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Confronting the Superstitious Church of the 21st Century

by G. Richard Fisher

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:16).

As we move into the twenty-first century, even the comments of comedian and award-winning filmmaker Woody Allen seem to make sense. Allen remarked: “History repeats itself. It has to — nobody listens the first time around.”

We have been fighting and will continue to fight battles which we thought were won or put to rest in the first three centuries of the Church’s history. What used to be commonplace in the world of the occult and in the world of hyper-liberalism is now common in the world of both Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity.

There has been an incredible paradigm shift in the world of Christianity. This shift has been so radical that the Church of Jesus Christ is beginning to resemble the culture of Athens found in Acts 17. Luke speaks out in verse 21 and describes the confusion in this way: “For all the Athenians



and foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing.” Luke then concludes in verse 22 by quoting the Apostle Paul as saying, “in all things you are very religious.” Indeed, the god of novelty was

reigning in Athens.

The word “religious” in Acts 17:22 (translated in some versions as superstitious) is the Greek word *deisidaimon*.¹ It has to do with fear of the supernatural. It was a practice that was all-embracing and non-discerning with a reverence for all kinds of deities, religious notions, religious fads and religious claims. It lacked discretionary thought and would try anything with the word “religion” tacked to it. It was mindless reverence and mindless religion with a love for newness and novelty.

The parallels to our own age are stark and frightening. Just pick up a copy of *Charisma* magazine and glance at its advertisements and its promotional items. It is Athens all over again — with a vengeance. How can the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth be leading in so many contradictory paths? The confusion (and the non-biblical mysticism) is palpable. Many

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Editorials

THE WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD'S "ORTHODOX" BANDWAGON

In the decade following the death of Herbert W. Armstrong in 1986, the church he founded made an amazing transformation of doctrine into what it regards as a conversion from cult teaching to orthodox belief. Many, including prominent Christian apologetic and countercult ministries and respected Christian periodicals, have acclaimed this group's seceding from a state of heterodoxy into a mainline — and even evangelical — faith. Yet during the time others have been applauding the changeover, Personal Freedom Outreach remained cautious and restrained in hopping onto the bandwagon of those proclaiming the Worldwide Church of God to be orthodox.

Personal Freedom Outreach's lack of praise for this sect's transformation does not keep it from rejoicing and thanking God for the men and women set free from the bondage of false doctrine and spiritual abuse. PFO is enthusiastic and truly grateful for the members of this group who are now justified through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone.

The sect's current leadership inherited the consequences of a half-century of Armstrong's false doctrine, false prophecy and spiritual abuse of his followers. And

while it is typical for the new leadership of a cult to make extensive changes in doctrine and practice when the founder dies, we acknowledge that it is unparalleled for the changes made to move a cult into a state of orthodoxy. These changes, therefore, are significant, necessary and welcomed.

Yet despite the changes, countless souls continue to be left without hope and others remain hurting, lost and wandering in the wilderness of confusion. The church's leaders attribute the division and frustration among members, along with the enormous financial deficits it is experiencing, to the repercussions of its transformation to orthodoxy. While this in one sense is true, it is also merely the consequence of false doctrine. False doctrine is indeed costly as lives are physically and spiritually crippled by its effects.

Early in the transformation, the Worldwide Church of God's "Public Affairs" department sought and sometimes succeeded in getting the endorsement of Christian media and evangelical ministries. Even with the efficacious dialogue which began to be realized, some like "Truths That Transform" (the nationally syndicated radio broadcast of Dr. James Kennedy) expressed optimism but remained guarded and cautious about the changes. Kennedy's ministry noted, "Those changes are welcome; however, we must be cautious in accepting their statements at face value. They have announced astounding

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News Updates

GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE ...

Several pieces of fine jewelry from the estate of the late healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman turned up on a Beverly Hills' auctioning block in early May. The jewelry was only a small part of Kuhlman's entire estate, which had been bequeathed to D.B. (Tink) Wilkerson and his wife, Sue.

In 1997, Wilkerson was contacted by B.C. Talbott, who is writing a biography on Kuhlman. After several meetings between the two, Wilkerson gave Kuhlman's belongings to the Dallas woman and her husband. Wilkerson stated, "I felt like they would do the right thing and that we would do what God wanted us to do — not use (the estate) to make money."

The Wilkersons only became active in Kuhlman's ministry during the last few months before the faith healer's death in February 1976. In December 1975, while in failing health, Kuhlman drafted a new will, which left the majority of her estate to the Wilkersons. Following her death, this new will raised the suspicion of longtime employees of the Kathryn Kuhlman Foundation. Kuhlman's early biographer, Jamie Buckingham, noted in his book *Daughter of Destiny*, "She evidently did a lot of things she would not have done had her body been functioning correctly."

Charisma magazine reported that the auctioned items were said to be distinguished "not only because Kuhlman was well-known, but also because the pieces are high-quality and hard-to-find." The magazine noted that the "most valuable" object was "a turn-of-the-century frog brooch containing green garnets that are brilliant in color and consistent in size."

Other personal items from Kuhlman's estate, but excluded from the auction, also were recently disclosed. These included a Louis Vuitton purse which contained false eyelashes, driver's license, keys, credit cards and a fake ID. Her marriage license, divorce papers and ordination certificate were also among the unveiled items. Talbott reportedly has received calls from both Benny Hinn and Roberts Liardon who have expressed an interest in buying the remaining estate items.

The magazine article also stated that Wilkerson said the proceeds from the auction are to go for the support of selected and worthwhile ministries.

—MKG

LOURDES AND FATIMA ENDORSED BY HINN

Faith healer Benny Hinn has spawned more confusion in the last decade than most preachers in recent history. Perhaps his insistence on advocating strange things stems from his own confusion or his desire to play to a larger constituency. Perhaps it is both.

Hinn appeared on the April 23 installment of *Larry King Live*. King challenged him as to why he doesn't go from "bed to bed" in hospitals with his healing power. Hinn indicated that he does visit hospitals and when he prayed for people, there were some who were healed but others who were not. He then offered King this explanation as to his mixed results: "But, you see, the gift does not work when you want it to work. The anointing must be there."

The driving force of his ministry then came to light as he told King: "In a crusade — in a meeting when I am ministering, the anointing of God comes on me and that's when things happen." Yet all of this begs the question: Why would the Holy Spirit limit Himself to work in power in only emotionally charged meetings? Hinn would have us believe that the anointing comes and goes but mostly comes in arenas and convention centers. Hinn's concept takes issue with Scripture as 1 John 2:27 states: "The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you."

Hinn then endorsed the reputed divine healing power of the Marian shrines at Lourdes and Fatima. He told King and the viewing audience: "Look, God has given us, Larry, many sources of healing. Look at Lourdes. People have been healed going to Lourdes and Fatima. There was a pool, even in the Bible, the pool of Bethesda, where the angels stirred the water — people were also healed. So God has given us many avenues of healing. He wants us to be healed."

It is disturbing to see Hinn put these two extrabiblical shrines in the same category as a biblical event. It must also be noted that in the incident in John 5, the man was healed by Jesus (John 5:12-13) and Bethesda is never mentioned again after this chapter. (It is a dry archaeological ruin today.) Further, no one is ever pointed back to it for help or healing. In Acts 3 the man is not pointed to the pool (which was nearby) but to Christ (Acts 3:6). Whatever temporary mercy God had shown at Bethesda ended with the person of Christ. But the point must be made that there is a universe of distance between what

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The Tarnished Prophet of the 16th Century

THE LEGACY OF NOSTRADAMUS

by M. Kurt Goedelman

Although he was born and lived nearly five hundred years ago, Michel de Nostredame is considered to be one of the most esteemed visionaries of all time. His predictions are said to have "mystified scholars." The oracles of the 16th century French physician, scientist and astrologer, more commonly known as Nostradamus (the Latinized form of his surname), were used by Adolf Hitler during the Second World War as propaganda to encourage the success of his military campaigns. In turn, both Winston Churchill and the United States responded by publicizing other of his predictions which they claimed underscored Hitler's demise. MGM Studios produced a motion picture newsreel, *Nostradamus Says So*, which was shown in movie theaters across the country during the war-torn 1940s.

More recently, Nostradamus has gained a significant resurgence of popularity during the last half of the 20th century. A 1981 feature film narrated by Orson Welles titled *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow*,¹ a nationally broadcast television special in 1991 adapted from the movie and hosted by Charlton Heston,² numerous full-length books and smaller booklets containing his prophecies and their interpretations, a staple in supermarket tabloids which have found him useful for their prophecy articles, and

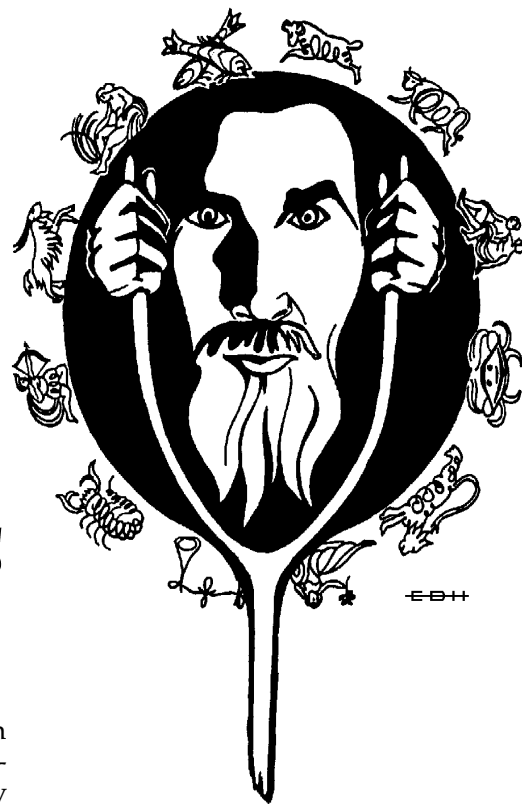
a quantum leap into cyberspace with several web sites posting his predictions³ have all combined to amplify his reputation as a "prophet."

Despite his refreshed publicity and fame, the Christian's awareness and response is greatly lacking. Dr. Robert A. Morey, in his brief treatment of astrology, devoted slightly more than a page to Nostradamus.⁴ Very little else, from a biblical perspective, has been written to evaluate this physician-turned-prophet.

In a 1983 newsletter, PFO briefly examined the ongoing fascination with the man and his predictions.⁵ It is an article that has remained in demand and one, because of its brevity, needs to be revisited. Moreover, with the time and seasons of his "end-time visions" approaching, and as we settle into the next millennium, his celebrity status surely will only gain new life and increase dramatically.

THE MAKING OF A PROPHET

Nostradamus, the oldest of five sons, was born Dec. 14, 1503, in the town of Saint Remy in Provence, France. His family is claimed to have been of Jewish descent and had been converted to Catholicism by the time Nostradamus turned nine years of age. Oxford scholar and Nostradamus

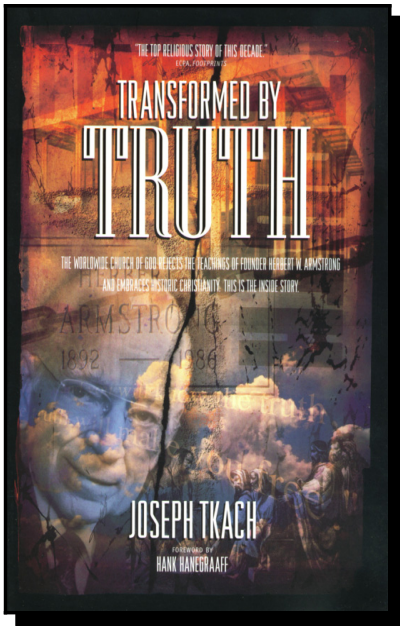


biographer, Erika Cheetham notes that "his parents are listed in 1512 as being part of the new Christian community."⁶ His family claimed their Jewish ancestry to be from the "tribe of Issachar" (1 Chronicles 12:32) and this purported pedigree gave Nostradamus his gift of prophecy.

