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The Secret of a Christian Classic

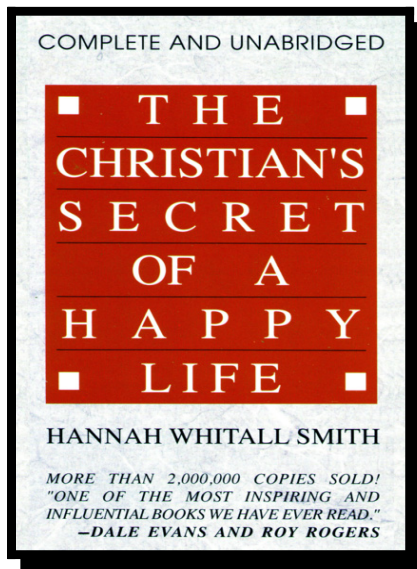
The Unhappy Life of Hannah Whitall Smith

by G. Richard Fisher

The saying, *There is often little truth in advertising*, is frequently as true in the realm of Christian publishing as it is anywhere else. Often, little truth is found in the titles and themes of books in Christian bookstores.

And lest one think this phenomenon is confined to modern works, consider the "classic" *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* by Hannah Whitall Smith, a book that overpromises and underdelivers and still sells well despite its 1875 publication date.

After reading the book a Christian should have difficulty understanding why Smith's publication enjoys the reputation it does. Perhaps many never get past the



title, which appeals to the modern search for self-fulfillment

and experience.

The book presents a sort of passive mysticism. In one chapter it cites Deuteronomy 32:11-12 and says that this verse teaches a kind of surrender to God with no need on the believer's part to act. Smith also teaches a truncated version of sanctification. She says that one of the eagle's wings is trust and the other surrender, and goes on to quote Isaiah 40:31, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength," without finishing the passage: "they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." The entire verse shows that while waiting on God is important, so is walking with Him.

A biography of Smith points out that she herself never lived the happy life she wrote about. Marie Henry's *The Secret Life of Hannah Whitall Smith* takes the reader behind the scenes and, in an honest fashion that doesn't set

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Editorials

1997 DESIGNATED AS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PRAYER FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

During the past several decades it seems that the commanding expressions of the Christian faith have been reduced to clichés. T-shirts, bumper stickers, pencils and other trinkets all are used to express the truisms of Christianity. Yet in spite of the trivialization this merchandising brings about, biblical truth does emerge. Consider, for example, the saying, "Prayer Changes Things." James 5:16 declares, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

In the past 20 years, God has raised up individuals and ministries who have invested time, effort and financial resources to reach Jehovah's Witnesses with the Gospel of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Tracts, books and cassette tapes all have been produced in abundance. Support groups and conventions, geared specifically for ex-Jehovah's Witnesses (and soon-to-be ex-Jehovah's Witnesses), have been held repeatedly, not only in the United States but throughout the world. A nationwide endeavor of

non-threatening recorded telephone messages also has been implemented to heighten a Jehovah's Witness' awareness that life outside the Watchtower organization does exist. All of these have been used of our Lord, not just to lead a Jehovah's Witness from the grasp of a "false prophet," but to faith in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps, for many, the actions cited above have superseded what should have been the very foundation of our evangelism: prayer. While programs and techniques are used of God, they can become man-driven. Prayer, however, is God-activated. It has the power to unveil the Gospel to those who are perishing. It has the potential to give sight to the blinded minds of the unbelieving.

Therefore, several countercult and apologetic ministries have designated 1997 as an "International Year of Prayer on Behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses." The campaign, introduced at the annual *Witnesses Now for Jesus Convention* in Pennsylvania last October, was inaugurated by Dan Hall of Reveal Ministries and is co-sponsored by Witness Inc. and Personal Freedom Outreach.

The goal of this important prayer effort is to make Christians throughout the world not only

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News Updates

MISSING-PERSON REPORT FILED ON MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR

Over a year after her disappearance, a missing-person report has been filed on well-known atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. The investigation by Texas police was precipitated by her son, William Murray. In August 1995, O'Hair left her American Atheists Inc. headquarters in Austin saying she was going to New York to picket Pope John Paul II during his visit to America.

Also disappearing with the famed atheist was her younger son, Jon Murray, and granddaughter, Robin Murray O'Hair. According to a Religious News Service report, William Murray has said that police told him "that they had located his daughter Robin's 1985 Porsche in a long-term parking lot at the Austin, Texas, airport." Austin police spokesman Mike Burgess said "the car has been processed and there is nothing suspicious." The automobile had been at the airport for several months.

The RNS article also indicated that on the day of her disappearance, O'Hair left a note on the door of atheist group's headquarters telling the staff that they had been laid off. Another report said that the memorandum stated that O'Hair and her family had been called out of town on an emergency.

Several rumors, including one that O'Hair is gravely ill or dead, have surfaced since her disappearance. Other theories are that O'Hair is living off secretly channeled funds from her organization or that she and her son and granddaughter were the victims of foul play.

O'Hair is best known for her 1963 landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed organized prayer in American public schools. She has also received notoriety from a hard-to-quash rumor that she is soliciting the Federal Communications Commission to have religious programming barred from the public airwaves. Since the rumor first circulated more than two decades ago, the FCC has been inundated with petitions opposing the reported request.

—MKG

HOLLYWOOD STREET NAMED AFTER HUBBARD

The late science fiction writer and founder of the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, will have a street renamed after him. The Los Angeles City Council voted early last October to rename a one-block stretch of Berendo Street in Hollywood after the controversial religious leader.

In spite of objections voiced by local citizens, the council approved the name change by an 8-3 vote. According to the Religious News Service, the residents accused Hubbard of "being a bigot, a charlatan, and a cult leader who was biased against homosexuals."

The church owns more than half the property on the one-block section, and is the site of its international headquarters. The Rev. John Woodruff, executive director of the church's Los Angeles branch, told the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper that the renaming of the "250 yards of street" was a "fantastic victory."

Hubbard, who died of a stroke in 1986, founded the Church of Scientology in the 1950s.

—MKG

THE WAY PURGES RANKS

The Way International has worked hard to purge all followers not completely committed to obeying president L. Craig Martindale by expelling them from twigs (small, home-based fellowships) or leadership positions or by restricting access to some of the group's activities.

The Way's late founder, Victor Paul Wierwille, named Martindale president in 1981 after placing his son, Donald Wierwille, and his closest associate, Howard Allen, on the three-member board of trustees. These three officers, who alone are technically members of The Way, control all aspects of The Way's policy, operations, finances and teachings.

After Wierwille died of cancer in 1985, the

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THE MINDLESS MYSTICISM OF Madame Guyon

Countering the Myth of Intermittent Deification and Sinless Perfection

by G. Richard Fisher

In an era of emotionalism, experience mania, sensationalism and mindless Christianity, it is easy to see why the writings of a mystic dead almost 300 years are enjoying a revival in readership.

Put in contemporary terms, the teachings of Madame Guyon, a Roman Catholic mystic who lived during the 17th and 18th centuries, are like an amalgam of the teachings of Shirley MacLaine, Rebecca Brown, Joyce Meyer and Sister Angelica. Nevertheless, some see her life and teachings as an example for Christians to follow.

Moody Press appears to be among that group. It continues to publish her autobiography and says in its Introduction:

"We offer no word of apology for publishing the Autobiography of Madame Guyon, those expressions of devotion to her church, that found vent in her writings. She was a true Catholic when protestantism was in its infancy."¹

What found vent in the writings of Guyon (Jeanne Marie Bouvier De La Motte, 1648-1717) was

full-blown mysticism. Elgin Moyer writes of her spiritual development, "her life began to be a series of visions, revelations, and spiritual experiences."²

Henry Sheldon describes mysticism as "the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God."³ Thus it is not just inner feelings of praise or gratitude for what God has done, but rather "The complete union of the soul with God..."⁴ This mind set confuses Creator and creature, wrongly seeking Christ not in God's Word but in the self. Christian mystics also ignore the importance of Christian fellowship, ordinances and the other means of grace. Mystical experience displaces biblical revelation, becoming the final goal and authority.

The school of mysticism that Guyon adhered to, sometimes called Quietism, was an extreme form of Roman Catholic mysticism that emphasized the cleansing of one's inner life and included the belief that one could see Christ visibly. Before Guyon's day, in the Middle Ages, this took strange forms in erotic

"bride mysticism" with some visionaries believing they were married to Jesus.⁵

Guyon and the Quietists went further, into something called essence mysticism. They believed that their being was merged with God's being and the two became one. This unbiblical idea survives today in the New Age and other non-Christian religions.

