want to just say, 'this is the movement of God.' You need to have deep convictions about that. This is not just a church among churches. This is not just the best thing going in Tulsa. This is the movement of God, and we're calling all who will be true disciples to align themselves with this movement of God. You think this is a church among churches, you can't be a disciple. If you think there's other churches out there you can go be a part of and be just as good and just as saved as you are a part of the church of disciples, you can't be a disciple. This is a church of disciples. It's the movement of God."<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the most exclusivistic word in the English language is the little three-letter definite article *the*. Often overlooked, it is an important word. If I say that "I am a member of a (indefinite article) movement of God" — that means that I am a member of one among many religious movements. On the other hand, if I say that "I am a member of *the* (definite article) movement of God" — then there is no other.

When Jesus Christ uttered the phrase "I am *the* way, and *the* truth, and *the* life," it meant that He was these things to the exclusion of all others!

When critics bring up the exclusiveness and elitism of the BCC/ICC, its apologists will often respond by saying the church holds no one against his will. They will cite certain talks given by leaders that expressly state so. For example, in August 1992 at the Boston Leadership Conference, Marty Fuqua announced:

"That's right, the door swings both ways, and don't let it hit you on the way out. It has always been my conviction. I said it in Chicago time and time again, 'if you don't like the Chicago Church of Christ, then leave.' ... Kip just says, 'if you don't like the Los Angeles Church of Christ, leave!' And I say, 'Amen!' ... But you guys have got to start looking those people in the eye and say, 'listen if you don't want to be a disciple, take a hike!'"<sup>13</sup>

Of course, anyone in America is free to leave any organization at any time, but BCC/ICC equates leaving that church with walking away from God. It means leaving the true Church. It means winding up in hell. There would be great emotional turmoil, and a real psychological barrier for a neophyte Christian who has become group dependent to simply "take a hike."

This is what critics of the BCC/ICC mean when we say that the elitism of this group fosters a "group dependency." If there is a single absolute leader of the group, then that leader becomes the final arbiter between the BCC/ICC and God. The only access to God is through the BCC/ICC. If you leave the BCC/ICC, then you walk away from God. Any impediment (such as family, friends or loved ones) that comes between

you and the BCC/ICC is a tool of Satan. Any negative information about the BCC/ICC is negative information about God and is labeled:

### **Spiritual Pornography!**

In order to have what behavioral psychologists call a "totalistic environment," there must be strict information control. As much as possible, members of the group must be isolated from any information that might cast negative light on internal doctrine and practice. Often, this is done physically. The group in question will purchase land and/or buildings in remote areas and withdraw from outside influences.

However, since BCC/ICC is extremely numbers-conscious and must constantly bring in new converts, physical removal is out of the question strategically. A stringent control must be kept on both new and older members to discount negatives that might be heard from the outside. Also, because of the large number of young, new converts, discipline must be imposed, and a program of constant scrutiny must be in place.

This is accomplished by the rigid discipling program that has been a hallmark of the Boston Movement all the way back to its beginning as the Crossroads Movement. As I wrote in 1989, it is still just as true today:

"Essentially, the framework of the BCC/discipling system is one of total submission to authority. Any new convert must submit himself to one who is 'more mature in the Lord,' that is, one who has been in the movement longer than the convert. That submission is absolute. Not only does the new member have his discipler, but that discipler has his discipler, and so on up the chain of authority."<sup>14</sup>

Randy McKean (brother of BCC/ICC leader Kip) declared on May 6, 1990, as he took the reins of the church in Boston:

“Do you know what I say to accountability? I say amen to accountability. Do you know what I say to organization? I say amen to organization. Do you know what I say to discipling? I say amen to discipling. Do you know what I say to strong directive spiritual leadership? I say amen to that! And when I say amen, I’m not saying amen to a humanistic system. ... It is proper and right, you need some help — start with your discipleship partner. If they really don’t know how to help you, if they are not spiritually mature enough for that situation, go to your Bible Talk leader. If they don’t really understand because they are not spiritually there to help you — It’s that deep of a problem or situation. Hey, you know, you go to one of the full-time people in the zone, or go to your Zone Leader. The Zone Leader can go to what’s next? The sector leaders? Sector leaders can then go to elders.”<sup>15</sup>

Above is a clear delineation of the discipling hierarchy, still valid today, as are other allegations made in 1989. For example:

“The BCC has developed a program whereby disciplers and disciples meet weekly to study, pray and have confession sessions. Unfortunately, confessed sins are not kept confidential between these two parties. Yeakley writes: ‘All too often in the Boston system, however, things disclosed to a discipler one day are known all the way up the discipling hierarchy the next day. The discipling hierarchy thus becomes a glorified network.’”<sup>16</sup>

Rick Bauer likewise notes:

“Violations of confidentiality are unfortunately one of the common denominators that many who have left the ICC allege. The details of one’s personal life, sins and other embarrassing information that were discussed in the context of a one-to-one Bible Study end up being passed ‘up the line,’ so that leaders are privy to a host of information about the members in their charge. I have observed this process, I have taken part in this process, and I have used information obtained in this manner for the purposes of controlling the behaviors of members in my charge while a leader in the ICC.”<sup>17</sup>

In 1993, Bauer came into possession of a computer printout with the names, grouped by House Church, of a large number of BCC/ICC members. Not just their names “but shocking and private details about their lives. Their sexual sins (many committed years before their affiliation with the ICC), their failures, their racial and ethnic [sic] differences, even perceived mental health observations, all crudely assembled into a master document — a congregational ‘Sin List’ if you will.”<sup>18</sup>

Bauer then reproduces for readers shocking examples of the BCC/ICC’s subjective inventory of its membership:

“[Names expunged] — Mega-weak, may not have become disciples at all; was recently unfaithful; He is emotionally numb, and she has abused him verbally ... lots of bad dynamics here.”

“[Name expunged] — gives impression of calmness, but is unsubmitive and rebellious; has anorexic background.”

“[Name expunged] — has several kids, never married, black, very independent, comes across as uneducated, but is sharp (accounting job — good

one).”<sup>19</sup>

Although this is just a random sampling of the type of information, the point is very clear: This information is available and is used.