Yet, Cheetham emphasizes the significance of his exposure to Judaism: "It is important to remember the Jewish element of Nostradamus' childhood when trying to decipher the Prophecies, as he was greatly influenced by occult Jewish literature."⁷ According to many of his biographers, an appetite for astrology, magic and the occult was constant and a lifelong force.

In his late teens, Nostradamus attended Montpellier, the most famous school of medicine in France, for education in philosophy and the medical arts. His career as a physician was accented when his country became plague-riddled in 1525. The young healer went from town to town treating the sick and dispensing some of his own cures. When he first married early in life, tragedy struck as

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Transforming the Truth

The Worldwide Church of God Continues to “Make” History

by Peter Ditzel

The suggestion a decade ago that the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) would be receiving accolades from such well-known Christian figures as D. James Kennedy, Hank Hanegraaff, Jack Hayford, Steve Brown, and Paul Cedar, or that the leader of the WCG, Joseph Tkach, would be a guest on *The Bible Answer Man*, *The 700 Club*, and other Christian programs, would have been met with disbelief. Not only has this happened, but a major Christian book publisher (Multnomah) has published Tkach's book, *Transformed by Truth*. The book claims to give the “inside story” of how the WCG rejected “the teachings of founder Herbert W. Armstrong,” but perhaps the cover's semi-transparent portrait of Armstrong looming out of his gravestone and out of the clouds hints at an additional inside story.

POSITIVE CHANGES

The church that was to become the WCG sprang out of meetings that started in Eugene, Ore., on the night of July 9, 1933.¹ But the WCG was far from an orthodox, Christian church. It taught a unique blend of peculiar teachings and cultic practices that came to be known as Armstrongism.

Armstrong died in January 1986. His successor, Joseph Tkach Sr., oversaw major changes in the church's doctrines that officially did away with much of the Armstrongism in the WCG. With his death in September

1995, Tkach Sr. was succeeded by his son, Joseph Tkach.

The article “New Wine in Old Wineskins” (*The Quarterly Journal* July-September 1995), told about the changes up to the time shortly before Tkach Sr.'s death and listed many of the striking and positive changes the WCG had made, but also pointed out several areas of concern. It is heartening to see how many have been satisfied in recent WCG writings, including *Transformed by Truth*: the WCG's emphasis on the Gospel, on salvation in Jesus Christ alone, indicates that legalism is no longer official WCG teaching; the WCG has made frank retractions of past WCG teachings in public arenas; the WCG has admitted that Herbert W. Armstrong was wrong to claim the WCG was the true church; the WCG now teaches original sin; it teaches that Jesus was eternally God's Son; it has admitted that orthodox Christianity has been right all along; and it has adopted the Statement of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (more about the WCG's own Statement of Beliefs later).

Another concern expressed in 1995 was that the WCG had not admitted that past teachings were heresy. Where the WCG was at that time merely saying that a past teaching was “not accurate,” it has now started

using words such as “unorthodox,” “heterodoxical,” “not orthodox,” and “different gospel.” In a Feb. 23, 1998, letter, Joseph Tkach says that he doesn't “consider it a compromise to be more generous in using terms such as ‘unorthodox,’ or ‘heterodoxical’ than using the term ‘heresy.’” This statement was made in the context of a paragraph about Tkach's desire to not repel people who have internalized heresy.

CONTINUING PROGRESS

In many respects, *Transformed by Truth* continues the positive and encouraging course the WCG has been taking for the past few years. It contains numerous references to the Gospel, salvation through faith in Jesus, and the wrongs of peculiar Armstrongite doctrines that diverted people from the Gospel and Jesus.

Also constructive are Tkach's pilgrimage account and his admissions of past WCG errors. For example:

“[After quoting John 5:39-40] For so many long years, this is exactly the error we made! We searched the Scriptures diligently to discover the right twist to this doctrine or the correct slant to that one. We got lost in minutiae and largely missed the real treasure, Jesus Christ Himself. ... We searched the Scriptures because in them we thought we had

eternal life; yet we did not come fully to Jesus that we might truly live.”²

Scattered throughout the book are revelations of the WCG’s former warped views on the Bible, the world, and even Jesus Himself:

“But Jesus? We didn’t spend too much time on Him. ... That was all the namby-pamby, sloppy stuff anyway. ... In an odd way, we had an almost negative predisposition toward Jesus. It was nothing we had planned, nothing official. But since we had distanced ourselves from Protestants and since they spoke so much of Jesus, we didn’t. Who wanted to sound like a Protestant? Who wanted to talk like a member of one of the harlot daughters of Babylon?”³

Transformed by Truth also admits to the errors of past legalism and even contains an admirable view toward the keeping of days.⁴

DISAPPOINTMENTS

Yet, despite these pluses, *Transformed by Truth* contained questionable areas that would need clarification before a final opinion of the book could be formed. So, still with hopes of being able to write a positive review, this writer sent a letter to Joseph Tkach, admitting that its questions were pointed, but not because of any “angry, bitter, caustic, sarcastic, or hostile spirit” (which the WCG had accused critics of in the past) but “for the sake of avoiding misunderstanding, bringing out your clearest answers, and thereby, hopefully, fostering accord.”

It was disappointing to read the accusative tone and lack of clarity in Tkach’s reply. Questions concerning *Transformed by Truth* were not satisfactorily answered. Space limitations prevent a complete inventory of concerns but the most significant ones will be addressed.

EQUIVOCATION OVER MAN AS GOD

On page 93, Tkach makes a welcome admission that the WCG used to teach that the destiny of believers was to become God even as God is

God. Unfortunately, he muddies this on page 153. He quotes Herbert Armstrong explaining his heresy of man becoming God: “We shall be as much God as God Himself is God, a God Family. God the Father will always be at the head of that whole Family. Jesus Christ will always be next in that Family. The rest of us at the resurrection, at the time of the Second Coming of Christ, will be the Bride marrying Him.” (By the way, Armstrong’s statement contains another heresy. By putting Jesus lower than the Father, he becomes guilty of subordinationism. Tkach never addresses this in *Transformed by Truth*.) Tkach then says, “this paragraph shows that we also insisted we would never be completely identical to God. God was forever going to be a couple of steps ahead of us.... Therefore He would ‘always be at the head of that whole Family.’”

But there is a problem here. Armstrong says in this statement, “We shall be as much God as God Himself is God.” This clearly means being identical with God. What he goes on to say, or Tkach’s interpretation of what he goes on to say since Armstrong doesn’t explicitly state it, is that man will not be identical with the Father. What has occurred here is equivocation. Tkach has changed the definition of God from meaning a member of the God Family to meaning God the Father.

Upon having this called to his attention, Tkach replied:

“Since we have embraced the Trinity, in order to connect with those who have doubts about the triune nature of God, it is vital that we accurately represent what the majority of people believed Herbert Armstrong to be saying about the destiny of becoming God as God is God. We clearly point out that HWA’s [Armstrong’s] teaching was polytheistic and false. People would not be reached if we were to fail to point out that HWA never believed anyone would be congruent or identical to God. In fact, by making such a mistake of misrepresenting what HWA believed, we would discredit ourselves with the very audience

that we would like to reach.”

“Certainly, we are aware that HWA’s oft used phrase — ‘to be God as God is God’ — would automatically convey to most readers the concept of equality and congruency with God. In other words, we also must deal with what the majority believed rather than just the clear cut statements that are easily seen as heretical.”⁵

Tkach seems to want to convey the idea that the majority of people understood that Armstrong “never believed anyone would be congruent or identical to God,” but he also says that Armstrong’s “to be God as God is God” statement “would automatically convey to most readers the concept of equality and congruency with God.” This is hardly a clear reply, and at best it sidesteps the concern expressed to Tkach that he has inserted a definition for God into Armstrong’s statement that Armstrong never intended.

One is left to believe that what the WCG has given with one hand by admitting “we taught that the destiny of all true believers (that is, members in good standing of the WCG) was to become God even as God is God ... to become God even as He is God,”⁶ it has tried to take away with the other hand through ambiguity.

In case anyone is really in doubt over what Armstrong taught on this subject, notice these very unambiguous passages from pages 21-22 of his booklet, *Why Were You Born?*:

“The PURPOSE of life is that in us God is really re-creating His own kind — reproducing Himself after His own kind — for we are, upon real conversion, actually begotten as sons, yet unborn, of God...we shall be instantaneously CHANGED from mortal to immortal — we shall then be BORN of God — WE SHALL THEN BE GOD! ... Do you really grasp it? The PURPOSE of your being alive is that finally you will be BORN into the Kingdom of God, when you will actually BE GOD, even as Jesus was and is God, and His Father, a different Person, also is God! ... You are

setting out on a training to become CREATOR — to become GOD.”

Could Armstrong have made himself any plainer? He believed and taught that we will be God as Jesus and the Father are God. No amount of dust thrown up by Tkach can ever obscure such clarity.

DISSONANT VIEWS OF ARMSTRONG

Cognitive dissonance is “psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously.”⁷ Tkach uses the term to refer to the fact that under Herbert Armstrong, WCG members often held inconsistent and contradictory beliefs at the same time. This is certainly true. Unfortunately, Tkach himself seems to continue to hold inconsistent and contradictory beliefs concerning Armstrong.

In 1995, this writer expressed concern that the WCG was still calling Herbert Armstrong “a minister of Jesus Christ.” *Transformed by Truth* doesn’t contain that phrase, but Tkach nonetheless paints an unnecessarily ambiguous picture of Armstrong and admits his personal ambivalence toward him. This remains a big concern.

Notice what Tkach, the first pastor general of the WCG to have been raised from childhood in Armstrongism, writes:

“As I write these words, I’m working in the office once occupied by Herbert W. Armstrong. I’m sitting at the desk Mr. Armstrong used, and I’m looking out the windows that once served as his eye on the world below. Everywhere I turn my head there are reminders of his strong leadership and pervasive influence. As I gaze on his portrait and glimpse mementos from his world travels that are scattered throughout our Pasadena headquarters, I feel compelled to try to make sense of what has happened in the Worldwide Church of God since his death in January 1986. So I sit in Mr. Armstrong’s former office, trying to look back and understand the man who led our church for so many years.”⁸

It’s possible that Tkach is having difficulty gaining a true perspective of Armstrong in such an environment. What he says about Armstrong bears this out. For example, “It is necessary to be honest about the errors that he [Armstrong] taught, yet it is appropriate to show respect to him as the founder of a movement that taught Jesus as being the only name under heaven by which we can be saved.”⁹

Notice how this clashes with what Tkach writes in other parts of the book (and how even these statements are self-contradictory):

“[Armstrong] taught that people were not saved by law-keeping but by the grace of God through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, yet he also taught that God would finally save only those who obeyed Him, including obedience to WCG teachings such as observance of the Saturday Sabbath and the annual holy days. His teaching minimized the sufficiency of the saving work of Christ and emphasized the coming millennial kingdom. He often characterized Christ as little more than a divine messenger.”¹⁰

And,

“We also claimed that while Christ died for the sins of the world, believing in Christ was insufficient to gain salvation; the believer must also obey Christ.”¹¹

In response to queries concerning his dissonant views toward Armstrong, Tkach wrote, “To the degree that Mr. Armstrong taught the gospel of salvation, to that degree he was a ‘minister’ of Christ.”¹² But to what degree did Armstrong teach the Gospel of salvation? In fact, Armstrong ridiculed the Gospel of salvation, calling it a “false gospel” and saying, “Today’s customary gospel *about* Christ believes that simply ‘believing on Christ,’ which is professing Christ as personal Savior, means that one is already saved. Yet Mark 7:7-9 shows that many even go so far as to worship Christ, and all in vain because they do not obey God’s commandments — especially the Sabbath — but follow the traditions of men by which Satan has deceived the whole world.”¹³ Besides misusing Scriptures

such as Mark 7:7-9 to support his distorted view of the Gospel, Armstrong even lampooned the Christian belief in being saved upon believing the Gospel: “It is as if some mystic switch has been flipped and the person will be shot instantly up to heaven upon death, which so many believe is not really a death after all.”¹⁴

Armstrong taught that *past* sins were blotted out by Christ’s blood but that salvation was then dependent on the WCG member’s obedience. That is not the evangelical understanding of Jesus being the only name under heaven by which we can be saved. It would have been more accurate for Tkach to have said that Armstrong was the founder of a movement that taught salvation by works.