In her autobiography, Guyon wrote that "divine wisdom is unknown."⁶ She made no attempt to speak of God's revelation of Himself in nature and creation (Psalm 19, Romans 1) and the specific revelation of God in Jesus Christ and His Word. She taught that we can know of God by "passing forward into God,"⁷ going into a mindless, meditative state where we can get in touch with the Christ within the self, merge with that Christ and be lifted into ecstasy.

The Making of a Heretic

Guyon's autobiography says she tried to enter a convent as a girl, but was thwarted by her parents.⁸ So, at age 15, she en-

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The Two Faces of the Worldwide Church of God



by Peter Ditzel

A few years ago, there was no doubt among Christian ministries that the Worldwide Church of God was a cult. But since the death of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, in 1986, the WCG has attracted much attention by making many changes, particularly in doctrine.

In recent months, an increasing number of ministries have accepted the WCG as Christian. Some consider events in the WCG as nothing short of a miracle. One ministry labeled the WCG an “uncult,” and another said it has completed the transformation “from the status of a cult to a firm standing in the church of Jesus Christ.”¹ But amid all of the plaudits, members and newly exited nonmembers continue to report spiritual abuse by those holding leadership positions over them in the WCG.

Enter or Exit David Covington

David Covington was a member of the WCG for twenty-five years and was in the full-time ministry for five of those years. He was pastor of the Roanoke

and Lynchburg, Va., congregations and was a contributing writer to the WCG’s *Plain Truth* magazine. Covington holds a Master’s degree in community agency counseling from the University of Memphis and is a National Certified Counselor. He wrote the cover story for and was himself featured on page 1 of the May-June 1996 *Plain Truth*. The WCG administration asked Covington to conduct workshops on spiritual healing for over 600 WCG ministers and their wives in six states. But in May 1996, David Covington resigned because, “after nineteen months of addressing these issues with [the WCG’s] administration, it became apparent that I was actually enabling a sick system that does not desire genuine change for Jesus.”²

Referring to pastor General Joe Tkach Jr., Mike Feazell, director of Church Administration, and Greg Albrecht, editor of the *Plain Truth*, Covington writes:

“You have implemented these changes [the changes that have won the admiration of so

many observers] through our historically abusive dynamics. In your present position, I am convinced you aren’t even capable of seeing, much less addressing, the genuine problems. I compare the 1996 WCG to a husband who used to beat his wife seven days a week and now has cut back to four. And, the wife is supposed to be satisfied with his progress! Worse, still, he’s holding seminars on domestic violence! Your administration continues to be abusive, but you hold spiritual healing conferences.”³

Addressing why outside observers are reporting that genuine repentance has taken place in the WCG, Covington points out, “These observers cannot possibly understand what it is like to be a member of this church. They miss the dynamics of this system which remain abusive.”⁴

He also points out continuing doctrinal problems: “the WCG still rejects the doctrine of eternal punishment, holds observances on the Jewish Sabbath and festivals ..., and teaches as doctrine the debatable matter of post-mortem evangelization [i.e.,

those who are not saved in this life still have a chance to be saved in a future resurrection].”⁵ I would add that the abusive heretic, Herbert W. Armstrong, continues to be regarded as a minister of Jesus Christ.

Covington lists nine fundamental problems in the WCG:

1. Authoritarian Hierarchy: Herbert W. Armstrong established a hierarchy in the WCG with himself — the pastor general — at the top. The only aspect of this that changed with Armstrong’s death in 1986 was that Joseph W. Tkach became the all-powerful pastor general. When he died in 1995, he was succeeded as pastor general by his son, Joe Tkach Jr. No members or elected representatives of the members ever were consulted about who should become the leader of their church; they did not have a chance to consider whether the succeeding pastor general was spiritually or morally qualified or had the intelligence or judgment to capably run the WCG. The succeeding pastor general was simply imposed on the members by the preceding pastor general. Hierarchical government has been acceptable for years in the WCG because members believe the leaders are appointed by God.⁶

2. Lack of Accountability: In any WCG congregation, neither the deacons, elders, nor pastor are accountable to the local church or the members of the church in any way. They must give account only to their superiors, and that line of authority ends with the pastor general in Pasadena, who is legally accountable to no one.

The WCG has at times made certain statements that sound as if decisions come from “the board” or from the Advisory Council of Elders, and not from

the pastor general.⁷ But the April 1995 *Ambassador Report* newsletter published the “Bylaws of the Worldwide Church of God, a California Nonprofit Religious Corporation.” These state that the “‘Corporate Governance’ shall mean the pastor general.” They further reveal that ecclesiastical decisions “shall be within the sole and subjective discretion of the Corporate Governance”; that the pastor general has sole authority over the contents of the bylaws; that the pastor general has sole authority over the selection of the Advisory Council of Elders (the members of the corporation) and the Board of Directors; and that the pastor general can remove any member of the corporation (Advisory Council of Elders) and anyone — or even everyone — from the Board of Directors without cause or notice.⁸

The *Ambassador Report* observes, “The Corporation’s board is therefore a *true dummy board*. Because the Association’s Advisory Board of Elders is determined in the same way, it, too, is a dummy board. ... In the final analysis, all WCG doctrines, policies, assets, and personnel are controlled legally by the whims, caprices, and fantasies of but one human being — Joseph W. Tkach [now Joe Tkach Jr.]. In a very real sense, therefore, the Worldwide Church of God is [Joe Tkach Jr.]”⁹

The WCG has occasionally talked about changing its hierarchical government, and did so again after Covington distributed his resignation letter. But, although the WCG has had 10 years since Herbert Armstrong’s death to implement such a change, it has not yet done so. The board of directors cannot truly lead the WCG as long as these bylaws remain intact. Nothing restrains the church from

returning to its old doctrinal positions (or going on to new heresies) if the pastor general so wishes. And, despite talk of change, the WCG inconsistently continues to defend its hierarchical government with references to the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰

The following would not have occurred in a church in which the leadership was held accountable to the congregation: After trying unsuccessfully for months to get her pastor to address several questions and concerns (including being removed from her youth ministry of 15 years after she mentioned that with the doctrinal changes she would now be free to teach the children about Jesus¹¹), a member resorted to writing to Pasadena. She reports that it was after she took this action that her pastor and his wife “came to my house to demand that I retract everything I had written in the note and to state that unless I promised to never again send such a note, that there was no hope for us to work together. In fact, [the pastor’s wife] literally waved my letter at me several times and alluded to a secret file they had on me... . The ‘counseling’ session was a sham. I broke down in tears at the end, realizing they had the upper hand, and Headquarters, as always, would take their word against mine. So I concluded aloud that I would just have to leave. They were both quick to endorse my ‘decision’ after which [the pastor’s wife] insisted that our stories ‘match’ in case Headquarters questioned them or me.”¹²

Notice how the WCG handled this matter at a time when it was billing itself as a New Covenant church dedicated to serving its members. After poring over the copious letters and e-mail messages between this ex-member

and various WCG ministers and between those ministers and David Covington (whom the former member contacted concerning her case), I find an obvious bias against her.

Her letters were analyzed for negativism, her heart was judged and her intentions assumed; she was even placed in the same category as the carnal Pharisees. "Would a person trained in the skills of conflict resolution," wrote one headquarters minister in reference to this woman, "have found a way to appease these enemies of Jesus?"¹³ So a person who cried out for help found herself labeled an "enemy of Jesus" who could not be helped. The WCG's high-handed approach is indicative of a desire to protect its leadership and image at the expense of the individual Christian. But in a Christian church the burden is on the church to resolve such conflicts without labeling every member who rocks the boat as carnal and unable to be helped.

3. Closed Communication:

The pastor general is inaccessible to the average member. Those who try to reach him are usually contacted by a staff member trained to either mollify or intimidate. Members may sometimes receive letters *signed* by the pastor general but not *written* by him.