Time and again, reports of this type of information being used against anyone who disagrees with or questions the group comes to light. Anyone who publicly opposes the BCC/ICC in writing, has those writings branded as “spiritual pornography” and members are encouraged/commanded not to read them. If members are caught with this material, they are disciplined. They are labeled as “rebellious” or they have “attitudes,” because they do not “get advice” from those who are older in the Lord.

### Deja vu — all over again

The controlling tactics, the loaded language, the elitism, even the point of origin of the movement were reminiscent of another group investigated years before.

A little over 14 years ago, this writer represented PFO on an ad-hoc committee of cult researchers dedicated to investigating a campus ministry, that was then evolving into a denomination.<sup>20</sup> There was growing concern that Maranatha Campus Ministries/Maranatha Christian Churches was fast becoming a controlling, abusive group. The committee interviewed leaders, members and former members, studied literature, listened to and watched tapes. It was during some of these meetings that I made first hand observations on the tactics of intimidation and control.

I had requested a meeting with the pastor of the Arizona State University MCM Church. When I arrived at the building I was surprised to be outnumbered by a ratio of five to one. I started asking questions and within no time, the subject was shifted from the problems of the movement to my sup-

posed personal shortcomings. They were sure that I had “anger in my heart” was possessed by a “critical spirit” and didn’t I want to repent and have them pray for my deliverance?

Weren’t the questions that I was asking really just jealousy that here was a movement of God that was on “the cutting edge of Christianity,” with a commitment that was stronger and purer than any denominational church?

All of these memories came flooding back to me as I read ex-BCC/ICC members Rick and Sarah Bauer’s testimony of the inner working of that movement’s tactics of intimidation:

“Often in the ICC, the person bringing a question or problem—even in a study of doctrine—generally *becomes* the problem, resulting in a character assassination; I had witnessed the spectacle of someone walking into a meeting (presumably a personal meeting with a leader) and being confronted by 8 or more leaders, united in making the individual’s character or previously-confessed sin (regardless of how little it may have to do with the problem) become the issue. This kind of meeting is called a ‘breaking session;’ it is one of the all-too-familiar experiences of any leader who dares to question the organization or the practices of the ICC. I knew all too well the methods used by the ICC to ‘break’ reluctant or questioning members, for I had employed them at times in my own years at Boston. I had also suffered these very same abuses against me at the hand of Kip McKean. In one case, I recall going to a meeting at Kip’s home with several other leaders in Boston. Detail after personal detail of my life and the lives of

others were cited publicly by McKean in an effort to ‘break’ us and get us to increase our recruiting efforts. It is difficult to describe just how ashamed and humiliated one can be made to feel in such a situation. Personal struggles and even non-sinful confidences and dreams that you may have shared with a trusted colleague were now being openly bandied about by McKean, who used this illicitly-gathered information to shame and control us. I have always been concerned about keeping the confidentiality of confessions during my years in the ministry, but the ever-increasing use of previously-confessed sin to break and humiliate individuals in the ICC is a problem of grave seriousness. Yet the ICC continues the practice unabated and unchallenged. In one discussion with an individual who is now one of the specially-designated ‘teachers,’ of the ICC, I was told that ‘once an individual sins, he loses all his confidentiality rights in the Movement.’ Since orthodox Christian teaching suggests that we are all sinners, presumably all members of the ICC have forfeited their rights when they confess sin in the ICC.”<sup>21</sup>

So we see the same tactic that was used against me by Maranatha, used internally in the BCC/ICC. The *person* bringing up the issue becomes the problem. I will state from personal experience that this kind of intimidation is very difficult for all but the very experienced Christian to overcome.

Space prohibits a detailed parallel between the two groups. But their similarities do offer us some hope. It appears that the recycle life of these destructive groups does run its course.

Just as Maranatha was losing

more people than it was gaining in its latter stages, so the BCC/ICC seems to be running an in-and-out operation. What numbers can be deduced about BCC/ICC (no reliable statistics are released to the public) shows this to be true.

The movement has run its course in Boston, and has now shifted emphasis to the West Coast. With the push now in full swing in Los Angeles, the controversy surrounding BCC/ICC is again flourishing. It is to be prayed for, that as more accurate information can be disseminated, the shorter the deceptive shelf life of this destructive group will be. Any informed observer of the theology and practice of the International Churches of Christ must arrive at the same conclusions as Bauer:

“The system of one-over-one discipling and the control structures employed by Kip McKean are so fundamentally flawed and inherently corrupting that even good people with the best of intentions end up hurting others and being hurt themselves. To employ the assessment of Ralph Nader when he criticized the Chevrolet Corvair in the late 1960’s, this organization is ‘unsafe at any speed.’”<sup>22</sup>

Maranatha Campus Ministries is gone, its organization disbanded. One can only hope and pray that the Hollywood version of the Boston Church of Christ might be cut to the heart in their sins of abuse, manipulation, and unscriptural theology before they suffer the same end.

#### Endnotes:

1. *Upside Down*, Issue 4-5, January 1993, “Who’s Brainwashing Who?”, pg. 26.
2. *Upside Down*, Issue 2, April 1992, Al Baird, “Discipleship: A New Look at Authority.”
3. Rick Bauer, *Toxic Christianity — The International Churches of Christ/Boston Movement Cult*, (Bowie, Maryland; Free-

dom House Ministries, 1994), "Selected Articles, Studies & Testimony," Chapter 4, pg. 17.

4. *BCC Bulletin*, Aug. 9, 1987, Kip McKean, "The Role of the Evangelist."

5. Cited in Bauer, op. cit., "In Their Own Words," Chapter 6, pg. 7.

6. Cited in Bauer, op. cit., "Study Guide to the ICC," Chapter 5, Section 3, pg. 13.

7. Cited in Bauer, op. cit., Chapter 6, pg. 5.

8. Ibid., pg. 3.

9. Bauer, op. cit., Chapter 6, pg. 4.

10. *The Christian Chronicle*, February 1987, editorial: "Second Thoughts on Boston."

11. Cited in Bauer, op. cit., Chapter 6, pg. 16.

12. Ibid., pp. 17-18.

13. Ibid., pg. 11.

14. Stephen F. Cannon, *The Quarterly Journal*, Volume 9, No. 2, April-June, 1989, "The Boston Church of Christ — Has Mind Control Come to Beantown?," pg. 6.