But Tkach does not agree:

“As far as Mr. Armstrong’s teachings about salvation, we cannot deny that he taught salvation was a gift of God through Christ. He quoted and expounded Ephesians 2:8-9 on this point over and over. Mr. Armstrong’s error was that he also taught Christians must keep such old covenant regulations such as the Sabbath and the food laws. Certainly, you have no quarrel with us in saying that he presented a ‘salvation by works’ message.”

“But to say he ‘taught salvation by works’ alone is misleading, especially for people who have left our fellowship and have not grasped the pure gospel. It becomes a fruitless point of debate with them as they quickly point out that Herbert Armstrong taught that salvation came as a gift from God through Christ alone. Unfortunately, he also taught that to be numbered among the people of God one had to keep certain old covenant laws and believe such exotic doctrines as the United States and Britain in prophecy. I believe that I make this clear in my book.”¹⁵

Unfortunately, what becomes clear is that, at least when discussing the subject of Herbert Armstrong, Tkach

misses the fact that adding any works for salvation to salvation by Christ alone makes Christ's sacrifice of no effect and is therefore an attempt at salvation solely by works. "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). For those without cognitive dissonance, there can be no believing in both salvation by Christ alone and in salvation by works. The two are mutually incompatible.

But what exactly is Tkach trying to say about Armstrong, and for what reason? He continues in his letter,

"Tragically, [Armstrong] used the term 'qualify for salvation' to teach the Christian responsibility of practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, Bible study, etc. In using such terms, there is no doubt in my mind that he promoted a salvation by works concept. I have found for many people it is a more successful approach to present people with what he was trying to say, albeit very poorly said, than to dismiss him out of hand. Once people hear the truth correctly presented, the Holy Spirit convicts them without our resorting to pejoratives and unnecessary condemnations."¹⁶

Tkach says he has no doubt Armstrong promoted a salvation by works concept, but it is a more successful approach (presumably in evangelizing present and former WCG members, especially those who are not attending any church)¹⁷ to present people with what Armstrong was trying to say, albeit very poorly. Tkach apparently is trying to justify the contradictory positions he holds concerning Armstrong and what he taught by saying that while Armstrong taught salvation by works, he didn't really mean to teach salvation by works. What Tkach doesn't explain is how he can know that Armstrong did not mean what he said and wrote. As has been said of the WCG's founder before, Herbert Armstrong was rarely right, but he was never ambiguous.

If we are to avoid repeating the tragic mistakes of the past, Armstrong

must be accurately remembered for the heresies he taught and the cult he established. Calling Armstrong "a minister of Jesus Christ" or making statements such as, "[The WCG] respects [Herbert Armstrong] as the man God used to bring many to a saving knowledge of Christ," that appeared in the May/June 1996 WCG publication, *Reviews You Can Use*, is a travesty of history. And a WCG Fact Sheet that calls the cult he founded "a Christian ministry established in Eugene, Oregon, in 1933" is simply propagandist disinformation. Tragically, when people who consider themselves qualified to teach cast such a positive light on Armstrong, Armstrongites can be left feeling completely justified in continuing to follow their late mentor.

On page 189 of his book, Tkach writes,

"First, I firmly believe that as a church we were essentially wrong on many crucial issues — and yet I also know that it was Mr. Armstrong who put the system in place that eventually got us where we are today. While much of what Mr. Armstrong taught was in serious error, he also gave us some things — a profound respect for the Bible, for example — that helped to pave the way to our current biblical understandings."

This writer doesn't expect Tkach to say that Herbert Armstrong is definitely consigned to hell fire for eternity and doesn't believe that Tkach or any other mortal is in a position to say that with certainty. But to give Armstrong credit for the WCG arriving at correct doctrine is absurd.

Imagine a passenger ship bound from New York to England. After leaving port, the captain, who has no idea how to read navigational charts, steers the ship south and rounds the tip of South America. Continually studying the ship's charts and telling his officers — who are also ignorant how to read charts — how important the charts are, while allowing no one to advise him how to understand them, he weaves the ship between the

islands of the Pacific, scraping bottom several times. A number of the passengers die during the journey, never having arrived at their destination. In the South China Sea, the captain drops dead at the helm, and the first officer takes command. He and the other officers, getting advice and how-to-read-charts books from passing ships, figure out how to navigate their way to England. But when asked for an opinion of his late captain, the officer, instead of admitting that the man was a failure in all ways by which a captain should be judged, says that while the captain "made some mistakes, as all captains do, he was really a good ship's captain because he started the journey by which we reached our destination and taught us a great respect for charts."

Tkach continues,

"Second, I could point out that many men God has used did a lot of foolish things or made many inaccurate or even harmful statements. All of us show our brokenness in one way or another. John Wesley was not known for having an ideal marriage. Martin Luther was stridently anti-Semitic. John Calvin allowed a theological opponent to be burned at the stake. It's not my place (or yours) to question their standing in Christ. The same could be said of Mr. Armstrong."¹⁸

True, we all sin and make mistakes, Luther and Calvin included. But a minister of Jesus Christ does not fight *against* the Gospel by calling it a "false gospel" and a "counterfeit gospel," as Herbert W. Armstrong regularly did. A minister of Jesus Christ does not call the Body of Jesus Christ, which is the Christian church, "Satan's counterfeit church," "counterfeit Christianity," the "false church," "the harlot's daughters," and so forth, as Armstrong often did. A minister of Jesus Christ does not preach heresies as foundational truth, as Armstrong clearly did. And a basic qualification of a minister of Jesus Christ is that he hold "fast the faithful word" and use

“sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9), or as Paul exhorts Timothy, he should be able to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15); this is something Herbert Armstrong did not do.

To teach doctrine — particularly doctrine concerning such essential matters as justification, regeneration, sanctification, the Trinity, the Gospel, the nature of God, etc. — that disagrees with biblical, orthodox teaching is, by definition, heresy. Armstrong taught many heresies. He knew that what he taught was contrary to orthodoxy, and was proud of it. Herbert W. Armstrong was, by definition, a heretic. Yet *Transformed by Truth*, though in places admitting Armstrong’s errors, nevertheless creates an image of him that is not accurate and is not consistent with the evangelical statements made elsewhere in the book. Tkach is simply inconsistent and ambiguous on the subject of Herbert W. Armstrong. Anything that portrays Armstrong and his doctrines as less harmful than they were is dangerously misleading.

Tkach seems to want to imply that the changes made since Armstrong’s death would have been made with the WCG founder’s approval, done in the spirit of Armstrong’s “respect for the authority of Scripture.” However, WCG history of the 1970s proves this is nonsense.

This writer’s letter to Tkach stated, “In the 1970s when some in the WCG ministry tried to introduce some of the very changes that were made after his death, Armstrong denounced them as liberals trying to water down or destroy ‘God’s truth’ (i.e., Armstrong’s heresies).” Avoiding the obvious implication that Armstrong does not fit the “minister of Jesus Christ” mold he has been trying to stuff him into, Tkach put a spin on this writer’s statement to make it seem to be a reference to the WCG’s Systematic Theology Project (STP) of the 1970s. Tkach said that the STP made only minor changes, and then he insinuated that this writer’s position was based on “fabrication” and “hearsay.”¹⁹

But even the “minor” changes made

by the STP were soundly condemned by Armstrong. And the STP was never mentioned. The comment was based on numerous letters written by WCG ministers in the 1970s seen by this writer while working as a WCG employee. These letters concerned many of the same subjects the WCG dealt with after Armstrong’s death. Interestingly, former WCG pastor David Covington recently independently corroborated the existence of these letters in his *Crossroads Online* (Issue #5, Fall 1997, page 6).

SPIRITUAL ABUSE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Another area of concern expressed in the 1995 article about the WCG was that the WCG had dodged accountability and had not admitted to cultism and the damage it had caused (see also “The Two Faces of the Worldwide Church of God,” *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1997, for a fuller treatment of this subject). Although there have since been some apologies and admissions to cultism and damage, *Transformed by Truth* does little to address the interpersonal dynamic in the WCG that drove the cultism and spiritual abuse and says nothing about whether abuse continues. When asked what the WCG is doing about spiritual abuse, Tkach replied,

“As far as the ‘spiritual abuse’ question is concerned, the [WCG] continually addresses itself to this through various actions. This includes instructing our ministry to be shepherds and not sheriffs. We also have small groups in virtually every congregation in which healing can and does occur. Members give testimonials of how they have been spiritually healed within the [WCG]. Many of us attend seminars on spiritual healing and seek to implement proposals that will help the process. We have consulted with, and continue to do so, a respected and experienced interdenominational group of pastors, denominational leaders, authors, seminary professors, and others. ...”

“Above all, our church has a spirit of openness and love that it did not have in the past. We are all quite aware of the pain that members of the [WCG] suffered through the years. I have first-hand knowledge and experiences of such poor treatment. We point all who need healing to our Lord and Savior. We are always willing to talk and help where we can.”²⁰

Yet PFO continues to receive reports from recently exited WCG members saying that there is still abuse. For example, on March 1, 1998, PFO received this message in response to “The Two Faces of the Worldwide Church of God” from a man who was at that time still a member of the WCG:

“Bravo! As a soon to exit member of the [WCG], I can vouch for everything you wrote in your article. Although the abusive cultic practices now in use are not nearly as oppressive as they were when I joined the WCG in 1980, they still exist and are used.”

“There is still a caste system in the WCG. ... The WCG ministers I know are still sensitive to criticisms of Herbert W. Armstrong. ... Guilt-tripping [trying to get members to give more to the WCG by equating loyalty to God with giving to the WCG] is still used in the highest echelons of the church. ...”

“Finally, many of the WCG’s pastors do not have an understanding of the basics of Christian theology. They are handicapped by their Ambassador College education, where they studied Armstrongism, not theology. They really have no business in the pulpit because they are not qualified to be ministers in a real Christian church. They are skilled in cultic mind control (reading Steven Hassan’s *Understanding Cult Mind Control* was like reading about the WCG), but know nothing about the Bible.”

“My own pastor told me that the WCG was never a cult, and the

ministry never practiced mind control. I was speechless when he said this. Many other ministers believe this as well. How can they help the membership to heal from their cultic experience when they don't think we need healing? ..."

"Your article hit the nail on the head. As an insider, I can vouch for everything you said. I urge you to continue exposing the WCG's sham reform."²¹

On page 188 of his book, Tkach mentions that "every employee of the church has a salary which is less than \$100,000 per year." Understanding that salary is not everything, this writer asked Tkach:

"1) Does anyone receive a total in salaries, monies, perks, benefits, anything else of financial value that is more than \$100,000? 2) Assuming \$100,000 is named because some people are receiving that in salaries or close to it, why is anyone making anywhere near that much at a time when the WCG is claiming great financial loss, you have had to make big cutbacks, and you are telling members that not being obligated to tithe means they should show where their hearts are by giving more than ten percent? How can someone making close to \$100,000 a year ask in good conscience someone making \$20,000 a year to sacrifice more?"

Tkach answered the first question by writing, "We do not have employees making \$100,000 or more.... There are no perks for employees except for the parsonages that are occupied until the sale of the Pasadena property. I believe we are being good stewards of the resources God has provided to our fellowship, as do our auditors since we received an unqualified opinion from Coopers and Lybrand. We are always looking for ways to improve as well."²²

But even when Armstrong was pastor general and Stanley Rader was treasurer, and amid numerous allegations of wildly high salaries and

church funds being spent on high living during trips abroad — to "spread the Gospel of the Kingdom" — and for expensive gifts to foreign leaders, the WCG was receiving high grades from its auditors (whose job it is to see that the accounts are in order, not to judge whether someone's salary is too high or if it is wrong to make donors feel guilty for not giving more).²³ Readers should note that Tkach did not address the second question.