Covington writes, "Communication is still far too closed. Dissent is not tolerated, but is labeled as division and used to disfellowship [or pressure into quitting] those who disagree."¹⁴ Closed communication occurs at all levels in the WCG. A member may have more success in speaking with the local pastor than in reaching the pastor general, but will often still be stonewalled or intimidated rather than reach a satisfactory closure to the prob-

lem. The former member mentioned above writes:

"My last recent attempt to question my local pastor on blatant problems within the congregation which are hurting the congregation, were met with the standard 'You must have had a traumatic experience in your youth to be so negative.' (In fact, my youth was relatively problem-free. My home life was happy... .) The real trauma has been the control and abuse I have allowed myself to endure in this church because I believed at the time that it was God's will."¹⁵

So, while Joe Tkach Jr. makes public apologies for "past" wrongs,¹⁶ members and former members are left to lick their own wounds. In another letter, this same ex-member asks:

"If those at headquarters are sincere, then why am I spiritually homeless, demoralized and hurting? Why doesn't anybody reach out to me and tell me that I should stay and we can work this out together for the benefit of everybody? Why must I have reinforced this feeling I have felt all along; that I am expendable to keep up the appearance that the local church is problem-free because my pastor and his wife are doing such a fabulous job?"¹⁷

4. Manipulation over tithing: Giving, by definition, is something we do freely. Giving to a church or religious organization is something we do freely as an act of worship. If we donate because we are told we will get a blessing; or because the church commands it; or because we are being made to feel guilty if we do not support an organization that has been financially irresponsible; or because the organization de-

scribes itself as having such a unique and important ministry that we would be letting God down if we didn't send in a donation, we are not giving, we are being manipulated into paying.

There is a difference of opinion among Christians about whether biblical references to tithing apply to Christians. The WCG which once had a three-tiered system of tithing has now publicly taken the stand that tithing is not part of the New Covenant and Christians are not obligated to obey tithing laws. But when income dropped, the WCG was quick to explain that the new doctrine means members are not *restricted* to giving *only* 10 percent of their income (i.e., they should now be giving more).¹⁸ This amounts to no real change because the WCG always told members to not only pay their tithes, but to give generous offerings besides. Further, the WCG returned to the old manipulative techniques of telling members that God will bless them for giving, God commands them to give, and the WCG with its unique ministry is in financial need.¹⁹

As if this were not enough, the WCG's Mike Fezell laid on a generous dose of guilt by writing to members, "We are now reaching a point where more decline in income will result in cuts [in employees and important projects]. ... It is no secret that neglect of financial support of the church is often symptomatic of a general neglect of living in Christ."²⁰

But Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton write in *Toxic Faith*, "Religious addicts believe that nothing is more essential than the organization's continuation, which is funded by the gifts of the followers... . People are seen

as sources of funds to keep the organization going rather than individuals worthy of service from the organization... . If the organization you support begs for your money and seems to place greater importance on your money than on you, stop supporting that organization.”²¹

An ex-member in Ohio describes what happened when members withheld their support:

“And should we doubt the motives of our pastor general, we were constantly reminded that if he wasn’t following Jesus Christ, would he have committed ‘financial suicide’ by saying that tithing was no longer required? (This comment was followed up later on in videos and co-worker letters as ‘...most are faithfully giving 10% and some people are giving *even more...*’, ‘...10% should be a *minimal* guideline for giving...’, ‘...you’re no longer restricted to giving only 10%! You can give 10, 20, 30 and even 40% now!’ Of course, this wasn’t about to happen, so we were once again chastised with, ‘Now we know where your hearts *really* are!’ because of the drastic drop in income.)”²²

Whenever the WCG finds itself in one of its many financial crises, the remedies include coercing members for more money, cutting services to local congregations, and dismissing lower-level employees. The highly paid WCG leaders never take voluntary pay cuts. In fact, only days before the WCG published the articles cited above, and typical of the arrogance the WCG has shown throughout its history, Joe Tkach Jr. received a pay raise.²³

5. Financial control: David Covington writes to the pastor general:

“The congregations still send 100% of their money [donations] to you... . Current regional pastor Craig Bachellor told Mike Feazell and me at dinner, in January 1995, he had determined his congregation received 19 cents back in services for every \$1 sent to Pasadena. Where does the rest go? ...”

“The problem is that the members do not compare their situation to the thousands of other Christian churches where 100% is collected locally and a small percentage is then sent by the congregation to a governing body.”²⁴

6. Local congregations not a true priority: The WCG leadership sounds like it is reforming its relationship to church members: “Friends, we are a church, and we sincerely want headquarters to serve the spiritual needs of our members rather than thinking that the members exist to serve us.”²⁵ But Covington charges that local congregations are receiving fewer services all the time: they still rent halls; funds for Wednesday night Bible studies have been cut off; some pastors are stretched between two (and sometimes as many as five) churches; congregations are not even allotted funds for such basics as yellow pages listings, business telephone lines, or post office boxes; and the idea is “being bantered about that our ministry will go to a part-time basis.”²⁶

Covington also tells Tkach, “It does not appear congregations will benefit from the \$250 million you expect to receive from the sale of the [buildings and grounds in Pasadena]. I have heard your Q&A session several times and recall your response about how it will be spent as including the following: 1) an

endowment for the corporate headquarters, 2) a ministerial retirement program, and 3) an endowment for Ambassador University. On one occasion you mentioned lastly that some might be used to help congregations toward a building fund.”²⁷

In fact, the WCG did tout a building program in its newspaper to members, including pictures of what the local church buildings would look like. But, typical of many of the WCG’s announced policies, the program has never gotten off the ground.²⁸

7. Chaos and confusion: Ex-WCG members often mention the chaos that resulted from the way the WCG introduced the doctrinal changes: Statements were made, retracted, and restated; members were told one thing, but would hear Christian ministries quote their leaders as saying something very different; the Sabbath, festivals, dietary laws, and tithing were no longer required, but were still used to judge someone’s “commitment.”

Also, administrators continually shift employees from one department to another. And the WCG’s record concerning various programs — such as the building program mentioned above — is no better. Covington writes,

“I traveled to a planning and ideas conference ... for the newly instituted Family Ministry department only to find out upon arrival that the program had been canceled. Ron Kelly was then given yet another new job in ministerial development where he promptly started a program for tuition reimbursement. This new program seemed to last little more than a month and joined a WCG graveyard littered with such short-lived policies. The roller coaster

goes up and down, and people's lives are thrown from side to side. It has been my experience with the historic culture of the WCG that the message of salvation through Jesus gets lost in an overflow of programs, policies and crisis."²⁹

I suppose that only God and top WCG leaders know whether this chaos is premeditated, or merely the result of ineptitude. But WCG observers should be aware of Ken Blue's words:

"Another tactic of keeping people out of touch with the present is to foment confusion, punctuated by crisis. Policies may be handed down and programs launched which seem to fit no coherent pattern.... The resulting turmoil keeps people from finding out what is really going on. This serves to cover up the fact that almost no productive activity may be occurring."³⁰

8. Lack of respect for members and ministry: David Covington quotes David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen in their book *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*: "[One] reason for secrecy in a church is that the leadership has a condescending, negative view of the laity. This results in conspiracies on the leadership level. They tell themselves, 'People are not mature enough to handle the truth.' This is patronizing, at best."³¹ The WCG members were the last to hear of the doctrinal changes.

A former member writes, "If they were really honest, sincere, and genuinely repentant, they would have worked on the *inside* of the church first, not going to the Christian ministries and countercult organizations six years before they sprang the new changes on the gullible membership."³² This same person also

says that "honest, sincere, Spirit-filled Christian leaders would have orchestrated the changes ... on their knees; beseeching God to step in. Then gently and lovingly, as kind shepherds, setting about to first instruct the members in the truth; giving them all the help they possibly could. ... This takes real faith."³³

Covington writes to Tkach, "I agree with your doctrinal changes, but absolutely disagree with the method by which you have imposed them upon the fellowship, instituting one change at a time. ... One person described feeling like they had been spiritually raped in the past year. A WCG pastor compared your approach to bobbing a dog's tail, one painful inch at a time."³⁴

One of the exiting members quoted earlier writes,

"We are tired of the continued condescension of the headquarters elite toward the 'lowly laity' in terms of telling us what we are capable of understanding or not. We are tired of being controlled in every facet of church life and most definitely tired of the double standard and double talk that permeates everything that emanates from Pasadena on down through our local pastor... . Although it may have duped Ruth Tucker and Hank Hanegraaff, the WCG is not the Jesus-centered church it is purporting to be. It still speaks in half-truths (e.g., 'a Christian doesn't *have* to keep the Old Testament Holy Days, but those who do are proving their passion for Christ'); it will not denounce Mr. Armstrong as the heretic and blasphemer that he was; and its pastors are not accountable for the way in which they deal with the laity. In some ways it

currently meets the profile of an abusive cult more than it ever did. When I dared to believe the rhetoric of a supposedly healthier WCG a year ago, I discovered that my questions and concerns have no more merit than under any previous authoritarian WCG regime. Although it gives the appearance of having repented of its false belief that it was the one true church, in reality it has done nothing more than slightly shift its rhetoric and self-focus from being the one true church to 'look how great we are because we are humble enough to change.' It still desires and claims a unique place in Christendom for its recent 'repentance.'"³⁵

This lack of respect also shows itself in the way individuals are dehumanized or publicly ridiculed. I can testify that this was common when I was a WCG employee — particularly concerning anyone who asked hard questions, criticized, or left the WCG. Covington tells of a more recent incident he observed in which a church administration supervisor told a small group of people that an African-American pastor who left the WCG "just 'wanted to be white,' was in it for the money, and possessed mental problems."³⁶ Since leaving the WCG, Covington has been likened to Judas Iscariot and labeled as immature and arrogant, among other things;³⁷ I have been accused of being a liar in no less than a dozen different and imaginative ways; and the cultic practice of making personal attacks on former members continues.³⁸

"Loving, kind, good people that only wanted to serve God with all their hearts and souls. People who put Him first in their lives. People who pa-

tiently underwent many trials and endured ... and endured. People who felt close to their God. A big, cruel joke. Betrayed by men who were not men of God. Beaten and left bleeding along the road of life" (written by a former WCG member in Colorado).