15. Cited in Jerry Jones, Th.D., *What Does the Boston Movement Teach?*, Vol-

ume II, (Bridgeton, Mo. Published by Author, 1990) pg. 15.

16. Cannon, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

17. Bauer, op. cit., "Responding to the ICC," Chapter 3, pg. 25.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., pg. 26.

20. Stephen F. Cannon, *Personal Freedom Outreach Newsletter*, Volume 5, Number 1, Jan-Mar, 1985, "Maranatha Campus Ministries — God's Green Berets?."

21. Bauer, op. cit., Chapter 3, pp. 10-11.

22. Ibid., pg. 18.

## REAL TRUTH

(continued from page 4)

booklets.

### Entering the WCG and Ambassador College

As I read each booklet, I took on more of the WCG's world view. After some time of indoctrination through literature, I spoke with a WCG minister who invited me to attend the local Sabbath services in New Jersey. I was impressed by the friendliness of the congregation.

I soon found, however, that the church had a sharp bite for anyone who questioned what was said by someone in authority. I made the mistake of sending the pastor a respectful letter questioning something he said. Although he didn't mention me by name, he devoted his next sermon to attacking me and what he considered my critical and divisive attitude. I learned that if I was going to stay in the only church I believed offered salvation, I had better stay in line.

I was baptized soon after I began attending. Baptism, which was considered a work necessary for salvation, was administered only to those who repented — meaning that they turned from sin to determining to keep the law. Jesus was also accepted as Savior, but only in the sense that His death paid the pen-

alty for past sins. The candidate for baptism accepted the WCG as the true Church with authority over him. Church members were considered neither born again nor saved. They had started on the path to salvation, but attaining that salvation was dependent on building holy, righteous character by keeping the law and overcoming until the end of one's life or until Jesus returned.

Believing that I needed to be completely re-educated, I applied to attend Ambassador College at the WCG's headquarters in Pasadena, Calif. I arrived in Pasadena one year after my baptism ready for serious study of the Bible. I was soon disappointed.

Despite Herbert Armstrong's ridiculing the world's educational system for simply pouring facts into students' heads, this was exactly the method employed by Ambassador College. Bible classes consisted of a minister giving a WCG exposition of the Scriptures. On tests, students were expected to repeat back what they were told.

### The Stress of Legalism

There was continual pressure to conform to a certain mold: believe what you are told, don't make waves, openly support Mr. Armstrong. Living in close quarters with other students, I found that many of

them were beset by fear and guilt. They felt the weight of their sins, felt guilty about continually having to go to God to ask for forgiveness, believed that they could not live up to God's standards, that He was mad at them for their continual failure, and that He would reject them in the end.

A few others handled the church's legalistic approach to salvation differently: they either believed they were good enough to measure up to God's standards of righteousness or that, although diligent effort was needed, the standard God set for salvation was low enough that most whom He called would be saved.

To the stress this legalism created was added a fully scheduled college day. Although Bible study was said to be important, there was little time for real, in-depth study or research. I reacted to having my day so completely planned for me by not always doing everything that was expected of me. This made me an unlikely candidate for a leadership position in the student body or for the best jobs. Yet, because of a chance meeting with the supervisor of the Personal Correspondence Department and my experience as a writer, I was hired in my senior year as a letter writer.

This job entailed answering questions from subscribers and mem-

bers. To be working at the world headquarters of the church in such a job was considered an enviable situation. I did well in the job, was soon being given the more difficult questions to answer, survived a couple of staff cuts due to the "budget crunches" so common under Herbert Armstrong, and was promoted to Senior Correspondent ahead of schedule.

Ten months after college graduation, I married a classmate who had become my best friend through our college years. Mary Beth was at that time working for the WCG's television department.

All was going well, at least on the surface. I was happily married, and I was being given more responsibilities in my job. I was asked to ghost-write letters for my supervisor and other church officials answering doctrinal questions from WCG ministers. I also wrote a question and answer column for the ministers' newsletter, *The Pastor General's Report*. But I found certain things disturbing.

### Signs of Cultism

I had met Herbert Armstrong shortly before graduation. He had a tradition of inviting small groups of senior students to his home for dinner. These dinners were black-tie affairs, using gold utensils and plates once owned by the Russian Czars. A picture of me conversing with Armstrong before one of these dinners appears in his autobiography (Volume 2).

I found Armstrong in this setting to be amiable and grandfatherly. Nevertheless, it eventually became apparent that he had another side to his personality. Even at these dinners, he became known for an eccentricity; he would sometimes bluntly begin speaking about sexual techniques, even producing a condom and discussing its use.

It became increasingly apparent

that Armstrong was ruled by his emotions and personal life. A sermon or Bible study might turn into a ranting lecture on loyalty to the Apostle or even a tirade against women wearing makeup, perhaps instigated by a disagreement with an aide or a quarrel with his wife.

Armstrong was also known for suddenly turning against people. For example, I remember Armstrong fervently defending church treasurer and legal adviser, Stanley Rader, from detractors on several occasions. Then one day, Armstrong viciously attacked Rader from the pulpit as a traitor. Naturally, this behavior struck fear in all who had contact with him. If Herbert Armstrong said something that could not be supported by Scripture, the Personal Correspondence staff was expected to support him anyway, even if it meant writing nothing but bluff. No one dare question Armstrong about these problems lest he accuse the person of disloyalty.

Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, in their book, *Toxic Faith*, list ten characteristics of a toxic faith system. Two of these characteristics are, "The leader is dictatorial and authoritarian" and "Communication is from the top down or from the inside out."<sup>1</sup> The remaining eight characteristics, as well as other traits Arterburn and Felton give throughout their book, are also fit descriptions of the WCG.

The authoritarian system of the WCG promoted the proliferation of sycophants. These are people who would flatter and humor those above them, doing everything in their power to make their superiors feel good about themselves and their decisions and look good to others — even when those superiors were wrong. These people had an uncanny ability to discern what their superiors wanted to hear. They would speak their minds only when they discerned that this was what

was wanted, but would quickly change their minds when they saw that those above them were forming a contrary opinion.