Another concern raised in past articles was that the WCG had not abandoned its hierarchical government. It has still not done so, but on pages 98, 186, and 199 of *Transformed by Truth*, Tkach makes promises of modifying it. This writer was somewhat discouraged — in light of his statement on page 199 that he expects "the changes to be effective by the end of 1997 or early 1998" — to learn in the Dec. 23, 1997, *Worldwide News* that on Nov. 20, 1997, the WCG Board of Directors only then "began to discuss potential changes in the way the Church and its Board functions." When asked how soon we can expect the changes to become effective, Tkach replied:

"You were troubled about what you apparently feel are contradictory statements I have made about certain changes in church governance. In my book I said these changes would be made by early 1998. But upon reading the November 20, 1997, *Worldwide News* you 'discovered' that the discussion about these changes was just beginning. The fact is discussions have been under way for some time about these issues. As the article pointed out, a formal process has begun. I can't give you an exact time when the changes will be implemented because our estimates are not always accurate. Many unforeseen circumstances and complications can arise. My expectations that I mentioned in the book obviously were a bit too optimistic."²⁴

This article mentions that Tkach's book expresses an admirable view toward the keeping of days. Yet it

would be remiss not to point out that actual WCG practice may be different. WCG members who don't keep the Sabbath or festivals are perceived by other members as less spiritual.

This writer also has an invitation dated Sept. 15, 1997, sent to some ex-WCG members from a WCG minister who was to be the coordinator of the WCG Feast of Tabernacles site in Melbourne, Fla., in 1997.

When asked about celebration of the festivals, Tkach said, "Regarding the biblical festivals, the answer is that these are old covenant institutions and the [WCG] does not observe them. We explain that there is only one way they can be 'kept' or 'observed,' and that is in an old covenant sense. To observe these Festivals required that the participants not work on what the old covenant describes as holy days, that commanded assemblies be attended, and that people go up to Jerusalem. We do not command our members to do any of these things."²⁵

But the criteria Tkach lists includes going up to Jerusalem, a practice the WCG never considered necessary (feasts were celebrated at sites throughout the world). This means the WCG never "observed" these days in the past, and doesn't "observe" them now, but it celebrates them now as it did in the past. So where's the change?

Of course, through most of its history, it *thought* it was observing them. Today, it still provides for celebrating them by, for example, providing services at Feast of Tabernacles sites on the days the Old Testament prescribes according to the Hebrew calendar. When one considers the longtime legalistic attachment WCG members had for these days, one must question the wisdom of the WCG continuing to support the celebration of these days, albeit with the understanding that they are not required and are not really being "observed" according to the Old Covenant.

Of further concern is the fact that the theme for the 1997 Feast of Tabernacles was announced as "Cel-

ebrating the Kingdom of God." In fact, Herbert W. Armstrong traditionally billed the Feast of Tabernacles as a celebration of the "soon coming Kingdom of God" and used it to promote his gospel of the kingdom, which he preached instead of the Christian Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. Whether or not the messages at the 1997 feast directly promoted Armstrong's gospel, the choice of themes was at best unfortunate.

CUSTOMIZED ORTHODOXY

Previous *Quarterly Journal* articles about the WCG pointed out its dangerous belief that this is not the only day of salvation, that there is a chance for salvation after death. *Transformed by Truth* doesn't retract this teaching and even seems to support it in the appendix, "18 Truths Restored by Herbert W. Armstrong."

When asked whether he still believes and teaches this, Tkach answered first by telling of the WCG's tolerance on this subject and then proceeded to confuse the issue:

"We have no single dogmatic teaching about the fate of the 'unevangelized dead,' and no specific belief about this issue is a test of fellowship. Typically, we point out the five views regarding the destiny of the unevangelized dead and explain that the first two are orthodox and the last three are generally considered unorthodox."²⁶

Space doesn't permit an explanation of the five views Tkach presented, but among the last three is the belief that the unevangelized will receive an opportunity to believe in Jesus after death. Remember that Tkach said the last three views "are generally considered unorthodox." But despite this, Tkach then goes on to challenge this writer's statement to him that this view is "certainly not orthodox" by asking by what criteria this writer defines orthodoxy, and he concludes the discussion on this subject by saying that "according to the standard definition of orthodoxy, the [WCG] accepts all orthodox Christian be-

liefs."²⁷ What is one to make of such an answer?

Another serious problem in *Transformed by Truth* is found in the "Worldwide Church of God Statement of Beliefs" toward the back of the book. The problem first was pointed out in an article by Robert L. Sumner in *The Biblical Evangelist* (Nov.-Dec. 1997). On page 8, the author cites Dr. Ralph G. Colas, executive secretary of the American Council of Christian Churches, as pointing out that this WCG doctrinal statement "describes the Bible as 'the fully reliable record of God's revelation to humanity' (emphasis added)."

In full, this WCG statement concerning the Bible says "that the Holy Scriptures, comprised of the Old and New Testaments, are the foundation of truth and the accurate and infallible record of God's revelation to humanity." Notice that this statement says nothing about the Bible being a revelation from God or divinely inspired; it says nothing about the Bible being the inerrant Word of God; instead of calling the Bible in its entirety the sole authority for all Christian belief and practice, it vaguely labels it "the foundation of truth," and the "record of God's revelation" instead of the revelation itself. As Dr. Sumner states, "Calling the Bible a record instead of a revelation is the language of neo-orthodoxy — Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, et al — not orthodoxy!"

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Besides giving unclear answers to some questions, Tkach didn't answer about a dozen more. For example, what many observers were seeing from their perspective during the period of change in the WCG is supported by some of the statements Tkach himself makes in his book; but when asked whether he agreed that these observers were justified in taking the positions they did, Tkach didn't answer.

Also unanswered were the following, concerning the announced changes in church governance: If the pastor general's term will be limited to a specified number of years, how

will he be chosen? How much say will the average member have in this? How much will this governance change affect the rest of the hierarchy from the congregational level to headquarters? How accountable will church leaders be to the membership? Tkach also gave no response to an inquiry regarding the availability of photocopies of old Herbert Armstrong documents quoted in notes at the end of *Transformed by Truth* that imply Armstrong started out with a more nearly orthodox grasp of the Sabbath question and the Mosaic law than he later taught.

Although Tkach's letter is eleven pages, much of it is taken up in castigating PFO, this author, "cult watchers" in general, and even offering criticism to the Body of Christ. He offers this explanation for overlooked questions: "If I have neglected to offer a reply to any questions in your letter, it is only because I overlooked it with one exception. I chose not to address comments regarding David Covington because we cannot, given the record, accept him as a credible source."²⁸

This writer mentioned Covington only once in the letter only to note a historical event, and Tkach answered the question that followed. It seems that the WCG will take every opportunity to try to discredit Covington, something it has unsuccessfully tried to do in correspondence with PFO for months.

CLOSING THE DOORS TO CRITICISM

Let's clarify that criticisms of Tkach are not intended to be a judging of his Christianity or a critique of his walk with the Lord. The purpose of this article is to update readers on progress in the WCG's move toward evangelical orthodoxy since previous articles and as revealed in *Transformed by Truth*. Positive steps are reported as encouraging news in which we can all rejoice. Negative news is reported, not as a judgment on anyone's personal Christian development, but because of the danger spreading aberrant beliefs concerning doctrine, WCG history, or Herbert W. Armstrong can pose to others.

Joseph Tkach's and his colleagues' historically challenged view of WCG history colors the WCG as having been a Christian church all along (albeit while teaching many errors) and its founder as a minister of Jesus Christ who promoted the Gospel (along with a lot of nonsense) and who led many people to salvation in Jesus Christ alone. And these people seem to believe that promoting this newspeak history will actually help their members and former members.

Even so, signs of this policy's failure may already be showing. Tkach admits in the April 1998 *Worldwide News* that while 30 percent of members are donating either the same or more than last year, "70 percent are giving either far less or nothing at all." It seems that WCG members are voting with their pocketbooks, and a 70 percent vote of no confidence is a sign of serious mistrust between members and church leaders.

The WCG would do well to promote the unadulterated truth and let God do the rest. It is the truth, not a myth, that sets us free.²⁹ And it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to believe that truth through the transformation that He works in our individual, not collective, minds.

Has the WCG been "transformed by truth?" Some individuals have been regenerated and this has had a great effect on official church doctrine. But it is wrong to say that the entire organization has been so transformed. Certainly we should rejoice in the progress the WCG has made and in the lives that have been changed by the working of the Holy Spirit. But this does not mean we must jump on the bandwagon of those giving blanket approval to the WCG while it continues to promote a distorted view of its history and founder and while we continue to receive distressing reports from those who are or who have recently been members of the WCG.

Regeneration does not instantly make anyone perfect. We carry over many errors in our way of thinking that sanctification may help to correct, though never completely rid us of in

our lifetimes. There is nothing heinous in Christians holding the leaders of the WCG up to the standards of 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and related Scriptures, while accepting individuals as Christians based on their confession of Jesus Christ alone as Savior.

It would simply be unfair to those seeking a church to attend or Christian literature to read, to give a clean bill of health to a church with the history of the WCG that continues, despite whatever progress it has made, to display the problems touched upon in this article while denying that it has them. In his letter to me, Tkach points out that many Christian churches have had problems. This is true, but in most cases these churches are open to criticism and correction, and those problems are worked out. (An excellent example concerns the Evangelical Free Church of America, and is reported in *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1996.)

When a church closes itself to criticism and correction, and perhaps even tries to intimidate the critics, then that church must be exposed and warned against. *The Quarterly Journal* is simply applying this procedure to the WCG which, although it has made many changes, appears to have reached a sticking point on the issues discussed in this article. We pray for repentance and reform, but until then we must reserve approval and continue to sound a warning.

Endnotes:

1. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*. Pasadena, Calif.: Worldwide Church of God, 1986, Vol. 1, pp. 505-508.
2. Joseph Tkach, *Transformed by Truth*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1997, pp. 31-32.
3. *Ibid.*, pg. 137.
4. See, for example, pp. 27-29.
5. Joseph Tkach, letter to Peter Ditzel, February 23, 1998, pp. 3-4.
6. *Transformed*, op. cit., pg. 93.
7. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "cognitive dissonance."
8. *Transformed*, op. cit., pg. 167.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 168.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 176.
11. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.
12. Tkach letter to Ditzel, op. cit., pg. 4.
13. Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages*. Pasadena, Calif.: Worldwide Church

of God, 1985, soft-cover edition, pp. 228-229.

14. *Ibid.*, pg. 197.

15. Tkach letter to Ditzel, op. cit., pg. 4.

16. *Ibid.*

17. On pg. 6 of his letter to me, Tkach states, "We believe that individuals who have not aligned with splinter groups and simply stay at home after leaving our fellowship are much more fertile ground than [those on] a continued steady diet of Armstrongism."

18. *Transformed*, op. cit., pg. 189.

19. Tkach letter to Ditzel, op. cit., pg. 7.

20. *Ibid.*

21. E-mail message to PFO of March 1, 1998, on file.

22. Tkach letter to Ditzel, op. cit., pg. 8.

23. I asked Tkach whether "Rader still has some sort of church position, though not 'official,' and whether he is still receiving money from the WCG." He answered, "Regarding Stanley Rader, the answer is that he has no official position or any connection with the Worldwide Church of God."

24. Tkach letter to Ditzel, op. cit., pg. 8.

25. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.

26. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.