9. Organization more important than Jesus or people: I have long said that the WCG exists to perpetuate itself and profit its leaders. Observers might argue that this is not true of the new WCG as evidenced by the loss of members and income due to its doctrinal correction. But while employed by the WCG I was told that the changes were being made to shed the cult image and to shift *Plain Truth* readership to a market more likely to donate. So perhaps WCG leaders didn't expect such a great loss, or thought the changes would bring them into a more lucrative market. They may have taken a gamble with potentially high returns. In other words, there is more than one possible reason for their actions.

David Covington makes this interesting observation:

"I know you [Tkach] say that you have lost members and income by the changes you have made. *However, your power and prestige have not been abated.* In fact, you have now had opportunity to speak before hundreds of denominational leaders, be interviewed on radio with James Kennedy and Hank Hanegraaff, obtain several book contracts, and that in addition to your planned radio program (and aforementioned pay increase). You did not possess anywhere near this kind of prominence before."³⁹

Covington ends his resignation letter with this paragraph:

"You continue to engineer us videos and materials to design a Christian church out of a destructive system. We pastors follow the instructions carefully and paint by numbers the fireplace on the wall, according to your specifications. Then, our members all gather around this facade and rub their hands waiting to get warm. We wait but grow weary. Many ministers are on the verge of emotional breakdown, and you are financially cutting them off! Our structure shuts out and stifles Jesus. It must change! I beseech members not to wait on you, but follow the Spirit. He is the One waiting!"⁴⁰

I conclude this article intensely aware that it does not adequately express the pain in the literally pounds of letters in my files from people who have recently left the WCG. To them, I apologize. I am also aware that the WCG — though necessarily treated as an organization in this article — has thousands of members, each of them an individual. In no way am I attempting to judge any individual's Christianity.

My hope in writing this article is threefold. First, I hope the idea that it is somehow virtuous to stay in the WCG will fall from WCG members' eyes, that their eyes will be opened to the kind of organization in which they have placed their trust, and that they will see that fellowship with the body of Christ awaits them outside the WCG.

Second, I hope that observers of the WCG will begin to see the complexity of the issue of an abusive cult becoming a healthy, orthodox church. It is not as simple as changing a few doctrines and mouthing some evangelical-sounding phrases. The individual members — some of

whom have been manipulated by mind control techniques for so long they do not even realize they have been abused — must be taken into account.

A WCG pastor who claims to have discovered the Gospel of grace and the extent of the WCG's legalism during the 1970s says his response was to pray "for the church to come to a deeper understanding of the grace of God."⁴¹ But, while prayer is certainly important, I cannot agree that it should be the only response. Why is this man mentioned in a positive light in *Christianity Today* instead of asking how he could have remained silent while following directives from headquarters and drawn a paycheck while the WCG continued to preach legalism and various other heresies; denounce the Gospel of grace as a deception; call Christians "instruments of Satan"; use members' tithe money on extravagant living for top officials; and spiritually blind, gag, and abuse its members?

Accompanying Ruth Tucker's article in *Christianity Today* is a small article, "When Your Church Says It's Wrong."⁴² It is written by a long-time WCG member, and is apparently supposed to show how WCG members are turning from legalism to grace. But I have to ask — since apparently no one else has — how this woman can claim to have cleared her mind of all prejudices while remaining in the church she has attended for more than 25 years and while using WCG published study guides and listening to WCG sermons. I must also question how her claim to have cleared her mind of all prejudices and to have an "open mind" is consistent with her statement that she "refused to listen to any rumors or read any 'black marketed' dissident materials."

My criticism is not of these people, who are the product of their church, but with those who hold them up as positive examples without asking critical questions. Dealing only with the leaders can result in an extremely distorted picture — one that may even have been purposely created for the benefit of the observers — and cause great harm to the average member. Likewise, exiting members who know they have been hurt by the present WCG administration, commonly feel betrayed by both the WCG leadership and the Christian ministries that have befriended the WCG. Observers must not forget that the leaders have been in responsible positions in an abusive, authoritarian cult for years and may have compulsive behavioral problems they have not yet faced and which may not be readily apparent to the observer. (Interestingly, David Covington mentions that, when he was still a WCG pastor, the top WCG administration felt they had no need to attend his workshops on spiritual healing.)

Third, I hope the WCG leaders will see that there is more that needs to be changed than they may have realized. Joe Tkach Jr. accuses ministries that have kept the pressure on the WCG of making “the journey [to evangelicalism] ten times more difficult.”⁴³ Why? Because we demand true fruit rather than an image of evangelicalism? (Read Luke 3:8.) Because we know that the possible regeneration of a leader or leaders and the publication of orthodox-sounding articles does not guarantee a spiritually healthy church? Because we want to hold leaders accountable for obvious lies and spiritual abuse?

We have not made the journey any more difficult than it needs

to be. Any unnecessary difficulty may instead arise from leaders duplicitously manipulating members and the media to fit a man-made agenda rather than putting their full trust in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we have inflicted faithful wounds (Proverbs 27:6) and will continue to do so until the WCG demonstrates true accountability and forthrightness and stops leaving a trail of abused people in its wake.⁴⁴

Endnotes:

1. Hank Hanegraaff, “Dear Co-laborer in Christ” letter, October 6, 1995. “The ‘Uncult’: Back to the Bible,” *Impact*, July 1996, pg. 2.
2. David Covington, resignation letter to pastor general Joseph Tkach Jr., May 11, 1996.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Some both in and outside the WCG have lately been referring to a 1939 *Good News* article in which Armstrong condemned centralized, hierarchical government. They see this as the “inspired” Armstrong position from which he later drifted. What they fail to see is that Armstrong wrote this article to justify the autonomy he declared for his group of followers after he severed his ties with the Church of God (Seventh Day) headquartered in Salem, West Virginia. When the Salem church was no longer a threat to his plan for his church, Armstrong set himself as the head of his own hierarchical, centralized government and condemned congregational and presbyterian forms of church government.
7. Ruth Tucker also gives the impression “a board of directors now leads the church.” “From the Fringe to the Fold,” *Christianity Today*, July 15, 1996, pg. 32.
8. *Ambassador Report*, April 1995, pp. 4-6. On pg. 4 it mentions, “such documents are considered so top secret they are stored in a multilocked vault and without special clearance even top ministers are not permitted to see them. For that reason, we are very pleased that one WCG insider recently provided us with a copy of [the bylaws].”
9. Ibid. pg. 6.
10. WCG home page on the Internet, May 22, 1996.
11. Letter of May 24, 1996, on file.