They were motivated in all their actions by desire to be a team player, by desire for approval, by desire for the promotion and prestige and power that might be doled out to them. Most were also motivated by one or more fears: fear of losing their salvation, fear of losing their jobs, fear of being stigmatized through excommunication, fear of appearing different, fear of rocking the boat, fear that they could change nothing anyway, or even fear that they might have to face the painful truth about the organization and its leaders and themselves.

In this system there were also pawns. Arterburn and Felton call them the victims and give an excellent description of them: "The most unfortunate of all the roles in a toxic faith system is that of the victim. ... They do everything out of a desire to know God and worship God, but their actions are misguided. ... Victims sacrifice their time and money and faith to support the system. ... They cause no problems because they believe everything that is passed down from the top. ... Victims sacrifice personal needs and desires so that they can be part of the system. ... Everyone acts as if it is a great privilege to be taken for granted and lost in such a worthwhile mission."<sup>2</sup>

Pawns in the WCG often gave financially until they were almost destitute, while much of the money was used to build lavishly expensive buildings or to fly Armstrong around the globe to meet world leaders to whom he would give expensive gifts for his own glorification. My wife and I knew employees who — after tithes and offerings — had no money for food; friends would leave groceries on their steps. Pawns also often donated their time and labor

to garden, clean house, wash cars, or move well-paid ministers (essentially creating a slave class of free labor).

The theory of management could usually be described as fear. The pressure to perform was intense. This pressure came from one's superiors and from within because of the legalistic outlook everyone had. To fail at a task was unthinkable. The phrase "heads will roll" was used so often, I would sit in meetings wondering how long it would take before it was said.

I was also disturbed by the way people were dehumanized. Critics of the WCG — particularly those who were former members — were discussed with derision. Even members who wrote to question a doctrine or give their understanding of a scripture were not treated seriously. Their letters were largely ignored. If they persisted, they might be sent a reminder that God reveals doctrine only through His Apostle (Armstrong) and even threatened with disciplinary action from their local pastor.

I observed these things, but repressed the questions they raised in my mind. God's time for completely opening my eyes to the real nature of the organization in which I was involved had not yet come.

### A Time of Change

Herbert W. Armstrong died in January 1986. His successor, Joseph W. Tkach, was quick to start making changes. These changes were not only doctrinal, but also affected the structure of the organization itself. Many hard-line Armstrong loyalists in powerful positions were either given positions of lesser authority or were forcibly retired. Some, such as evangelist Roderick C. Meredith, chose to leave the WCG in favor of Armstrongite splinter groups (Meredith now heads the Global Church of God). So many employ-

ees were moved from one department to another that it was as if administrators were playing a giant chess game.

It was during this time that I was shifted from the Personal Correspondence Department to the Editorial Services Department. There, I wrote articles for *The Plain Truth* and *Good News* magazines, wrote a monthly question-and-answer column for *The Plain Truth* and wrote and edited brochures and booklets. This was a busy time for Editorial Services because many of Armstrong's booklets were being discontinued and replaced with new publications.

The doctrinal changes the Tkach administration instituted were disorienting and upsetting to many members. Personally, I found them to be improvements. My work in the Personal Correspondence Department had already convinced me that many teachings needed changing. Just how many changes were really needed, I would not realize until my final year with the WCG.

At the beginning of that final year, another shifting of employees resulted in my being transferred back to the Personal Correspondence Department. I retained responsibility for *The Plain Truth* Q&A, got back my old Personal Correspondence duties, and added some new ones.

It wasn't long before researching answers to questions about the doctrinal changes caused me to see that more changes were needed; one change led to the need for another, which would then lead to the need for another change. I began using *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* and *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, and other Bible helps that had recently been added to the Personal Correspondence library, to research some of the questions I had. I found that the teachings of Herbert W. Armstrong were not biblical, and

that the changes being made by Joseph Tkach's staff — although often improvements — were only scratching the surface.

The real question forming in my mind was this: If the teachings of Herbert Armstrong were not biblical and were, in fact, heretical, where did that place the WCG? Since the WCG was founded on Armstrong's human-devised, false doctrines, the answer was inescapable: the WCG is not God's Church; it is a false church. Since the WCG is a false church, any changes Tkach might institute would make no real difference.

### Leaving the WCG

The WCG's world view disintegrated for me. I woke up to the reality that I had been in a cult. I consider it a great blessing that my wife was undergoing a similar experience and came to the same conclusion. The Holy Spirit led us to know salvation in Jesus Christ, not in any human works or man-made system. I quit my job, we left Pasadena, and never again attended the services of the WCG.

Leaving the WCG was both wonderful and traumatic. There was an exhilaration in the "liberty by which Christ has made us free" (Galatians 5:1). On the other hand, we had left behind *all* of our friends, who now considered us traitors (a "final letter" from one of Mary Beth's best friends was particularly upsetting for her). We had also abandoned our entire way of life and world view, and I had cut off my income. While we knew that what we were doing was right, it was nevertheless very stressful.

Legalism dies hard, and Mary Beth would occasionally have feelings of guilt over not keeping the Sabbath. We both had recurring dreams about the WCG. Even our sons, ages 5 and 7, found our abandonment of WCG teachings

upsetting.

For some time, we did not attend the services of any church. (I am not saying that I recommend not attending church for those leaving a cult, only that in the emotional state in which we found ourselves, this is what we did. Here is where Christians who know people ready to leave cults can be of tremendous help — not by bullying or arguing, but by patiently extending a loving hand.) I suppose this time can be described as a withdrawal from the addictive behavior (the feeling that we *had* to attend services, *had* to fellowship, *had* to donate time and money, *had* to have a follow-the-leader relationship with a pastor, etc.) we acquired in the WCG.

I used this time to solidify my convictions about the WCG and my understanding of orthodox doctrines

by writing a book-length manuscript about the WCG. I was amazed to find that the WCG's teachings were more full of holes than I had suspected.

Mary Beth and I also researched the beliefs of the various Protestant denominations. Finally, we started visiting churches in our area. Many were fine churches, and when we attended the Laurelton Park Baptist Church pastored by PFO director G. Richard Fisher, we knew we had found our church home for our remaining time in New Jersey (we have since moved to Oklahoma). The love of the congregation and the understanding and care exhibited by Pastor Fisher speeded our healing enormously.