29. In his rewrite of WCG history, Tkach seems to want to imply that the WCG has always been above lying. On page 20 of *Transformed*, Tkach describes a meeting he and WCG church administration director, Mike Feazell, had with cult watcher, Lorri MacGregor. When MacGregor asked them if they believed in justified lying, Feazell replied, "Certainly not. We were far too self-righteous for that!" But self-righteousness does not logically lead to honesty. The Pharisees were the epitome of self-righteousness, but Jesus called them liars (John 8:55), and it is obvious that they orchestrated lies to get Jesus condemned. When I worked with a team of WCG writers to answer letters, we would often answer a question by knowing the goal we had to reach (for example, support a statement Armstrong had made), and we would contort Scripture to reach that goal. Of course, we were caught up in the lie ourselves, but it was, nevertheless, a lie. I also attended a WCG session on public relations (it was part of the WCG's "Ministerial Refresher Program") in which the students (ministers and some headquarters employees) were told how to deal with difficult questions by turning them around with a spin and then ending the response with a positive statement (called a sparkler) about the church. I consider this to have been training in what MacGregor calls "justified lying," and David Covington reports that these sessions were still being given at least as late as 1992.



his wife and two young children died in 1533. For the next decade, a despondent Nostradamus wandered throughout Europe. He remarried in 1544 and by his second wife had, according to one report, four children (another biographer says six).

Although he enjoyed a prominent and lifelong career as a doctor, what generates admiration for him today came for him late in life. It was not until 1555, at age 52, that he completed and published the initial part of his collection of prophecies. His recognition as an author was enjoyed for only a decade as he died of dropsy in 1566. Additionally, his acceptance as a healer seemed more tolerable than that of a soothsayer. Author Charles A. Ward observed:

“When the work made its appearance, it divided the public. Some called the prophet a simple visionary, or, in coarser phrase, a fool; others accused him of magic, and of being in too close treaty with the Devil to be honest. A few held their judgment in suspense, and would pronounce no opinion on the subject. A vast number of the grandees and of the learned, both at home and abroad, thought that he was endowed with a gift supernatural; and amongst these were Henri II. and Catherine de Medici. It remained to the *esprits forts* [i.e., strong spirits] and the ignorant public, who knew nothing of him but his name, to pronounce him a charlatan and impostor. There is one thing certain, he felt much hesitation as to publishing at all; and, when he took that step at last, he addressed the book to his infant son, and not to any public character, in the year 1555.”⁸

Yet by the next century most suspicion seemed to have completely ceased. The distinction, and even compulsory reading, of his writings became a reality. Ward further informs:

“Touching the prophecies of Nostradamus, Théophile de Garencières gives us an interesting fact, that, after the primer, it was the first book at school in which he learnt to read. It was the custom in France then (*i.e.* 1618) to initiate children by that book. They thought the crabbed and obsolete words, such as long survived in the English law, would give the scholars some idea of the old French language; so that the book got republished from year to year like an almanac.”⁹

Cheetham also adds that:

“Nostradamus is probably the only author who could claim that his work has never been out of print for over four hundred years, apart from the Bible. The interest he generated is extraordinary. On an average about thirty books, either editions of the Prophecies, or critical appreciations of them, have been published each century since his death.”¹⁰

The endurance of his revelations, some say, was itself foretold by the visionary himself. In his epistle to Henry the Second, King of France, Nostradamus wrote:

“Notwithstanding such as cannot be restrained from the exercise of the malignancy of the evil spirit, [there is hope that] *by the lapse of time, and after my extinction here on earth, my writings will be more valued than during my lifetime.*”¹¹

HIS CENTURIES OF PROPHECIES

Nostradamus’ illustrious legacy of prophecy is said to contain over 1000 predictions, half of which his proponents assert have already been fulfilled. His prophecies are said to know neither time nor geographic barriers. They claim to comprise numerous centuries and many dealt with his homeland of France. Others embrace the world. His prophetic utterances were published under the name, *Centuries of Prophecies*, but in fact have nothing to do with time.

The title is descriptive of his prophecies, which are delivered in one hundred sets of four-line verses (also called “quatrains”) in each book.

Today’s supermarket tabloid reader or movie viewer is likely unaware of the cumbersome and awkward verbiage contained in the quatrains of Nostradamus. The *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* describes:

“The vaticinations of Nostradamus which secured his fame are in verse, and are written in quatrains of rough, rude, unintelligible, and incorrigible French, in tottering and halting metre, with rugged, harsh, and often unmanageable rhymes, clattering or jingling at the ends of alternate lines. ... They remain for the most part incapable of comprehension, and are scarcely rendered more perspicuous by the English version.”¹²

In some cases, Nostradamus added to the complexity by confusing French with Latin and Greek words. Remarkably, it is because of the arduous and difficult wording of his prophecies that has given him an added measure of success. Moreover, these prophetic quatrains are quite vague and extremely general, which further warrants a great deal of success.

WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

Much of the good fortune as to the fulfillment of Nostradamus’ predictions lies solely in mind of the interpreter. There is no clearer example of this than the prophecies now attributed to the assassinations of brothers John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. In Century I, Quatrain 26, Nostradamus wrote:

“The great man will be struck down in the day by a thunderbolt.

An evil deed, foretold by the bearer of a petition.

According to the prediction, another falls at night time.

Conflict at Reims, London, and pestilence in Tuscany.”

To this quatrain, Cheetham in her 1973 volume ascribes this interpretation:

"The first three lines here may apply to the assassination of the two Kennedy brothers. John F. Kennedy was shot down (thunderbolt) in broad daylight at Dallas, Texas on 22nd November 1963 by the psychopath, Lee Harvey Oswald. The other man linked with him who is killed at night, was his brother Robert F. Kennedy who was shot down on 5th June 1968 in the early morning while celebrating his victory in the presidential primary elections at an hotel. Line 2, the fact that the assassination had been told by the bearer of a petition may refer to the many death threats John F. Kennedy and his brother received during their terms in office. The troubles in France, England and Italy would refer to the world repercussions to these assassinations."¹³

The Orson Welles-narrated movie concurs with Cheetham's interpretation and further stresses the understanding of the quatrain's second line by claiming that the late psychic Jeanne Dixon made several attempts to warn President Kennedy from making a trip to Texas prior to the fateful day in November.

Yet, it can be demonstrated that interpretation is in the eye of the beholder. And time can change the meanings and fulfillment of these prophecies. Consider the interpretation given to the very same quatrain and published just one year before the killing of the president:

"The taking over of Czechoslovakia by Hitler, the resignation of President Benes, the dissensions over the matter between France and England, and the dire warning of the consequences of this betrayal, are all remarkably outlined in this prophecy."¹⁴

Another of the prophecies said to apply to the elder Kennedy's assassination further shows just how open to interpretation the predictions really

are. In Century VI, Quatrain 37, the reader is informed:

"The ancient work will be accomplished,
and from the roof evil ruin will fall on to the great man.
Being dead, they will accuse an innocent of the deed,
the guilty one hidden in the misty woods."

According to the understanding of this quatrain presented in the 1981 movie, it clearly speaks to the controversy which surrounded the president's death. It is strongly suggested that what Nostradamus wrote is a description of Lee Harvey Oswald. That is, that Oswald accomplished his deed from the roof, he himself being killed as an "innocent" man erroneously accused of the crime, all the while the true perpetrator of Kennedy's murder was "hidden in the misty woods" which is now said to be the infamous grassy knoll.

Before considering the way in which other Nostradamus researchers have interpreted this quatrain, it should be emphasized that accuracy of the historical facts evidently does not seem to matter. For example, Oswald did not take aim "from the roof," but shot from a window on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building. Furthermore, this particular interpretation is itself self-contradictory as the "evil ruin" did *not* fall "from the roof," but is alleged to have been from the grassy knoll.

And then there's the complication that comes from the fact that other of Nostradamus' commentators do not even see this prophecy as having an Oswald-Kennedy connection. For example, Henry C. Roberts (writing prior to Kennedy's assassination) suggests the interpretation that "King Louis XVI attempted to escape from the rebels, but was apprehended in a forest hiding-place."¹⁵ And Erika Cheetham (after Kennedy's assassination) offers, "Although this is a detailed prophecy and seems likely to have occurred, I do not know of its ever having been fulfilled."¹⁶

Occasionally the campaign of Nostradamus' readers may even help to form the interpretation. An illustration of this is from Century III, Quatrain 10:

"Of blood and famine, what a great calamity,
Seven times is ready to come upon the sea coast,
Monaco by hunger, the place taken captivity,
The great one carried away, and shut up in a cage."

The understanding of this prediction is now suggested to be the fate of Princess Grace of Monaco who was killed in an automobile accident on Sept. 13, 1982. While some are convinced, others are not so sure. Biographer Cheetham writes:

"I have to admit that I am not really convinced by the interpretation I here offer to this quatrain. But since the death of the princess I have received such a remarkable number of letters from readers who were convinced of its meaning, that I include it for the readers' interest, if nothing else. Certainly the first line has relevance to any century. ... Princess Grace, of the golden movies, the golden hair and golden life died in the iron cage of her crashed car. However, whether she could really be described as 'great' I feel to be in question. Monaco, after all, is a very minor principality, and she achieved nothing that could be honestly called of international worth except for the few films she made in Hollywood."¹⁷

In her earlier volume, Cheetham remarked that "This general quatrain could refer to any disaster occurring to Monaco since [Nostradamus' time]. The last line is particularly difficult to translate."¹⁸

The declaration found on the concluding credits of the motion picture/television special collaborate that the interpretation is really up to the interpreter:

"The prophecies of Nostradamus can be interpreted many different

ways. This motion picture has presented only some of them. They are not the opinions, judgments or interpretations of the producers of this film."

A ROUND PEG IN A SQUARE HOLE

As demonstrated above, it matters little if Nostradamus' complete four lines of his narration matches the facts, just as long as a word here or a word there can be applied. One of his earliest quatrains is most often translated to read:

"Of the human flock, nine shall be set aside,
Being divided in judgment and counsel,
Their destiny shall be to be divided,
Kappa, Theta, Lambda, dead,
banished, scattered."¹⁹

Former interpretations of the above verses include references to the Supreme Court of the United States²⁰ and the death of three Soviet cosmonauts.²¹ This latter explanation is in line with an even more up-to-date rendering and meaning of the quatrain:

"From the human flock nine will be sent away,
Separated from control and advice
Their fate will be sealed on departure
K-Th-L make an error; the dead banished."

And based upon this fresh translation, we are told this quatrain is a prediction of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster in 1987. Consider the following offered commentary:

"...nine will be sent away — Actually, there were 7 crew members. Separated from control and advice — The ground controllers could do nothing. Contact was lost with the astronauts after the explosion. It is said that they may have survived for a period of time afterwards. *Their fate will be sealed on departure* — Videos show that flame was escaping while the rocket was still on the

pad. Their fate was sealed from the instant of departure. *K-Th-L* — ThioKoL - manufacturer of the defective rocket engine. Vowels are omitted and two consonants transposed."²²

A revision of the translation, a disregard for historical details (nine instead of seven actual crew members), and transposed consonants and omitted vowels all work together to make this a more plausible, fascinating and consummated interpretation. With such contorting and tweaking rationalizations, the predictions of Nostradamus can be assured of an even greater success rate of fulfillment and, in fact, be made to say whatever the interpreter desires. Additionally, the assertion that Nostradamus had the ability "to see what others cannot see" is sacrificed of its impact, as all too often his words are only loosely used as perimeters to realize self-styled fulfilled prophetic utterances.