12. Letter of February 2, 1996, on file.
13. Richard Rice, e-mail message to David Covington, May 3, 1996.
14. Covington resignation letter.
15. Letter of August 8, 1995, on file.
16. “From the Fringe...”, pg. 30, as quoted from the March-April 1996 *Plain Truth*.
17. Letter of January 25, 1996, on file.
18. Joseph Tkach, Co-worker letter, February 26, 1996, and “The High Cost of Following Christ,” *Worldwide News*, March 12, 1996, as quoted in Covington’s resignation letter.
19. “The High Cost...”
20. Mike Feazell, *Worldwide News*, March 12, 1996, as quoted in Covington’s resignation letter.
21. Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith*, (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1991), pp. 257-260.
22. Letter of September 27, 1995, on file.
23. Covington resignation letter.
24. Ibid.
25. “The High Cost...”
26. Covington resignation letter.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pg. 114.
31. David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1991), pg. 78.
32. Letter of March 8, 1996, on file.
33. Letter of May 28, 1996, on file.
34. Covington resignation letter.
35. Letter of April 8, 1996, on file.
36. Covington resignation letter.
37. David Covington, letter to Greg Albrecht, June 14, 1996.
38. Carrol E. Miller and David G. Hunsberger, letters to Peter Ditzel, August 21, 1995, and September 7, 1995.
39. Covington resignation letter.
40. Ibid.
41. “From the Fringe...”, pg. 32.
42. “When Your Church Says It’s Wrong,” *Christianity Today*, July 15, 1996, pg. 29.
43. “From the Fringe...”, pg. 32.
44. The WCG’s responses to David Covington’s resignation letter (both the brief response on the Internet and the detailed response from Greg Albrecht in a letter to Janis Hutchinson dated May 31, 1996, demonstrate neither accountability nor forthrightness.



tered an arranged marriage with a 37-year-old man. Despite her husband's wealth, she wrote that the union was unhappy.⁹ She stated that her overbearing husband and tyrannical mother-in-law vilified and abused her unrelentingly.¹⁰

This evidently left Guyon desperate for escape and inward was the only direction she could turn. At 19 she met a priest who told her: "It is, madame, because you seek without what you have within. Accustom yourself to seek God in your heart, and you will there find Him."¹¹ Guyon wrote of no conversion, only a presupposition that Christ was always in her heart.

Thus she started her incredible lifelong journey within. She responded to the Lord, "Thou wast in my heart, and demanded only a simple turning of my mind inward, to make me perceive Thy presence. ... The kingdom of God is within you."¹²

Guyon is not the only one who has misused Jesus' words from Luke 17:21. While New Agers and other cultists cite this passage to prove their pantheistic view, Jesus used it to communicate a different idea. The Greek word *entos* can be literally translated "in the midst." Jesus was speaking of Himself as being in the midst of those he was speaking to. The Kingdom was among them in the person of Jesus and they were missing it. Verse 22 confirms this as Jesus speaks of days ahead when they would desire to see Him and not be able. His physical presence in their midst would be withdrawn.

A New Testament note in *The Ryrie Study Bible*, confirms this:

"17:21 *the kingdom of God is*

in your midst. The necessary elements of the kingdom were there present and needed only to be recognized. It cannot mean "within you," for the kingdom certainly was completely unconnected with the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking (v. 20)."¹³

Guyon, thinking that God had always been in her heart, also believed that the fire would "devour all that was left of self" and that here would be no more "troublesome faults or reluctances,"¹⁴ bringing about a perfect, sinless state of life. While she warned of the dangers of visions, dreams and ecstasies, her only rule for evaluating such experiences was "The Giver alone must be our object and aim."¹⁵ She had little regard for the biblical Christ, settling for what she called Christ "in the center of the soul,"¹⁶ a construct of her own imagination.

Absorption or Hypnosis?

Guyon's description of absorption into God¹⁷ sounds a lot like self-hypnosis. She claimed to lose self-will, becoming reclusive and believing she had been absorbed into God's being.¹⁸ She wrote of things like death of the senses and the death of understanding, equating union with Christ with some kind of mystical, inner-death experience.¹⁹

When Guyon did refer to Scripture, she distorted it to teach something about an inner, meditative state. Guyon's problem was that she was absorbing the writings and teachings of the mystics of that day. One such mystic was Jesuit Francois Fenelon (1651-1715). At the request of the Pope, Fenelon burned his writings to stay in favor with Rome. Guyon would face prison over hers. Other mystics known to Guyon were Jacob

Boehme (1575-1624), Francis de Sales (1567-1622), and Charles Molinos (1640-1697). Catholic legalism was being countered, not with biblical balance, as in the Reformation, but with unrestrained extremism and subjectivism.

Through all this, Guyon writes that her marriage continued to be a struggle of coping with domestic miseries by retreating into self and "God"²⁰ and experiencing euphoric states. She went through nearly seven years of mental depression and emotional instability with constant thoughts of hell and damnation.²¹ Experiences and mystical highs did not give her any kind of lasting comfort. These were probably more of an escape than anything else. She told of dreams that sound like bizarre nightmares but which she considered revelations of hidden truth, which she interpreted through imagination and speculation.²² Her husband died after 12 years of marriage,²³ leaving her free to pursue her ideas more fully.

In the 1680s, she encountered the New Catholics, a quasi-monastic group under the tutelage of Father LaCombe, and gave them all her money.²⁴ LaCombe, an imitator of the hermit Anselm, had a great influence on Guyon.

Guyon wrote that she ate and slept little after joining the New Catholics.²⁵ Perhaps this weakened state contributed to her loss of emotional control and a belief that she was in direct contact with Jesus Christ.²⁶ Scientists today understand much about the chemical effects on the brain from sleep deprivation.

Jay Adams alerts us to the physical and mental problems associated with sleep loss, among which can be perceptual difficulties and hallucinations. He connects sleep loss with the bizarre

manifestations reported in the Middle Ages:

“If in the ascetic life early morning prayer was combined with late-night vigils, there is little wonder that many early mystics saw what they thought were visions and heard what they supposed were revelations from God. Since they held a strong belief in present direct revelation and miracles, it is not surprising that the perceptual disturbances resulting from sleep loss that brought about hallucinations often took the form of (or were interpreted as) revelations. A study of the practices of the ascetics forces one to conclude that it was probably sin against their bodies, rather than holiness derived from ascetic practices, that was at the bottom of the mysticism so often associated with hermits, monastics, and others.”²⁷

Guyon expressed her creed this way:

“Perfect poverty, by the total privation of everything that was mine, both inwardly and outwardly. Perfect obedience to the will of the Lord, submission to the church.”²⁸

What Guyon found while under La Combe were altered states of consciousness. She perfected her self-hypnosis and moved into extremes that can only be described as a delusion of self-deification:

“So was my soul lost in God, who communicated to it His qualities, having drawn it out of all that it had of its own. ... Oh, happy poverty, happy loss, happy nothingness, which gives no less than God Himself in His own immensity, no more circumscribed to the limited manner of the creature but always drawing it

out of that, to plunge it wholly into His own divine essence.”²⁹

This is like adding a member to the Trinity. We may share God’s blessing and even reflect some of His communicable attributes like mercy, love and holiness but it is lunacy to say we can be plunged into the divine essence. God is wholly other and will always remain ontologically different from the creature. We share His blessings but not His essence.

There is only one unique eternal and perfect God and man is not like Him (Isaiah 40-46). Fusion, as it is called, is a gross error whether it is the fusion of Norman Grubb (the Christological type), the polytheistic fusion of the Word-Faith type (little gods), or the monotheistic and intermittent type of Guyon and the medieval mystics.

While we can be one in purpose with God, we cannot be one in being or essence.³⁰

Some might counter that the Greek Orthodox Church has taught the doctrine of deification or theosis. From Athanasius to Maximus was it not said that “God became man that man may become God”? On the surface it sounds like deification, but some misunderstand.

The Greek Orthodox Church did not teach deification in the absolute and strict sense. They so explained and nuanced the doctrine that it is clear that they believed Christians are partakers of Christ and would be something like Him but not share His essence or divine nature. Deification occurred at the incarnation and our becoming like God by the indwelling Holy Spirit is potential and progressive for the believer.

Secondly, this “partaking,” in the Greek Orthodox view, is es-

chatological, in the future. At the Resurrection believers will dwell in an immortal, deathless, glorified body like that of Christ. Their transformation will be complete and full glory will be attained. They will be more like God than ever but not God in any absolute sense. The Greek Orthodox view is a far cry from the heretical views of deification.³¹

Some may even try to stretch and twist 2 Peter 1:4 (“partakers of the divine nature”) into some kind of deification scheme but it just won’t work. The Greek word “partaker” (*koinonia*) means a partner or one having something in common with another. Partners do not become one another or become absorbed into each other. Two distinct persons are needed to have a partnership and identities are not confused.

Whatever partnership we have in God and Christ does not make us one with the Godhead. A baby in the womb shares its mother’s life but they remain separate and distinct.

The New Geneva Study Bible affirms:

“Believers are not absorbed into deity, nor do they become divine. Rather, they have received the Holy Spirit and are sons of God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:9-21). As such they are being conformed to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29) and the image of God in them is being renewed in true righteousness.”³²

Interspersed into Guyon’s emotional highs were freakish lows where she would see horrible faces in blueish light and for a time experienced poltergeistic activity.³³ If this was not scrambled brain chemistry from sleep loss it was occultic.