Mary Beth and I continually pray for those who are still members of the WCG or its splinter groups. We

pray that God will open their minds as He has ours to see the cultism in which they are involved, the heresies of Armstrongism, and especially to truly comprehend the Gospel and what it really means to accept Jesus as Savior that "Christ may dwell in [their] hearts through faith; that [they], being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that [they] may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).

#### Endnotes:

1. Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith, Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville, TN: Oliver-Nelson Books, 1991), pp. 169, 180.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

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## MARY BAXTER

(continued from page 1)

Army.

The Church of God headquarters in Cleveland, told PFO by phone that the Church "gives no official endorsement to the book." However, there was no condemnation of the book either and the spokesman admitted that the book was controversial.

Even *Charisma* magazine, usually open to all kinds of zany fads, warns its readers concerning Baxter's book: "Sensationalism fascinates, but it also breeds heresy. Authors who claim to have divine revelations should willingly accept scrutiny. Read Baxter's book as she suggests with the Bible in hand. Do not immediately canonize the vision. Weigh carefully her every word" (April 1995, pg. 85).

Taking *Charisma's* advice, Baxter's account has been found want-

ing. The book reads much more like an account of a horrible nightmare or a reaction to prescription drugs than it does the Bible. Baxter's publisher, Whitaker House, has published this sort of work before as it is the current publisher of the unscriptural delusions of Rebecca Brown. (See further the PFO booklet, *Drugs, Demons and Delusions*.)

One has to question Baxter's health, based on statements such as the one on page 95: "I was sick many times during the preparing of this record."

On page 113: "During the following days at home I was very sick."

On page 184: "When I awoke the next day, I was very sick. For days I relived the horrors of hell and its torment. At night I would wake up screaming and saying there were worms crawling in me. I was so afraid of hell."

A check into her medical background is in order to see if medica-

tion could have induced these visions.

### Mary Baxter's Tour of Hell

Baxter's account of her purported journey is indeed unusual — and unscriptural. It doesn't quite read like Dante's *Inferno*, but it does parallel mystical Jewish apocalyptic literature and medieval myths and legends which attempt to describe the nether regions.

She writes that after going through a "Slinky-like" tunnel, Jesus told her, "Hell has a body (like a human form) lying on its back in the center of the earth. Hell is shaped like a human body — very large and with many chambers of torment" (pg. 34).

For example, lost preachers go into the "belly" of hell where they lie in coffins and are stabbed repeatedly with spears by demons (pp. 69-71), a novel, but unscriptural, image unless one misinterprets Jonah 2:2: "Out of the belly of hell

cried I.”

The Hebrew word *beten* (belly) can be symbolically used as an inner place of safety and protection as in Job 20:15 or for the opposite, such as a place of crisis and disaster as in Jonah. A literal stomach is not among the uses.

Baxter goes on to describe the “heart” of hell, a lifeless place with a constant odor of “burning and decaying flesh mingled with the smells of offal, stale garbage and mold” (pp. 78-79).

Hell is not only divided into body parts, but rooms, according to Baxter’s account.

There is the “fun center,” with special torments for mediums, warlocks, witches and mind-readers. “Spiritual bones were taken apart and buried in different parts of hell,” she writes. “The soul was literally torn apart and the parts scattered across hell in a kind of demonic scavenger hunt. The mutilated souls felt tremendous pain” (pg. 97).

There’s a detention center for prostitutes and homosexuals with biting demons “in the form of bats” (pg. 109). Baxter further writes she found herself transformed into a skeleton of dead men’s bones with worms crawling inside her (pg. 111).

Baxter then holds her readers in suspense by announcing that the Lord told her not to reveal the visions from the left arm of hell (pg. 141). Perhaps these are revelations that will be revealed later. Excellent material for a sequel.

### **Hell’s Inhabitants**

Despite Scripture’s clear declaration that demons are spirits, which means they have no body or form, Baxter describes one as the size of a grizzly bear with a bat head and hairy face, another as a small hairy monkey with no eyes, still another

as smooth-skinned the size of a horse, and one more with large ears and a tail (pg. 40). She also describes snakes 25 feet long and 4 feet around, but does not state why they were there (pg. 64). There’s also the “Queen of Satan,” who can change into a cat, a horse, a snake, a rat and a young man” (pg. 179).

Witches sit in rocking chairs and rock away while they turn into an old man, a young woman, an old woman and into a skeleton with empty eye sockets and a “dirty mist inside” (pp. 84-85).

People consigned to hell, Baxter says, feel repentant. Such a notion is false. Larry Dixon writes in his book, *The Other Side of the Good News*: “The commonly held view that the wicked experience repentance in hell is incorrect; the Bible teaches their impenitence will continue forever (Revelation 16:9)” (pg. 163). Dixon points out that in Rabbinic thought, “gnashing of teeth” is usually associated with anger. If hell is forever, so is the anger and unrepentance of the lost.

### **Receiving Baxter’s Message**

Calling something “a divine revelation,” as Baxter calls her book, is serious. Christians are exhorted to examine all religious messages and claims (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 John 4:1).

While Baxter describes suffering she herself endured in hell, 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says the child of God cannot suffer God’s wrath or any of the pains of hell. Romans 8:1 is clear that those in Christ cannot, ever, endure condemnation in any way since Christ has suffered it all for them. Romans 8 repeatedly declares no condemnation, no separation, for those in Christ. They are predestined to glorification.

Hell is spoken of in the New Testament as judgment, wrath, distress, torment, punishment and eternal destruction for the unsaved (Ro-

mans 2:3-9, Revelation 14:11). To speculate further is not wise. Christians should avoid making speculative leaps into the dark, since Satan himself is the perpetuator of darkness and confusion.

Hell is very serious business. It is real and it is frightening. It should not be presented in a science fiction nightmare or horror movie motif. It should not be trivialized in any way. There must be a “reverent agnosticism” where God is silent.

### **To Heaven and Back**

Baxter’s travels included a more pleasant stop, even if it is equally unrecognizable from a scriptural standpoint: paradise. Her brief account includes the description of a special planet for little children, including stillborn and aborted babies, and animals. Soul-winners can look forward to mansions made with huge diamonds (pg. 207).

There is also the “file room” (pg. 209), where angels are scrutinizing people’s lives, constantly bringing them to God for His approval or disapproval.