FAILED PROPHECY

Even with all the adjustments, fine tuning and full-blown permutations of Nostradamus' predictions, he is unable to escape the actuality that there are those which have unmistakably failed. Dr. Robert Morey, who also points to the practice of fluctuating details, demonstrates that even this exercise cannot save him from the mark of a false prophet:

"The translator H. Roberts complicates matters by juggling facts and dates in an attempt to save Nostradamus from faulty predictions. But if one examines with care the few predictions where Nostradamus did give specific dates, one will find that Nostradamus failed to predict future events accurately."²³

Morey then lists for his readers five failed prophecies of Nostradamus:

"1. He predicted that by 1792 Venice, Italy, would become a great power and influence in the world. Venice is still waiting for this to happen. 2. The downfall of the Catholic clergy in A.D. 1609 which he predicted never materialized. 3. Nostradamus

predicted that in A.D. 1792, persecution against the Catholic church would arise. It would be more severe than the persecution against the Church in North Africa. Because the Church in North Africa ceased to exist, the continued presence of the Catholic church seems to refute Nostradamus' prediction. 4. Astrologers were to be persecuted in A.D. 1607. This never happened. 5. By A.D. 1700, China 'would subdue the whole northern section' of the world."²⁴

Those introduced to Nostradamus through the current swell of material will also be able to detect his failed oracles. In the 1981 film on his life and predictions, two very significant and fast approaching revelations were emphasized. The first applied Century VI, Quatrain 95 to Ted Kennedy:

"The youngest son shall be slandered by a detractor,
When enormous and martial deeds shall be done,
The least part shall be doubtful to the eldest,
And soon after they shall both be equal in the government."

Orson Welles explained to the film's viewers that the "slandered by a detractor" referred to the 1969 incident at Chappaquiddick, Mass., where Mary Jo Kopechne was killed in the automobile driven by Ted Kennedy. Kennedy, it was claimed according to the prediction, would then make a successful run for the presidency in 1984, thereby fulfilling the "equal in government" verse. Although Kennedy made unsuccessful bids for the Democratic party's nomination for president, he never became "equal in government" with his elder brother — unless one would regard his already-held office of a Senator as such. This, however, clashes with the "soon after" expression. It is interesting to note that the 1991 NBC television special, which was an adaptation of the movie, avoided completely any attention of this originally stressed prediction.

Another example from the movie was the italicizing of a May 1988 date

for a great earthquake to occur in the United States. Century X, Quatrain 67 was used:

“The earthquake shall be so great in the month of May,
Saturn, Caper, Jupiter, Mercury in Taurus,
Venus also, Cancer, Mars in Zero,
Then shall hail fall bigger than an egg.”

Welles informed viewers that this particular astrological configuration, said to be in the month of May, would occur in 1988. Yet May 1988 came and went with no such cataclysmic event taking place. Charlton Heston, on the more-recent television version, merely circumvented the false prophecy by claiming:

“The San Francisco earthquake occurred in 1989. For some, Nostradamus’s prediction as projected by Orson Welles in 1981 was remarkable, missing as it did by one calendar year. Others feel the prediction is for a future quake. That it was the interpretation of his prediction that was off.”

Heston further noted that Nostradamus’ predictions are indeed open to many interpretations. But as previously stated, by employing such unrestrained criterion there can really be no such thing as a false prophecy.

The pinnacle of Nostradamus’ predictions is no doubt his vision of the final conflict of mankind with the appearance of his third and final antichrist (his first two are said to be Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler). His interpreters are varied in their dates for the start of the Third World War, but all agree it would transpire in the early- to mid-1990s. Cheetham covers many bases by listing an eight-year period (1986-1993)²⁵ and even beyond with dates of 1995 and 1996.²⁶ The movie edition looked for its beginning in 1994.

While the date of the war’s commencement may be debated, all agree that by 1999 the conflict will be well under way based upon Century X, Quatrain 72:

“In the year 1999, and seven months,
From the sky will come the great King of Terror.
He will bring back to life the great king of the Mongols.
Before and after War reigns happily.”

Some even seek to bolster Nostradamus’ oracle with a correlation to inspired Holy Writ:

“A tremendous world revolution is foretold to take place in the year 1999, with a complete upheaval of existing social orders, preceded by worldwide wars. Nostradamus shows his mystic knowledge of the great secret of the book of revelations and solves for us the identity of the ‘Beast of the Apocalypse’ and the time of his arrival which John of Patmos (Rev. XIII:18) records ‘Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the Beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666.’ By a simple reversal of the numbers and turning 999 upside down we obtain 666.”²⁷

A SCRIPTURAL RESPONSE

In addition to all of the above confusion, Nostradamus’ methods of prophecy — even when most of his researchers agree on an interpretation — has a less than flawless success rate. These latter two factors alone should give Christians sufficient reason to pause before considering him in good faith as an authentic prophet. His use of astrology and a divining rod, readily acknowledged to by his patrons, are common occultic practices and scripturally condemned (Deuteronomy 18:10; Isaiah 47:13-14).

Moreover, the failure of some of his prophetic offerings further exclude him from any claim to be a prophet appointed and equipped by God (Deuteronomy 18:21). The advocates of Nostradamus emphasize that his “record for the past 400 years or so has been incredible” and “Anyone who doesn’t take Nostradamus seriously is a fool.”²⁸ Yet, Christians should not be disarmed or challenged

by such threatening words. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 instructs believers that:

“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods’ (gods you have not known) ‘and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Even some among those who support Nostradamus and his predictions admit to the crucial distinction. Biographer Charles A. Ward labels him a “superficial Christian, a Pagan perhaps at heart”²⁹ and further acknowledges:

“Still he is clearly no prophet in the old and Hebrew sense of the word — like Isaiah, Daniel, David, John, — a man who neither respects his own person as regards its safety, nor the person of other men as regards their position. You cannot say of him: ‘*Scimus quia verax es, non enim respicis personam hominum*’ [i.e., ‘(you) teach the way of truth, (you) do not regard the person of men’] (St. Matt. xxii. 16), which is the test-touch all the world over of a true prophet.”³⁰

Christians need not be enticed by a desire to know the future apart from what God’s Word tells us. Therefore they should avoid Nostradamus and his prophecies. To look outside the boundary of Scripture is to deny that God has provided for us all that is needed for life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3).

The prophecies recorded in Scripture have stood and will stand the test of time. They are not transcendental nor do they have to be reworked or contorted. Moreover, God’s Word is the benchmark for all other prophets and prophecies.

“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and

you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:19-21).

Endnotes:

1. *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* with Orson Welles, Warner Bros., Inc., 1981. The video version of this motion is available by Warner Home Video, 1986.
2. NBC Special, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* hosted by Charlton Heston. This program aired Wednesday, Feb. 20, 1991, tape on file.
3. While several web sites offer research and reference material on Nostradamus, the most thorough is "The Prophecies of Michel Nostradamus" web site located at: www.telebyte.nl/~zaphod/nostra.html
4. Robert A. Morey, *Horoscopes and the Christian*. Minneapolis: Bethany House

- Publishers, 1981, pp. 20-21.
5. "A 20th Century Look at Nostradamus - Was He God's Prophet During the 16th Century?", *PFO Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 5, 7.
6. Erika Cheetham, *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*. New York: Perigee Books, 1973, pg. 5.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Charles A. Ward, *Oracles of Nostradamus*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940, pg. 10.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 26.
10. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 13.
11. *Oracles of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 58, brackets in original, emphasis added. This "prophecy" is highlighted by Gus Vandermeer in *Nostradamus and Other Amazing Experts' Amazing Predictions For The Year 2000 and Beyond*. Lantana, Fla.: Micro-Mags, 1998, pg. 11.
12. John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1894, Vol. VII, pg. 197.
13. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 33.
14. Henry C. Roberts, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*. New York: Nostradamus, Inc., 1949, (Twelfth printing, 1962),

- pg. 17, emphasis added.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 191.
16. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 262.
17. Erika Cheetham, *The Further Prophecies of Nostradamus - 1985 and Beyond*. New York: Perigee Books, 1985, pg. 76.
18. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 124.
19. Century I, Quatrain 81.
20. *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 36.
21. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 60.
22. "Century 1, 81 — Space Shuttle Disaster," from www.alumni.caltech.edu/~jamcsf/spacesh.html. (Italic added to separate quatrain quotes from commentary.)
23. *Horoscopes and the Christian*, op. cit., pg. 20.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
25. *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pp. 88-89.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.
27. *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 336.
28. "Nostradamus Past, Present & Future," *Sun* magazine, Dec. 19, 1995, pg. 20.
29. *Oracles of Nostradamus*, op. cit., pg. 41.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 39.



SUPERSTITIOUS CHURCH

(continued from page 1)

of these new quirks are touted as the end time revival and people jump on the new bandwagon until they tire of it or a more exciting wagon rolls in.

We must come to grips not only with the reality of superstition in the Church but have a plan to resist that superstition. Let's look first at:

THE REALITY OF SUPERSTITION IN THE CHURCH

Dr. Peter Jones, professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary in Southern California, captures the large view as he surveys how our churches have moved toward experience-driven religion and eastern mysticism:

"Belief that the human is divine, and thus essentially good, helps explain the burgeoning quest for personal spiritual discovery, to

the detriment of doctrine and truth. Mysticism has replaced true spirituality. Companies in the West, seeing commercial value in such optimism, are using these ideas to produce better sales personnel. Madison Avenue and the gurus could be an unstoppable, unholy alliance feeding the machine of political correctness. As an expression of divinity, each self is a source of truth."²

If anyone doubts that this is an age of religious fadism, confusion and superstition, just visit a Christian bookstore. There you will find:

- Hannah Hurnard — New Age occultist and aura reader.
- Madame Guyon — a mystic heretic.
- Madeleine L'Engle — who says the God of the Old Testament is "a male chauvinistic pig."
- Many of the latest psycho-babble theories.

- Dream interpretation and prophetic words for the 1990s by Vineyard prophets.
- Alternative medicine and Bible Codes.
- So-called revival stories with people acting like crass fools or animals.
- Instructions on how to get rid of ancestral demons and curses and do spiritual mapping.
- And on and on, *ad nauseam, ad infinitum*.

Truly it is like Athens and like the second-century age of heresy described by Philip Schaff when he said of that era, "strange medleys of Christian and unchristian elements in chaotic ferment."³

Modern reformer Michael Horton has written to show that there are many religious trends in the world today alerting us to the reemerging heresy of Gnosticism. He lays it out clearly:

"So far, we have seen an emerging shape to this elusive heresy

of the ancient church, distinct from orthodoxy in the following preferences:

- ♦ the subjective over the objective
- ♦ the secret and private over the public
- ♦ mystical experience over critical understanding
- ♦ the feminine over the masculine
- ♦ spirit over matter
- ♦ eternity over time
- ♦ direct encounters with God over events mediated by matter and history
- ♦ spiritual techniques for gaining access to and control over the secrets of the universe
- ♦ salvation from the body, time, institutions, and escape into a realm of pure spirit.”⁴

Faith-healer Benny Hinn can boast to his Hawaiian audience that he has received visions of the dead Kathryn Kuhlman and from these revelations has received direction for his ministry from her.⁵ Sadly, his admission of necromancy and spiritism does not raise even a whimper or cry of shock and outrage anywhere from inside his camp. Necromancy is now being advocated in the Church of Jesus Christ and it was the very thing that brought the demise of King Saul (1 Chronicles 10:13).