Some of Guyon’s other strange

beliefs include:

- That we should claim healing and not undermine it by praying for the will of God. This is so unbelievable since she was so sickly all of her life, probably epileptic as well.³⁴

- That she and La Combe could communicate for hours without words in some kind of strange telepathy. She asserted they could read each others hearts.³⁵

- That she had insight into the minds and hearts of others. Many insisted she guessed incorrectly. For this practice of “mind reading” — which was really an over-active imagination — she was constantly rebuked for pride.³⁶

- That her trance states, which left her unable to speak for days, were good and godly.³⁷

- That she had written under the direct inspiration of God, often not even being aware of what she was writing. She claimed to have found within herself, “latent treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”³⁸ She was so bold to say that her writings were spirit-dictated.³⁹ Guyon was usurping the position of Jesus Christ “in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 3:3).

Evelyn Underhill, herself a promoter of mysticism and myths, refers to Guyon as a “medium” exhibiting clairvoyance, prophecy, telepathy, and automatic writing in bewildering profusion.⁴⁰

A Setback

There was a great turn of events when La Combe, in self-preservation, began systematically burning the writings of the mystics.⁴¹ The Church leadership and laity were becoming more vocally opposed to the mystics and their errors. As a result Guyon was constantly on the

move relocating with regularity and “wandering as a vagabond.”⁴² A strange bond continued to exist between Guyon and La Combe and he constantly intervened on her behalf in spite of his disagreement with her views.

In 1688, Guyon came up against her worst nightmare in the person of a Father La Mothe, who brought her in on heresy charges and suggested an immoral connection between the lady and La Combe.⁴³ La Combe was imprisoned and Guyon was banished to a locked chamber in a convent.⁴⁴

After seven months, Guyon was released. She joined the mystic Archbishop Fenelon. With few exceptions, Fenelon accepted and affirmed all of Guyon’s experiences and ideas.⁴⁵ This added fuel to her fire and would propel her into a radicalism that led to 10 years’ imprisonment. The sufferings created a martyr’s complex and the “persecution” proved in her mind to show the rightness of her cause.

After release from prison, Guyon lived reclusively and quietly for seven years. She died in 1717 at age 70.

Other Dangers

Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity reminds us of the other errors of mysticism:

“In seventeenth-century France the Quietists, Monsieur de Molinos, Madame Guyon and Archbishop Fénelon, condemned human effort. They believed that, to attain perfection, man must be passive. He must abandon himself to God to the extent that he does not even care for his own salvation. This state can be reached in prayer. When it is truly achieved, sin is impossible. Temptation

may come, and even compel the Quietist to perform actions which would be sinful in others. But because he no longer has a will of his own, the actions are not sin.”⁴⁶

God has given us the Scriptures because He wants us to use our minds. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and minds (Matthew 22:37). Mysticism is a dead end and cannot be supported by Scripture. Meditation of the true biblical kind is not mindless and self-centered but focused on God, His works and His ways (Psalm 1, Joshua 1:8). The Hebrew word translated meditation means to muse or to roll ideas around in the mind. Submitting our will to God and His Word in grateful and practical obedience is the key to healthy sanctification. The Bible teaches us to be still and silent before God, but not passive and mindless.

Baker’s Dictionary of Theology affirms:

“It may be doubted whether there is any direct biblical support for mysticism as distinct from the mystical interpretation of biblical data. ... apart from its obvious extravagances it may be doubted whether it is a genuine form of biblical and evangelical Christianity.”⁴⁷

Guyon’s mystical mindlessness, her intermittent deification and perfectionistic ideas need to be exposed and rejected. We need to call on “Christian” publishers to stop the spread of heresy. It is curious that Moody Press is responsible for Guyon’s autobiography while also publishing Arthur Johnson’s *Faith Misguided*, which exposed the dangers of mysticism. It is also curious that Moody has let Johnson’s book go out of print while for

decades has continued to print Guyon's volume. Even if publishers would want to issue books like this for historical purposes, there should be loud disclaimers in the Preface for the sake of the untaught and the novice.

Guyon's beliefs do not even come close to biblical Christianity. What she proposes is sheer essence mysticism and Catholicism mutated into even more horrible errors. That man could become like God was one of the first lies held out by Satan to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). That Moody Press would continue to propagate this lie is beyond comprehension.

Endnotes:

1. Madam Guyon, *Madame Guyon An Autobiography*. Chicago: Moody Press, no date, pg. 6.
2. Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who In Church History*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1962, pg. 182.
3. Henry Sheldon, *Pantheistic Dilemmas*. New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920, pg. 224.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 220

5. See further, *Mysticism An Evangelical Option?* by Winfried Corduan, pp. 34-35 and *Dictionary of Christianity in America* by Daniel G. Reid, Coordinating Editor, pg. 968.
6. *Guyon*, op. cit., pg. 14.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 37.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-54.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-64, 89-99.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 72.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
13. *The Ryrie Study Bible*, study note on Luke 17:21, pg. 1580.
14. *Guyon*, op. cit., pg. 73.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 76.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 77.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 80.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-88.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-147.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 156-159.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 201.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 162.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-224.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 231.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 232.
27. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, pg. 386.
28. *Guyon*, op. cit., pg. 234.
29. *Ibid.*, pg. 239.

30. See further, "Ye Are Gods? Orthodox and Heretical Views on the Deification Of Man," by Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Christian Research Journal*, Winter/Spring 1987.
31. See further, *The Love of Power or the Power Of Love*, by Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright, pp. 88-89 and Corduan, op.cit., pp. 98-102.
32. *The New Geneva Study Bible*, study note on 2 Peter 1:4, pg. 1980.
33. *Guyon*, op. cit., pp. 243-244.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284, 289.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 299-301.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 281.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 324.
40. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*. New York: Image Books-Doubleday, 1990, pg. 295.
41. *Guyon*, op. cit., pg. 310.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 336.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-357.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 357, 364.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 371.
46. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985, pg. 498.
47. Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-chief, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987, pp. 367-368.

Hannah Whitall Smith

(continued from page 1)

out to be unflattering, exposes a Hannah Whitall Smith who was as flawed as anyone. Henry's interesting and readable book makes Hannah Whitall Smith's life a secret no longer.

Henry became interested in Smith and her writings after suffering a "partial breakdown" after serving as a pastor in a Presbyterian church. She compiled her account of Smith's life with the help of surviving family members, diaries, letters and personal papers. Her material contained a large amount of primary sources.

Henry says early in her book's

Introduction that Smith's life was far from perfect:

"The truth is that this writer of the best-selling Christian classic *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* had some agonizing experiences with members of her family and went through periods of great discouragement, doubt and even despair" (pg. xiv).

According to Henry's biography, Hannah Whitall Smith was born (1832), reared and married (1851) in Germantown, Pa. She struggled with spiritual doubt and confusion during the early years of her marriage. A confirmed mystic, Smith experienced what she called "openings," a term she

used for her inner "revelations," many of which were unorthodox.

While on vacation in Atlantic City, N.J., in 1858, Smith reported that a "healing, comforting peace warmed her whole being" while she read her Bible (Henry, pg. 32). Giving attention to Romans 5, she said she came to a saving knowledge of Christ and an experience of salvation by grace. After resigning from the Quaker assembly in order to be baptized by immersion, she came under intense persecution from her family (Henry pp. 34-39).

She and her husband Robert then joined the Plymouth Brethren. Hannah Smith began to doubt the concept of hell and

eternal punishment and ultimately, through an “inward voice,” became convinced that all mankind would be saved. She became convinced that all sinners ultimately would confess Christ as Lord (Henry, pp. 41-42). This departure from Scripture into Universalism or Restitutionism arose from her belief that God was too loving to punish sin.

Universalism is a heresy with both pagan and Christian forms. One variation teaches that hell is ultimately restorative. (See further, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 539-540.) None of the universalistic theories is based on Scripture but rather a sentimental view of the love of God that makes the Atonement all-inclusive. Faulty logic and disregard for scriptural teachings on hell is Universalism's foundation.

The *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* details how the Church, from the earliest times, condemned Universalism as heretical:

“**Universalism.** A theology which holds that in the fullness of time all souls will be released from the penalties of sin and be restored to God. Technically known as *apokatastasis pantōs* (‘restoration of all’), universalism denies the doctrine of eternal punishment.... Augustine of Hippo (354-430) strongly opposed universal salvation and the theology of Origen was eventually declared heretical at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 534” (pg. 849).