### **What the Bible Says**

Having given Baxter her say, an examination of God’s Word is in order.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says “the secret things belong to God.” The Apostle Paul warned strongly about going beyond the Scripture into speculation when he said, “You might learn not to exceed what is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6). Paul, who, after viewing heaven, wrote “man is not permitted to speak” (2 Corinthians 12:4). He added that his true Divine revelations of heaven were inexpressible.

Jesus Himself taught in Luke 16:25-31 that no one crosses from the place of torments to paradise and that no one comes back. Forced to choose between believing Mary Baxter or Jesus (or even Paul the

apostle), the outcome should be obvious.

The prominent 19th century minister, Albert Barnes, highlights the pointed teaching of Jesus in Luke:

"If there is anything certain from the Scripture, it is, that they who enter hell return no more; they who sink there, sink forever. ... God gives us warning sufficient to prepare for death. He has sent His Word, His Servants, His Son; He warns us by His Spirit and His Providence; by the entreaties of our friends and by the death of sinners; He offers us heaven and He threatens hell. If all this will not move sinners, what would do it? There is nothing that would" (*Albert Barnes On The New Testament*, pp. 235-236).

Jesus in John 12:48 declared that His words will judge us on the last day. All claims will be sifted through the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. Jesus will have the last word. The Bible will be the final critic.

Mysticism and subjectivism make

for a dangerous hermeneutic. Ron Owens warns:

"In weighing the veracity of something, Scripture must always be our guide—not personal preference, experience, tradition, or cultural setting. When anything contradicts the Bible, or distorts God's self revelation in His Word it is wrong, no matter how positive the end result is reported to be" (*Special Report—The Toronto Revival*, Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, Issue No. 1, Winter 1995, pg. 1).

Scripture gives enough information on the afterlife to make all men accountable without additional information from the other side. Spurgeon's College teacher Nigel Wright states it well: "There is something objectionable about investigating something which the Bible considers not worth it" (*The Satan Syndrome*, pg. 110).

Trying to scare people into heaven with vivid and imaginary scenes is counterproductive and can produce skepticism when claims cannot be proved.

*The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* says:

"The Bible does not give the physical location of hell or anything about the furnishings, but it assures readers that those whose sins are not atoned for by Jesus Christ will receive perfect justice from God, that they will receive exactly what they deserve for all eternity, which will be a most miserable state" (Vol. 3, pp. 116-117).

Beyond that we dare not go.

Since Mary Baxter's source is not the Scriptures and all of her sources and motives may never be known, one should reject her teachings and misleading ideas. These ideas are not divine revelations, as her title claims, but faulty human speculations.

Since the revelations and teachings of Jesus found in the Bible are authoritative and the final word on death and the afterlife we need to let these be the final judge on all of Mary Baxter's bizarre and incredible claims. People need to stop visiting the bookstores for the latest fads and crazes and revisit their Bibles.

## EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

*Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained"* (pg. 383). Further, "It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament" (pg. 384).

**4. Confession to a priest.** "Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance" (pg. 405).

**5. Devotion and prayers to Mary.** "We give ourselves over to her now, in the Today of our lives. And our trust broadens further, already at the present moment, to surrender 'the hour of our death' wholly to her care. ... Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' mother into our homes, for she has become the mother of all the living. We can pray with and to her. The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of

Mary and united with it in hope" (pg. 706).

The Catechism also holds strongly to the sinlessness of Mary, her perpetual virginity and her bodily assumption into heaven. The index gives a ready reference to all those topics.

**6. Purgatory.** "The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect. ... The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. ... This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead" (pg. 291).

**7. The Mass** (as a continuing renewal of Calvary and Christ's sacrifice). "Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. ... The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it *re-presents* (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross. ... The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: 'The victim is one and the same'"

(pp. 380-381).

**8. Idolatry** (condemnation of, while condoning images of Mary and the Saints). The Catechism condemns idolatry and says it “consists in divinizing what is not God” (pg. 569). However, there is the lauding of the “contemplation of sacred icons,” and the encouragement for churches to display “holy images” of our Lord, Mary, angels and the saints (pg. 329). There is also the encouragement to have statues and images in our homes.

Reading the words of the back cover one can readily see why there is such a mixture of biblical and clearly non-biblical teachings in this work. They inform us that, “The Catechism draws on the Bible, the sacraments, Church Tradition and teaching, and the lives of the saints.” One can only wonder why any one would think that anything in the Catechism is really new.

On pages 6 and 7 Pope John Paul prayed to Mary for the success of the Catechism in the effort of evangelization. Its readers in the end will decide.

—GRF

## **BUILDING UPON THE SAND**

In 1986, Herbert W. Armstrong died. About five decades earlier, Armstrong had founded the Worldwide Church of God, a sect that assembled a plethora of unorthodox doctrines and, from its inception, was called a non-Christian cult. With the death of its founder, few cult watchers were surprised that doctrinal changes would be made to provide a new image for the movement by his successor.

After all, many other cults have initiated shifts in doctrine and practice following the founder’s death. History has shown that inner strife altered many a heretical movement, including those of Charles Taze Russell (International Bible Students/Jehovah’s Witnesses), Joseph Smith, Jr. (Mormons), and Victor Paul Wierwille (The Way International).

Nevertheless, what surprised most was the Worldwide Church of God’s near wholesale departure from the crucial and primary beliefs made by its founder. Just a few months following the death of Armstrong, PFO assessed in its newsletter publication, the history and doctrine of the movement. Because of its popularity, we subsequently released our report in tract form. Almost immediately, it seemed, our evaluation became obsolete as the sect swiftly moved to adopt a theology more in line with orthodoxy.

Doctrinal modifications to include a belief in the Trinity and the bodily resurrection of Christ became tenets of the WCG faith.

In 1991, the WCG’s then-Assistant Director of Public Affairs, Michael Snyder, wrote PFO and stated that our report “contain[ed] a substantial amount of inaccurate or outdated information.” Snyder requested that PFO’s critique “be withdrawn until it is revised to correctly reflect current Church teachings and accurate background information.” Yet, because the official theological positions of the WCG continued in uncertain transition, PFO was not then willing to invest the time, effort and expense to update our essay. We asked for, but we could be given no guarantee by the sect that following a modification of the article, they would not be writing in a few months to seek a revision of the revision.