In a recent *Christianity Today* article, “The Future of Evangelical Theology,” Thomas Oden laments:

“The Babylonian captivity to novelty is the temptation of all modern reflection. It is invading evangelical leadership at an alarming rate in ways disturbing to evangelicals in the mainline who have suffered from its bewitchments for two centuries.”⁶

Dr. Virginia Mollenkott, professor of English at New Jersey’s William Patterson College and who is promoted in some evangelical churches, though an admitted lesbian, is now proposing the shocking and bewildering claim that *Jesus Christ was really a woman*. At a news conference for the National Council of Churches she

cited a *Journal of American Scientific Affiliation* article which argued:

“Jesus was born in parthenogenesis; that parthenogenetic births are always female; that in some cases, therefore, he would be willing to refer to Jesus as ‘she’ — up until the last minute of sex reversal, in which case Jesus remains chromosomally female throughout life, but functions as a normal male and looks like a normal male.”⁷

Kathryn Riss, the wife of twentieth-century revival historian Richard M. Riss, claims to have gotten the following song directly from the Lord. In part its lyrics are:

“I just laugh like an idiot and bark like a dog,
If I don’t sober up, I’ll likely hop like a frog!
I’ll crow like a rooster at the break of day,
‘Cause the Holy Ghost is moving, and I can’t stay away!
I’ll roar like a lioness who’s on the prowl,
I’ll laugh and shake, maybe hoot like an owl!
Since God’s holy river started bubbling in me,
It spills outside, and now it’s setting me free!
So, I’ll crunch and I’ll dip and I’ll dance round and round,
The pew was fine, but it’s more fun on the ground!
So I’ll jump like a pogo stick, then fall to the floor,
‘Cause the Holy Ghost is moving, and I just want MORE!”⁸

Authors James R. Coggins and Paul G. Hiebert express their view as to why there is such a low level of discernment and doctrinal understanding in today’s Church:

“There is a dangerous tendency in our age to seek infallible gurus, faultless leaders, and follow them blindly. Professional athletes who have been Christians for two years become our role models. Evangelists are asked to advise us on theology. Professional Christian singers be-

come our Bible teachers.”⁹

The Church at large is in deep trouble because its leaders and people no longer believe in the absolute *sufficiency* of the Scriptures for life and godliness, as both Peter and Paul proposed (2 Timothy 3:14-17, 2 Peter 1:2-4). And doubly sad is the fact that if these things are pointed out, the one crying out for discernment and reformation is bashed as a Pharisee and heretic hunter.

People are running everywhere looking for esoteric solutions to conditions caused by lack of attention to God’s Word. People like Mark Bubeck are combining smatterings of clinical psychology with bizarre and subjective practices and advising people to pray that God would search their sexual organ, blood, bones, muscles, glands, hair, skin and cells for demon activity.¹⁰

These are repulsive things to have to write about but such activities are being promoted by so-called bondage breakers and demon busters. Such things cannot be even remotely found anywhere in the Bible. They are figments of wild and convoluted imaginations. It is Athens all over again. Bubeck continues to be a lucrative and brisk seller for Moody Press and it offers no apologies. It is difficult to question a best-selling author.

The Church today is adrift on a sea of neo-gnosticism and subjectivism. It is spending its time in just hearing and telling new things. Sadly, the smorgasbord for Athens is many of the Christian magazines because of the large amounts of income generated through advertising and sales. Truth has been sacrificed for Athens. Hocus-pocus is now groovy and the Bible is a drag. “Does it feel good?” and “Will it sell?” is all that is being asked. Again we would state that the massive move away from the sufficiency of Scripture is creating incredible problems that all the false solutions and fad panaceas will never repair or heal.

Added to this deplorable state will be the Millennial madness centered around our move into the year 2000. The best kept secret is that, because of a calendar discrepancy, we had actu-

ally crossed into the year 2000 a few years ago. Remember King Herod, by all the historical accounts, died between 4 and 6 B.C. We have been through the year 2000 without a whimper and no one even noticed. What does that do to all the prophetic scenarios? In Athens no one really cares. It is the thought and the novelty that count.

Radio talk show host and author Bob Larson offers "A Live Exorcism Captured on Video!" featuring "A 20-hour exorcism condensed into two incredible hours. Scenes of the supernatural in action!" And all this for only \$100.¹¹ This is the same Bob Larson who claimed on the Trinity Broadcasting Network to have raised a comatose body by simply waving a Bible over it. The devil "told" Larson he was going to "kill" the person and caused his body temperature to plummet. Larson asserted that the Word is a lamp and God showed him it was a "heat lamp."¹² And the people who flock to Athens instead of being outraged, send their money and beg for more.

Then there is the angel craze and angel stories.¹³ They are almost mandatory in the writing of any book in recent years. Even Joni Eareckson Tada has an angel story and says she saw one as "a brilliant golden shape that glowed whisked by the large bay window I was facing — it didn't move from left to right, but from bottom to top."¹⁴ Three-time heavy-weight boxing champion Evander Holyfield writes about the angel who used to appear in his kitchen when he was a child. He would actually have us believe it was a black, bald headed angel!¹⁵ Benny Hinn has been spinning angel stories for years but like most of Hinn's material, no one else ever sees these things and they are unverifiable.¹⁶ They also go a long way in boosting one's superstar status.

The pursuit of angels should be off-limits for a Bible-believing Christian for a number of reasons. Paramount is a warning in Colossians 2:18 regarding intruding into the unseen realm of angels. The pursuit of angelic beings is a subtle diversion from the

only Mediator who is superior by comparison and from the study of Scripture.

The historic creeds from the fourth century forbid even the naming of angels.¹⁷ Satan can pose as an angel of light we are told in 2 Corinthians 11:14 and that should make any Christian extremely cautious. The Scriptures are clear that all of our guidance is to be sought in the Word through the Spirit.

So the reality of Athens and superstition is in our face. How do we go about resisting the superstition, the fads, the nonsense and mysticism that has overtaken the Church at large?

Let's move on to our second point:

RESISTING THE SUPERSTITION IN THE CHURCH

If we are going to successfully keep our balance and confront Athens, there must be the following posture:

1) A Total Commitment To The Doctrines Of Scripture.

The early Church is shown to have been committed to doctrine. In Acts 2:42 Luke reports that "they continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and prayers."

William Evans saw the need to know doctrine as one of the greatest needs of the Church, writing that, "There is probably no greater need in the Christian Church today than that its membership should be made acquainted with the fundamental facts and doctrines of the Christian faith."¹⁸

John Calvin, long ago, addressed the dangers of denigrating doctrine:

"It is an illusory belief of the enthusiasts that those who keep reading Scripture or hearing the Word are children, as if no one were spiritual unless he scorned doctrine. In their pride, therefore, they despise the ministry of men and even Scripture itself, in order to attain the Spirit. They then proudly try to peddle all the delusions that Satan suggests to

them as secret revelations of the Spirit."¹⁹

What we need is a revival of study and memorization of Scripture. That, followed by practical obedience to its commands, would eliminate the need to fabricate revival with ear-splitting music, bizarre manifestations, altered states of consciousness, and emotional frenzies. Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola is now issuing revival reports which include the practice of "sweeping." People run around frantically "sweeping" the demons out of the building and off the property.²⁰

Consider the commitment of the Apostle Paul to the importance of sound doctrine and hear him command our allegiance:

"That you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3).

"Knowing that the law is not made for a righteous person but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners. ... and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

"Now the Spirit speaks expressly that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine which you have carefully followed" (1 Timothy 4:6).

"Till I come give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:13).

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16).

"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their

own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed" (1 Timothy 6:1).

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions" (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

"You have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance" (2 Timothy 3:10).

In 2 Timothy we are told to:

Hold to sound doctrine (1:13).

Teach sound doctrine (2:2).

Abide in sound doctrine (3:14).

Preach sound doctrine (4:1-2).

From these verses we see that doctrine is not only vital but crucial and indispensable.

Doctrine denotes teaching and what is taught. The clear message of the Bible is that we are to give urgent and undivided attention to the Apostles' teachings now made permanent because they are inscripturated within the pages of the Bible. The Greek words for doctrine, *didache* and *didaskalia*, as used by Paul, stress not only the act of his delivering God's message to them but also the absolute authority of that teaching.²¹ Paul forcefully reminds the Corinthians: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you *are the commandments of the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Peter says of the Apostles' doctrine:

"That you be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior" (2 Peter 3:2).

Baker's Dictionary of Theology tells us on page 171 that, "Doctrine is the teaching of Scripture on theological

themes."

Abraham Friesen, professor of history at the University of California in Santa Barbara, gets to the heart of the problem of people trying to live by phenomenon rather than solid doctrine. He says the issue is:

"... the problem of the relationship of the written Word to the Holy Spirit. This is not a new problem. In the sixteenth century Martin Luther struggled against Thomas Muentzer, who sought to subordinate the Word to his mystical experience of the Spirit. In opposition, Luther repeatedly asserted the unity of the Word and Spirit. The Word was not merely a 'testimony' or 'witness' to the experience of the Spirit. Any experience, even one of the Spirit, could not be self-authenticating; it need always to be tested by the revealed Word of God. Not the experience but the Word was the final arbiter of God's truth."²²

We need to get back to reading, memorizing and living out the Scripture.

Not only do we need a total commitment to the doctrines of the Scripture but we need as well:

2) A Total Commitment To The Local Church.

Christians need to be in a balanced, healthy, Bible-teaching church. Christians as well need to plead with their pastors to preach doctrine and then pray consistently for them. Worship, fellowship and Bible teaching keep us in balance and protects us from the deceptions that not only fill our world but fill our churches. Every pastor should have in his library Jay Adams' three volumes on *Studies in Preaching* or Andrew Blackwood's *Doctrinal Preaching for Today*.

People use all kinds of *excuses* for not being in a good church. How silly it would be to apply the same shallow rationale to sports events: "I won't go to that ballgame because there are too many hypocrites there." "I won't go to that game because my parents

made me go as a child." "I won't go to that stadium because all they want is money." "I won't go to that event because it lasts too long." Frankly, we go to what interests us. If there is no heart for God or His house, it tells so much about us and our spiritual state. Hebrews 10:25 commands us to consistently attend church. How can we love and serve the brethren as commanded in so many of the Epistles if we are never around them?

3) Total Commitment To and Reliance On The Christ Of The Scriptures.

Hymn writer Joseph Scriven was a man who knew great personal loss and was thrown into tragedy and grief after the drowning of his fiancé. Later he met another and intended to marry when she died suddenly. Yet he was able to write:

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!"

Surely he knew Christ and found his stability in knowing what Christ had done and was doing for Him. What kept him going was not a chill up his spine but a sure knowledge of a Savior who cared for and carried him. Life's challenges do not have to break us. They can bend us toward Christ.

When emotions run out and the feelings are gone, we need to fall back on our Lord and on promises like Romans 8:38-39, knowing by faith that *nothing* can separate us from His love.

Erich Sauer pointedly reminds us:

"... the one who has been called to the kingdom has not only to decide at his *conversion* which master he will serve but has thereupon to make the same decision every day and in each practical detail of his life of *sanctification*."²³

If we are going to resist and overcome Athens in our day, we must at all costs be sold out to the doctrines of the Bible, to the work of the Church and to a daily living fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Endnotes:

1. See further, Gerhardt Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964, Vol. 2, pg. 20.
2. Peter Jones, *Spirit Wars*, Mukilteo, Wash.: WinePress Publishing, 1997, pg. 27.
3. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910, Vol., 2, pg. 429.
4. Michael Horton, *In the Face of God, The Dangers and Delights of Spiritual Intimacy*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 46.
5. G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*. Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 1997, pp. 195-196.
6. *Christianity Today*, Feb. 9, 1998, pg. 46.
7. See further, *The Christian News*, July 21, 1997, "Jesus Christ Was Really a Woman," pg. 9.
8. Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997, pg. 245-

246.

9. James R. Coggins and Paul G. Hiebert, *Wonders And The Word*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Kindred Press, 1989, pp. 10-11.
10. See further, Mark Bubeck, *Spiritual Warfare Basics*. Sioux City, Iowa: International Center for Biblical Counseling, no date, pg. 23.
11. "Bob Larson Resources 1998," ministry resource catalog.
12. Audio clip of Bob Larson on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (4/16/96) featured by Hank Hanegraaff on various editions of *The Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast, (tape on file).
13. See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1994, "Angels We Have Heard on High? — What Are We Really Hearing in the New Obsession with Angels?", pp. 4, 10-12.
14. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven Your Real Home*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1995, pg. 84.
15. Evander Holyfield and Bernard Holyfield, *Holyfield The Humble Warrior*.

Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996, pp. 7-12.

16. See further, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*, op. cit., pp. 1, 45, 52.
17. See further, Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 14, pg. 150.
18. William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, pg. 5.
19. Cited in *In the Face of God*, op. cit., pg. 134.
20. For more information on the "Pensacola Outpouring" and the Brownsville Revival, see *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1997 and January-March 1998.
21. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pp. 323-324.
22. *Wonders And The Word*, op. cit., pg. 36.
23. Erich Sauer, *In The Arena Of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, pg. 70.