Universalism all but disappeared until it was resurrected in Massachusetts in the late 1700s. Most likely Smith got her ideas from the Universalist churches that thrived in and around Phila-

delphia in her day.

The Smiths eventually moved to Millville, N.J., where they were exposed to the “second blessing” teaching, (Henry, pp. 49-50). Forms of a “higher-level” Christianity were being fostered by a group called the Keswick movement and often were referred to as the “higher life.”

At a camp meeting in Pennsylvania, husband Robert was “shaken with what seemed like a magnetic thrill of heavenly delight.” For about a year Hannah Smith sought the “baptism” which she felt would be accompanied by “sobs” and “thrills,” but nothing came.

Praying one night in June 1869, without any outward physical signs, she received what she called a “weak consciousness of God's presence” (Henry, pg. 53). She concluded shortly after, that both her experience and Robert's were emotional and not solid. Smith sought the Spirit's baptism again in 1876 and 1877 (Henry, pg. 86). Her letters between 1876 and 1878 express such anxiety, doubt and confusion. She might be classed as manic-depressive (Henry, pp. 87-88).

After the death of their 18-year-old son (Henry, pp. 56-57), the Smiths returned to Philadelphia where Robert suffered a “nervous breakdown.” He was confined to a sanatorium and came under the influence of a Dr. Foster, who shared strange ideas about the interweaving of sexual and spiritual feelings (Henry, pg. 61). This, along with Hannah's self-imposed sexual abstinence, brought severe strains on the marriage that continued until Robert died in 1898.

Despite their unhappiness and eroding marriage, Hannah and

Robert quickly became famous teachers of “holiness” and “sanctification.” Hannah's book, written years before, was beginning to transform the couple into religious heroes. (Smith later confessed that *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* was written under pressure from Robert and only to oblige him.)

The Smiths eventually returned to the Quakers. Robert became a famous preacher across Europe, a leading light in the “higher life movement.” Many criticized the fact that he always traveled without his wife. Henry writes that he fell into moral scandal and that there is evidence of repeated episodes of adultery. Hannah remained unhappily married and her letters reveal her continuing misery (Henry, pp. 64-65). However, in those days appearances prevailed and divorce was not an option.

Rumors of heresy and another nervous breakdown eventually scuttled Robert's career. (See further, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, pp. 1098-1099.) Henry says he deteriorated into a self-indulgent hypochondriac (Henry, pg. 103).

The Smiths' children fared little better spiritually. Of Hannah's three surviving offspring (four had died), the eldest daughter carried on an extramarital affair, having abandoned her Roman Catholic husband and children. Hannah suffered untold agony intervening between her son-in-law and the abusive governess he placed over her grandchildren (Henry, pp. 136-138). Another daughter married atheist Bertrand Russell and that marriage ended in separation. Her son did not embrace Christ or Christianity.

Right up to her death in 1911, Smith was a religious celebrity,


with admirers kneeling before her wheelchair and getting letters from those who said they slept with her books beneath their pillows (Henry, pg. 164).

In the end, Smith did not believe her own perfectionistic ideas and was skeptical of everyone (Henry, pg. 165). She wondered about heaven and if she had everything wrong and had hindered multitudes of people and that perhaps some would "try to persuade Peter to shut the gate against me" (Henry, pg.

165).

While Marie Henry does her best to show Hannah Whitall Smith as a slightly scarred saint and spiritual hero, thorough research and honest reporting reveals more of a confused, unhappy heretic than hero, someone whose life demonstrates that more attention needs to be given to the Word of God than to emotions, mystical inner "revelations" and fad doctrines. Smith's view of God and her outspoken

Universalism put her squarely in the heretical camp.

An examination of Smith and her book is not complete without asking if the goal of the Christian life is happiness or holiness. Our days might be bitter, but God's love remains sweet. In the light of the admissions by the Apostle Paul of times that even he was temporarily "cast down" (2 Corinthians 7), we cannot expect to be happy constantly until we get to heaven. 

Editorials

(continued from page 2)

aware of the lost spiritual condition of Jehovah's Witnesses, but to call believers to unite in intercessory prayer for these lost souls throughout the year. Our prayer is that Jehovah's Witnesses at every level will come to know the *real* Jesus Christ and trust Him for salvation (John 1:12-13; 3:14-18; 5:39-40).

Recently a woman from Michigan wrote to PFO and asked for a list of the members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses so that she could appeal before the throne of God specifically and individually by name for the salvation of these men. What an awesome God we commune with to think that we can plead His grace to transform the unregenerate minds and hearts of those in the top leadership position of this wicked organization. (Incidentally, the ten men who make up this board are: Carey Barber, John Barr, Lloyd Barry, President Milton Henschel, Ted Jaracz, Karl Klein, Gerrit Lösch, Albert Schroeder, Lyman Swingle and Dan Sydlik.)

In addition to praying for the Governing Body of the Watchtower Society, Christians are also encouraged to intercede on behalf of the workers at the various Bethel headquarters' facilities; circuit, district and zone overseers; and elders, pioneers and missionaries. Just as important, we need to pray for the spiritual protection of the unsuspecting being proselytized into the Watchtower cult.

The words of John MacArthur certainly offer motivation and guidelines for the need of prayer.

He writes that,

"Prayer for the lost is ultimately directed at God as an act of worship, because the salvation of sinners causes them to give glory to Him. ... Praying for the lost should never be cold, detached, or impersonal, like a public defender assigned to represent a defendant. Understanding the depths of their misery and pain, and their coming doom, we must cry to God for the salvation of sinners" (*Alone With God*, pp. 135-136).

Charles Spurgeon once said,

"Before God does a great work, He calls His people to prayer."

As prayer warriors on behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses who need to be set free in Christ, let our voices be heard unto the Lord. God will honor the prayers of the saints for the lost. Our most effective evangelism begins with prayer. Our most powerful weapon is prayer. Consider where might your spiritual life be, had a concerned parent or friend not prayed for you to come to know the risen Savior? PFO, and the co-sponsoring ministries, call upon Christians around the world to commit as "prayer warriors" on behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses and are asked to pray daily for all involved in the Watchtower.

For materials promoting this effort, including flyers, press releases and posters, write Dan Hall at Reveal Ministries, P.O. Box 52, Walnut Grove, CA 95690 or phone him at (916) 776-4705 or (916) 537-9058.

—MKG

group went through a power struggle among top leaders. That period is called "the fog years." Since then, perhaps 25,000 of The Way's 35,000 peak active followers abandoned the group for various splinter organizations.

In recent years, Martindale has tried to solidify his position as president with complete power over The Way's followers, using purging as his primary weapon. TWI claims that this puts them out of the household of God, not just out of TWI.

Martindale has selected several types of people to "purge, mark and avoid." After 10 percent of W.O.W. Ambassadors (volunteers who served as TWI missionaries for yearlong terms) in 1994 were suspected to be homosexual, Martindale spearheaded an effort to expose and expel all "homos" and "homo sympathizers" from the group, beginning with its leadership. Rev. Ed Horney bragged that "163 sodomites" had been purged in a nine-month period (*Highlights of The Way Corps Graduation* tape, June 1995).

The group since has sought to discipline (by withholding communion) or purge all who do not tithe their income to The Way. The Way has long taught the importance of tithing and "abundant sharing" (giving above the tithe). Now Martindale is emphasizing "plurality giving," in which followers determine their needs and then give all income over that amount to The Way.

Martindale also has taught the past three years that believers should not go into debt, even to buy a house. This means that nearly all devoted followers have sold their homes (if they owned them but could not pay off the debt) and now rent. Martindale also expects husbands to have complete control over their wives. He also promotes big families.

Martindale demands that all followers accept his teachings and follow his instructions without question. When he teaches, he expects people to accept his words as God's own direction.

The Way Magazine repeatedly lauds those who show "tremendous support for our man of God." Followers should come to classes "ready to receive the present truth taught by Rev. L. Craig Martindale," who is "the man for this day and hour." Graduating Corps share the salt covenant with him, "sealing their full commitment to stand with him" (Sept.-Oct. 1996, pp. 19, 16, 21).

Martindale is especially angry at anyone who listens to the group's defectors and critics. For instance, many followers heard that Way researcher John Schoenheit had written a paper that prompted Martindale to fire him. However, Way leadership utterly forbade everyone from reading it or even listening to someone who knew any details about it. Contact with ex-Way splinter groups and leaders like Christian Educational Services and Chris Geer is prohibited.