In the decade following its founder’s passing, the church has repeatedly published “Statement of Beliefs.” It seems the ink is barely dry on one edition before a new edition, with wording changes, revisions and new entries, comes rolling off the presses. Likewise, even some of the organization’s own publications have become “null and void” shortly after publication. It is easy to see that the trademark which has plagued many a pseudo-Christian movement, “Today’s truth proves to be tomorrow’s error,” has also bedeviled the WCG.

Most apologetic ministries, including PFO, have applauded and welcomed the WCG’s serious re-evaluation of the doctrine and practice of its heretical founder. We praise God that this sect’s search for the truth has begun to bring its beliefs in agreement with the major tenets of orthodox Christianity faith. We commended it for having abandoned doctrines which wrongfully and manipulatively controlled the lives of its faithful followers. We realize that these changes have been at great expense to the group and have not come easy.

Yet an important and serious cultic characteristic remains. The sect’s refusal to confess and repent from the many false prophecies and damnable heresies of Herbert W. Armstrong. The group’s move into “orthodoxy” has been, at best, a good example of subterfuge. Nowhere will one find the group admitting to a heretical background initiated by a genuine false prophet. Adjustments of “not accurate” teachings, revisions, and word changes have become the group’s method for change. Individually, a person does not achieve right standing with God by making revisions or changes in his life. Rather by accepting accountability for his sins, expressing repentance and seeking forgiveness, a person is seen as righteous through

Christ. Collectively, the WCG must accept responsibility and repent of its heretical background.

By its own admission, the "Worldwide Church of God currently regards Herbert W. Armstrong as its founder and as a minister of Jesus Christ." While there is no way to disown Armstrong as founder, it is quite another to continue to see him as "a minister of Jesus Christ." This man is responsible for sending thousands of adherents of his self-made religious system to a Godless eternity because of his damnable and heretical doctrines.

J. Thomas Lapacka, the WCG Manager of Church Relations, disagrees with such criticism. In a June 2, 1995, letter to PFO, he "express[ed] a measure of surprise" at our statement regarding Armstrong. "Yet, I believe to maintain that those holding these views in the past have been damned for eternity underestimates the graciousness, love, and power of Our Lord," Lapacka wrote in his letter. While there is no denying the graciousness, love and power of our Lord, these characteristics of God are given to man through a relationship with the Jesus of the Bible. Armstrong's version of the person and work of Christ was the antithesis from the distinctive statements found in Scripture.

Additionally, Lapacka's premise disparages the warnings of Christ in Matthew 7:15-23 and 24:23-27 and the Apostle Paul's instruction found in Titus 1:9. His declaration borders on universalism. If God's graciousness, love and power to save can transcend how we view the person and work of Christ, then there becomes no need to watch one's "life and doctrine closely" as Paul commands in 1 Timothy 4:16. Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Moonies — anyone and everyone — become exempt under the graciousness, love and power of God. What a tragic distortion of the love and grace of God found in Scripture.

Lapacka further told PFO that he sees "no biblical injunction to condemn Mr. Armstrong." We see plenty. Matthew 7:15-23; John 8:24; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 3:6-8; Titus 2:1, 7-8; and 2 Peter 2:1-3 are but a few. Soundness of doctrine and faith reverberate as a fundamental concern in Paul's pastoral letters (1-2 Timothy and Titus).

Finally, the WCG realizes that there will be those who "may still differ on our views of Mr. Armstrong," but it would preferably have these critics "concentrate rather on that which we agree." The WCG should not paper over or even defend the corrupting influence of this false teacher. This church needs to renounce Herbert W. Armstrong, not continue to revere him as a

man of God who merely needed some adjustments in his theology to bring it more in line with orthodoxy. While the sect is moving ahead with good doctrine, its foundation is still one built on sand.

Former WCG staff member Peter Ditzel wrote in a recent issue of this *Journal*: "Until it confesses to its illegitimate history of cultism and heresy and to the spiritual damage it has inflicted on countless adherents over the years, the WCG — changing a doctrine here and a practice there — will continue to be entangled in its own web, 'always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth' (2 Timothy 3:7)."

—MKG

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## NEWS UPDATES

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(continued from page 3)

*Confusing World of Benny Hinn* (pp. 109-114).

Holyfield himself "now denies ever intimating he was 'healed' by self-proclaimed faith-healer Benny Hinn" (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 12/27/94, D3). Sports writer Terrence Moore of the Atlanta newspaper added: "Holyfield told me in the aftermath that he never thought the faith healer had an effect on his heart. Holyfield says, 'There really wasn't anything for him (the faith healer) to heal. That's because I don't believe I had a problem with my heart to begin with'" (1/8/95, F3).

—MKG

## MORMONS PURGE HOLOCAUST VICTIMS FROM BAPTISMAL RECORDS

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has agreed to remove from its baptismal records the names of 380,000 Jews who died in the Nazi Holocaust and had been baptized by proxy in Mormon temples. In addition, the Mormon church will re-emphasize its disapproval of proxy baptisms for Holocaust victims not directly related to Mormons.

The decision in April to purge the names follows complaints from Jewish groups and months of dialogue between the LDS church and Jewish leaders.

Mormons have built the elaborate doctrine of "Baptism for the Dead" on a single unqualified verse in 1 Corinthians 15. Latter-day Saints teach that those who have died without the benefit of the "restored"

gospel of their church can achieve an exalted degree of salvation through these proxy baptisms. Only a select few of the 9 million church members are considered worthy to perform temple ceremonies, including baptisms for the dead.

According to a Religious News Service report, Ernest Michel, founder of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and a Holocaust survivor himself, said he was "very, very pleased" with the Mormon's compliance to the request.

"These people were killed because they were Jews, and for anybody to claim anything else is, I think, wrong," he said to RNS.

Since 1991, the LDS church has officially disapproved of baptisms for the dead of non-related Jewish Holocaust victims. Baptisms performed for such people were done without the sanction of the Mormon church. The current decision marks the first time names have been deleted from church baptismal records, according to Monte J. Bough, executive director of the Mormon church's family history department. Mormons have performed more than 200 million proxy baptisms.

Mormons have acknowledged that they expect to hear similar requests from other religious groups. Mormons have been baptized in behalf of numerous

Roman Catholic saints, including Saint Francis of Assisi and Joan of Arc.

—MKG

## TILTON LAWSUIT DISMISSED

A lawsuit by former televangelist Robert Tilton against ABC News recently was ruled "groundless" by a federal judge. U.S. District Judge Michael Burrage dismissed the suit on May 26. Tilton had charged that the network portrayed him in a negative light and had featured bogus and out-of-context information resulting in "public scorn and derision." The evangelist was spotlighted on an ABC "PrimeTime Live" exposé in November 1991.

The investigative report said Tilton used follower's donations to underwrite his extravagant lifestyle and that prayer requests sent to him were discarded after donations had been removed. The popular evangelist's ministry reportedly had a monthly income of \$7 million before the broadcast. His daily television program, "Success-N-Life," which once aired in 235 markets, went off the air in 1993. Membership at his Dallas-based Word of Faith World Outreach Center declined from 10,000 to less than 1,000.

—MKG

### ***Personal Freedom Outreach — Statement of Belief***

***I. The Bible as the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God: It is in its entirety the sole authority for all matters of Christian belief and practice.***

***II. The one true God. In the one true God there exist three persons, being: The Father, The Son Jesus Christ, and The Holy Spirit.***

***III. Jesus Christ: His deity, humanity, virgin birth, sinlessness, death and bodily resurrection; who will personally and visibly return again to earth.***

***IV. The personality and deity of the Holy Spirit.***

***V. The existence and personality of Satan, his total opposition to God, and his power over the unregenerate.***

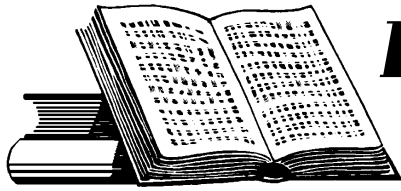
***VI. The complete and total depravity of all men which makes them hopelessly lost without the new birth obtainable through faith in Jesus Christ.***

***VII. The final estate of man: for the saved, everlasting life in the presence of God and for the unsaved, everlasting punishment because of their unbelief.***

***VIII. The Gospel by which we are saved being summed in the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

***IX. The Church being the Body of Christ, united in the Holy Spirit, consisting of those who have received Jesus Christ as Savior. A local church is an organized assembly of believers united for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission of Christ.***

***X. The Great Commission of Christ being to preach the Gospel to all men, baptizing and discipling those who have believed.***



# Books in Review

## THE KING JAMES ONLY CONTROVERSY

by James R. White

Bethany House Publishers, 286 pages, \$10.99

Author James White has done a masterful job in reducing the whole field of textual criticism and manuscript transmission to a very understandable and readable format. He is to be commended.

One does not have to be a specialist to read this book. It is very clear and very concise even for the non-specialist.

White systematically looks at the nuances, differences and divisions in the "King James Only" camp. He discusses the extremes of Peter Ruckman, the duplicity of Gail Riplinger and, as well, the more serious and scholarly Majority Text adherents like Edward F. Hills.

He takes us step by step through Erasmus' development of the text underlying the King James Version and explains how it came to be known as the Textus Receptus. There has been a mystification of the Textus Receptus by some, however White shows us that it is a very human product, as are all translations.

White clearly shows that every argument used by the "King James Only" groups to castigate other versions can be addressed to the King James position as well.

For those who have encountered the disruptions of the "King James Only" crowd and those who may, this book is a Godsend. It should be read and digested especially by every pastor, elder and board member of a local church to protect its people. It is a must and will be the definitive text on the topic.

—GRF

## THE MODERN SEARCH FOR THE REAL JESUS

by Robert B. Strimple

P&R Publishing, 161 pages, \$10.99

This book will stretch the mind of its readers. Although it will take some thought and concentration it is well worth the effort.

The book is a clear, cogent presentation of the history of critical scholarship as it relates to the Gospels, form criticism, and the so-called search for the historical Jesus. It is a primer on modern scholarship's weird and heretical views of Jesus.

Higher criticism presents contradictory ideas about the person of Jesus and have, in fact, constructed a number of mythical Christs.

Robert Strimple shows the bias of rational (destructive) criticism and points out, "the starting point of the modern quest of the historical Jesus is the assumption that the Jesus presented in our biblical gospels is not the Jesus of history" (pg. 9).

He lays out a who's who of critics and explodes the myth of the imaginary "Q" document said to be the elusive source for the Gospels.

Strimple is to be complimented for boiling down the confusing, conflicting theories of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, H.E.G. Paulus, David Friedrich Strauss, Bruno Bauer, William Wrede, Wilhelm Bousset, Rudolph Bultmann and others. None of them agrees and all try to construct from subjective ideas a mythical, non-supernatural Jesus.

Strimple concludes, "The ongoing history of Gospels criticism, therefore, can be seen as the ongoing history of attempts to bring the Gospel witness into harmony with the prevailing philosophical and cultural moods of the age" (pg. 154).

This book will greatly benefit anyone who takes the time to digest its contents.

—GRF

## WATCHING THE NEW WAVE

by Sure Hope SA, Inc.

30-Minute (VHS) Video, \$11.95

This brief video was produced in South Australia and exhibits some of the more bizarre teachings of self-proclaimed "Holy Ghost bartender" Rodney Howard-Browne and Word Faith advocate Kenneth Copeland. Portions of the analysis have been downloaded from Howard-Browne's February 1995 meetings in Australia and reveal continuing and up-to-date examples of the laughing evangelist's unorthodoxy and lunacy being packaged under the guise of the "anointing."

Without a doubt, the highlight of the video is Howard-Browne and Copeland's lengthy *glossolalia* discourse with each other. The pair speak, joke, laugh and prophesy with each other in "tongues," which is done to the delight of the conference audience. The segment demonstrates just how far removed from biblical perimeters this "new wave" has taken its adherents. The presentation also briefly mentions the theology of William Branham and Kenneth Hagin.

Some viewers will be disappointed that a number of the unorthodox declarations are displayed over a still photograph of the promoter while the audio track is played, as opposed to actual video footage of the supposed divine proclamations. Still, this does not diminish the extent of the heterodoxy these Word Faith evangelists promote.

—MKG

*Editor's Note:* The publications featured in our **Books in Review** section are available from Personal Freedom Outreach (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$1.50 to the price listed to cover postal costs. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.