These are all common elements of mind control. Group pressure, public condemnations, shunning, prohibiting outside contacts, positive believing (filtering out all negative thoughts about TWI and its leadership), fear and guilt all exert tremendous pressure on Way followers. Publicly, Way leaders encourage followers to think for themselves, but everything they do and say is designed to control what their followers hear, accept and do.

Martindale is in the process of replacing V.P. Wierwille as the focus of his followers' faith. He has been replacing Wierwille's lessons with his own on the same topics. The core of Way teaching had been Wierwille's Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced classes on *Power for Abundant Living*. Martindale recently replaced them with the Foundational, Intermediate and Advanced classes on *The Way of Abundance and Power*. He also produced classes on "The Believer's Family" and "Defeating the Adversary" to replace Wierwille's classes with similar titles.

The "Abundance and Power" classes already have been taught to Way leadership. The Foundational class was first made generally available in October 1996, but only to those who faithfully attend a twig fellowship and who pay the \$100 fee.

Martindale's new Foundational class reportedly does not include much material on biblical research principles, which dominated the first half of V.P. Wierwille's class. Actually, all this material can be found in Wierwille's book *Power for Abundant Living*, which is nearly an edited transcript of the first part of the class. Martindale goes into more detail on the evil of homosexuality, the benefits of holy spirit, the manifestations (such as speaking in tongues), Jesus Christ is not God, "the deep," "the flooding" and other new topics.

TWI reports that 770 new students graduated from the Advanced classes in the last year.

Martindale prides himself in "redefining" The Way's ministry. This included replacing the

W.O.W. Ambassadors with The Way Disciples and terminating the annual "Rock of Ages" national gathering. He has systematically removed people from staff positions and replaced them with recent Corps graduates who have been trained in his "redefined" ways.

Followers are sometimes asked to answer questionnaires which list classes they have taken, and are pressured to take the new ones. They are also told to subscribe to Martindale's newest teachings in *The Way Magazine* and on Sunday night service tapes.

They were also told to burn books, music, pictures and other materials which were published by TWI, but written by people who no longer "stand" with Martindale, including former Way leaders such as Walter Cummins and John Lynn.

This "house cleaning" has further reduced The Way's numbers, leaving what they call a "remnant." It also has prompted The Way to class Way Corps as Active, Emeritus, Alumni (in the ministry but without Corps privileges), and Dropped. Probably more than 80 percent of Corps graduates are no longer with The Way.

Rev. Rosalie Rivenbark replaced Donald Wierwille as Vice President of TWI at the group's annual anniversary observance last October. Donald, the founder's son, had been a trustee for 19 years. His father and the trustees who served with him only left office when they were aged and ready to retire. Since Wierwille is not yet that old and apparently not ill, this change has raised questions in many followers' minds.

Rivenbark was a graduate of Family Corps II (in about 1978), was ordained by TWI in 1981 and has worked on Way publications for many years. Most of all, she has complete commitment to Martindale and TWI.

—JPJ

CLERGY INVITED TO FAMILY VALUES CONFERENCES

Pastors from across the country were invited to be a "guest for an expense-paid trip to one of the most successful conferences for clergy and church leaders in the nation today." The "Empowering Christianity Through True Family Values" seminars are the product of True Family Values Ministry and are co-sponsored by the Washington Times Foundation and the International Religious

Foundation. The conferences began last June and continued weekly throughout the rest of the year. They were held at the Sheraton National Hotel in the nation's capital.

A flyer, describing the meetings, called the program "A series of ecumenical conferences in Washington, D.C., uniting Baptists, COGICs [Church of God in Christ], Apostolics, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Unificationists, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Mormons, Adventists, Evangelicals and Muslims in joint effort to revive the God-centered family." Another brochure said the forum was "Acclaimed by Clergy throughout the Nation."

The founder of True Family Values Ministry is the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church.

Highlights of the four-day events included a video presentation by Moon of "a unique view of the principle of the providential history of salvation," other "multimedia presentations" and a tour of the Unification Church-owned *Washington Times* newspaper.

Moon claims that on Easter Sunday in 1936, Jesus appeared to him telling him that he had been selected to finish the work of the Messiah. He further teaches that Jesus failed in his role as the Messiah when he died on the cross.

—MKG

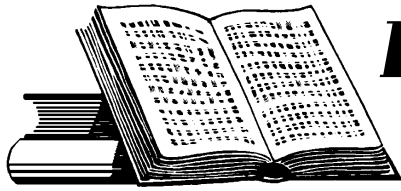
LDS LEADER ADMITS SEXUAL ABUSE CHARGES

A spokesman for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has admitted molesting a 14-year-old girl. Lloyd Gerald Pond, 51, host of the Mormon church's "Times and Seasons" radio program and director of the church's radio news services, was originally charged with two counts of forced sodomy, but pleaded guilty to a less serious charge of sexual abuse.

A number of radio stations reported dropping the nationally syndicated broadcast after Pond was charged. The LDS church announced Nov. 22 that Pond had resigned and that it would recall its programs featuring him.

Pond will be sentenced Feb. 3 and could receive up to 15 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

—KAM



Books in Review

STRANGE FIRE?

Assessing The Vineyard Movement
And The Toronto Blessing

by Eric E. Wright

Evangelical Press, 368 pages, \$14.99

Some say, "If you have not had the experience you can't critique it." Maybe the opposite is true. Having "experiences" like those in the "new wave" make one less able to be objective, biblical and sensible when it comes to discernment. This "new wave" is shot through with contradictory messages.

Author Eric Wright has all his faculties, facts and discernment intact as he analyzes John Wimber, the Kansas City Prophets, Rodney Howard-Browne, John Arnott (Toronto) and a host of other cross-pollinating extremists in the new Charismatic extremism.

This may be the definitive text on the issue. It not only examines the "barnyard" worship services of the "Vineyard" in the bright light of Scripture but looks at the history of the major revivals and explodes the myth that there is any comparison to the Charismania of today's so-called "new wave."

Wright makes perfect sense as he looks at the physical phenomena and shows how these things can be viewed through the lens of expectation, suggestibility and altered states of consciousness. He shows the eerie similarities between hypnosis phenomena and the physical results produced by proponents of Vineyard-like activity.

His chapter titles are catchy and give a flavor of what to expect in this well documented book. They include: "Surfing the Third Wave — Without Going Under," "Confusing Signals — Diverse Vineyard Interpretations of Events in Toronto," "Phenomena — Biblical or Bizarre," "Divine Disorder or Cultivated Chaos" and "Putting the Cart of Experience Before the Horse of Scripture." There also is an appendix on Jonathan Edwards and another on the Great Awakening.

PFO has surveyed other books on this topic. They falter, fudge, flounder and fail. They give with one hand while taking back with the other. Wright remains biblical and consistent throughout.

You can call him a cessationist, but he makes an incredible case. He does a meticulous job and cannot be ignored from either side of the debate. If we could only have one information source on this topic we would vote for *Strange Fire?*. The title says it all. We applaud Eric Wright for his exhaustive research.

—GRF

SECRETS OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

by Randall Price

Harvest House, 531 pages, \$10.99

Randall Price's book is a valuable new addition to scroll research for a number of reasons: It is evangelical, current, and was produced with much of the research done on site in Israel. It is one of those books that makes you feel you are really in touch with the situation.

It contains a chapter on politics and the scrolls and lets the reader in on new scrolls and new scroll discoveries through 1996.

Price also looks at the ways in which cults misuse the Dead Sea Scrolls to promote spurious doctrine. This occurs within Mormonism, New Age teaching and through the teachings of Edgar Cayce and Edgar Szekely.

Price also refutes the sensationalists, including Texe Marrs, Vendyl Jones, Barbara Thiering and Robert Eisenman.

If one has some acquaintance with the background of the Dead Sea Scrolls the chapters can be read in the order of interest not necessarily in sequence. Included are a glossary of terms and 20 pages of chronology which makes the content available to even a novice on the subject.

The biblical analysis of the Scroll Communities theology and theological system is insightful and helpful. Price is perceptive in showing its sharp differences with Christianity. The charts, maps, and pictures are extremely helpful.

Price states the purpose of the book in the Preface: "My purpose in writing this book is to help to remove the popular mystique that has surrounded the Scrolls and, in as nontechnical a way as possible, reveal their significance for us today." He succeeds admirably.

There is a huge amount of material here for the money. There is also a large detailed index that makes instant retrieval of material possible. This book delivers. It should be a welcome addition to any Christian's library.

—GRF

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