EDITORIALS

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ing changes before, but church doctrine was not significantly altered. This church places public image at a premium."

The latter observation of the "Truths That Transform Action Sheet" was indeed insightful as in the early evangelical congresses in which the Pasadena-based church participated, members of its Public Affairs department, not its theologians, were the sect's representatives at these meetings.

Moreover, throughout the transformation — and even now in its wake — an issue that needs careful consideration is: Are the changes mere external representations or true internal persuasions?

Robert L. Sumner astutely noted that the Worldwide Church of God's "changes seem more *convenience* than *conviction*!" In his recent article "Is Armstrong's Cult Now Orthodox?" he writes:

"While going through their alleged metamorphose from a worm to a butterfly, the leaders repeatedly changed and modified their statements to please their 'guides.' For example, in the matter of the Trinity, especially as it related to the Holy Spirit, they would agree among themselves as to a position, then go to those whom they were trying to please, and say, 'How is this?' The latter would reply, 'It doesn't go far enough.' So they would go back to the drawing board and make suggested

changes, then return and ask, 'Now what do you think?' That kind of 'doctoring doctrine' is not the stuff of which true Bible believers are made" (*The Biblical Evangelist*, Nov.-Dec. 1997, pg. 7).

Early in the Worldwide Church of God's transformation process, PFO itself was asked by the sect's Pasadena headquarters to update literature to "reflect accurate information" as to the changes being made. Because the official theological positions of the Worldwide Church of God were in an unpredictable state of flux at that time, PFO was less than eager to make immediate changes.

In 1991, PFO responded to the request by saying, "If we update our article today, there is no guarantee that in a few months you would not be writing again asking for further revisions." A few years later, starting in 1995, PFO began to evaluate the Worldwide Church of God's move from cultism to orthodoxy in a series of articles. However, PFO's words to Worldwide Church of God leadership in its 1991 letter proved to be prophetic.

Late last year, the leadership of the church again wrote to PFO, this time asserting that PFO's revised "material is at best one-sided, containing half-truths, assumptions, and subjective judgments that are followed by a long list of somewhat dubious footnotes." The church's comments strongly propose that the PFO articles are greatly imprecise and in no way convey an accurate representation of its present conduct.

Yet at the very time PFO was receiving the Worldwide Church of God's censure, former members of the church were writing PFO and saying just the opposite — comments such as: "Thank you for addressing the issue

of accepting the WCG as 'mainstream' based on 'surface changes.' ... We are the forgotten abused. We are now accused of being 'unforgiving and angry' for leaving the 'Church'" and "Bravo! As a soon to exit member of the Worldwide Church of God, I can vouch for everything you wrote in your article. Although the abusive cultic practices now in use are not nearly as oppressive as they were when I joined the WCG in 1980, they still exist and are used."

The defensive and pushy tone of the Worldwide Church of God's new round of communication showed little improvement from the arrogant and combative spirit the church had directed against both Christian ministries and individuals who, in recent years, did not express wholesale approval or still had concerns and criticism. For a church and people who claim to be transformed by a miracle of God, little, if any, of the fruit of the Spirit are readily evident — at least not in its letters to PFO.

Beyond the church's aggressiveness, other important matters encountered in the current dialogue caused even more reservations. The sect's "Director of Church Relations" charged that PFO must "feel" that it has "all of the information" it "need[s] to accurately report about what has happened in the Worldwide Church of God." In response to his charge and the allegations that our articles are "one sided" and contained "half-truths, assumptions, subjective judgments" and "somewhat dubious footnotes," PFO offered that it is not above correction in the articles it publishes.

Although such general and sweeping comments are troubling, PFO asked for clear examples of subjectivity and promised, where valid, to duly note and correct inaccuracies. This offer was extended in three separate letters. Yet the only response to each has been a blatant disregard of PFO's request combined with the implication that PFO is not concerned with the truth.

Another disturbing issue is the church's attempt to question the integrity of former Worldwide Church of God members who are openly critical of the sect. The church's letter to PFO challenged "the veracity of charges ... coming from a small group of former members and ministers." It further stated that this group's "allegations are far from the truth, and so go beyond simple misrepresentation."

PFO was told that: "Perhaps you are not aware, but we know that at least one reputable, independent third party source has asked one of your sources to be accountable for such misrepresentations." When PFO told the church of its aversion to such an indiscriminate "third party" unnamed accusation, it produced a copy of a letter from a minister in California addressed to former Worldwide Church of God staff member David W. Covington.

However, this letter and the subsequent inquiries it produced, in PFO's evaluation, did more to demonstrate

misrepresentation on the church's part than it did to disarm the trustworthiness of David Covington. The letter from this minister suggested that Covington could be charged with "defamation, slander and/or libel." This stemmed from a comment made by Covington and posted on his web site which, according to the minister, "claimed that Mr. Joe Tkach Jr. is the sole owner of the Pasadena [church headquarters] property."

Despite such a stern legal threat from this minister, his warning was not based upon firsthand knowledge or details as to what Covington actually said. He wrote to Covington that he "recently heard some disturbing news" and then issued his unwarranted comment that "If you are wrong, and you probably are, I think you could be charged with either defamation, slander and/or libel. I do not know for sure, since I'm neither an attorney, nor have I seen what you wrote." Such remarks are indeed ambiguous. In PFO's opinion, this certainly demonstrates a lack of wisdom on the minister's part. Before sending a letter issuing such accusations, it would be prudent to check out what was or wasn't said.

Moreover, Covington, upon receipt of the minister's letter, immediately deactivated his ministry's web site because his remarks had the potential of conveying misinformation. According to Covington, when he reactivated his web site "two weeks later it contained an apology and restatement regarding Joseph Tkach's relationship to the organization."

Yet Covington's responsive and corrective action was never mentioned or even alluded to by the Worldwide Church of God leadership in any of its letters to PFO. So it is apparent, despite all its appeals to PFO to be responsive with the "plain truth," they are above holding themselves to the same standard.

Two more unsettling specifics are closely interwoven and further give us pause: The church's continued kinship to its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, and its conviction that its past doctrine and practice did not separate it from of the Body of Christ.

Concerning the former, much is being made by the church's hierarchy that critics will not be satisfied until the bones of Herbert W. Armstrong are exhumed and burned. This is a grave overstatement, to say the least. PFO is, however, deeply concerned by the continued claims and allusions to Armstrong "as a minister of Jesus Christ." It is inconceivable to us as to the amount of false doctrine, false prophecy and abusive practices of this man which has had to be altered and/or camouflaged, and for this organization to continue to promote him with such reverence. (For additional insight on the HWA/WCG relationship, see Peter Ditzel's article in this Journal, esp. pp. 7-9.)

And then there's the declaration that this church really has been "Christian" all along. A recently released "Fact Sheet" discloses "The Worldwide Church of God, a

Christian ministry [was] established in Eugene, Oregon, in 1933" (emphasis added). One current member of the sect, in a letter to PFO, offered a similar opinion when he wrote: "I think one of the greatest abuses of the former WCG was the denial of the breadth of the body of Christ — that there were indeed Christians outside the WCG."

Thus, in this member's view, what looms large is not the doctrinal transformation, but a move from the exclusivist attitude of the church to a realization that there are members of Christ's body *in addition* to the Worldwide Church of God.

All of this then begs the question: If the church has made such a transformation by the grace of God, why have there been such concerted efforts to adopt a revisionist position as to its founder and history and maintain a "Christian" heritage?

Yet, despite all the above, the most important reason for caution is Matthew 7:15-20. Jesus identified cultic and aberrational groups as "false prophets." He said we would know them by their fruit (v. 16) and that a rotten tree does not produce good fruit (v. 18). Yet the leadership today is telling us that the Worldwide Church of God is capable of producing good fruit. It has had to rework and relegate its "bad tree" history into a "good tree" image which just needs a little care and some pruning and fertilizer. Yet Jesus said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (v. 19). He did not tell us to coddle, prune and nurture it.

If for no other reason, the words of Christ require that Christians do not uncritically accept this church's image transformation. Nevertheless, PFO rejoices and thanks God for the individuals who are being set free from the bondage of false doctrine and spiritual abuse — not because of this sect's claim of the "plain truth," but because of the atoning work of the Savior on Calvary's cross.

—MKG

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Lourdes and Fatima are promoting and the Jewish pool of John 5. At the Pool of Bethesda, no one was being encouraged to hold to teachings contrary to God's Word.

The message of both Lourdes and Fatima are messages supposedly from the Virgin Mary promoting veneration and prayers to her.

The Catholic Almanac under "Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary" tells us that in Fatima, Portugal, "Mary appeared six times between May 13 and Oct. 13, 1917, to three children in a field called Cova da Iria near Fatima, north of Lisbon. She recommended frequent recitation of the Rosary."

Most are not aware that in the Rosary one prays to Mary these words: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death." There is only one Mediator for sinners (1 Timothy 2:5) and only one who can deal with our sins, that is the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The *Almanac* goes on saying that Mary urged "works of mortification for the conversion of sinners; called for devotion to herself under the title of the Immaculate Heart." Can our works of mortification convert sinners? Did not Christ command us to preach the Gospel to every creature (Matthew 28:19)? It is not our suffering and sacrifice that brings conversion to others but the preaching of His suffering and sacrifice and a sinners' hearty response to the Savior. It may cost us in time and effort to evangelize the lost but ultimately it is the Gospel that is the "power of God unto Salvation." Fatima's message is a total contradiction of the Gospel.

Fatima also calls for making holy communion on the first Saturday of every month and the *Almanac* informs us that: "Fatima, with its sanctuary and basilica, ranks with Lourdes as the greatest of Marian shrines."

So what about Lourdes? Hinn evidently approves of it. Lourdes is just the French version of Fatima. The *Almanac* gives its history: "Mary, identifying herself as the Immaculate Conception appeared 18 times between Feb. 11 and July 16, 1858, to 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous at the grotto of Massabielle near Lourdes in southern France. Her message concerned the necessity of prayer and penance for the conversion of men."

It has been a longstanding controversy as to what, if anything, is really happening at these Marian shrines. Certainly there can be improvement of psychosomatic illness just through expectations. Because of the false beliefs being promoted so blatantly at both of these shrines, we cannot even rule out the demonic and the occultic (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Hinn has admittedly slid into spiritism and necromancy so it should not be surprising that he is spiraling down into one error after the other. We can only wonder what will be next.

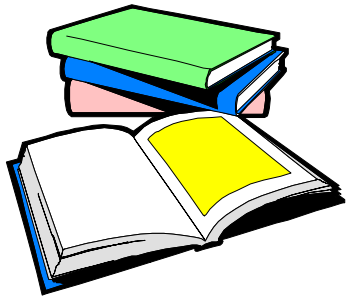
—GRF

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 24)

questions the prescripts of some noted, modern-day celebrities of the Christian faith. This book may unsettle some as it goes against the grain of the traditionally accepted views of guidance, but it's a call to return to believing that Scripture many learned as a child: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

—MKG



Books in Review

DEMONIZATION OF THE BELIEVER

An Unbiblical Teaching Exposed

by Gil Rugh

Sound Words, 55 pages/4 tapes, \$14.95

One of the more hotly debated topics in both Charismatic and Evangelical Christian camps today is: Can a believer be demonized? Dr. Gil Rugh says: No! In his four-tape series and accompanying 55-page book, Rugh systematically and methodically examines that question from the Bible while dissecting the experientially based, nonbiblical ideas of popular spiritual warfare experts Neil Anderson and C. Fred Dickason.

Rugh's teaching and writing have been missed by most but are a must for every Christian. His is material that needs to be studied in the light of so much paranoia and confusion today. The concise booklet, along with the four audio tapes, is one of the best inoculations against this false teaching that can be found.

In his book, Rugh cuts to the core of the issue in his seven chapters entitled: "Sin: Who Is to Blame?," "A Biblical Survey of Demonology," "Demon Possession and the Believer," "The Biblical Way of Dealing with Demons," "The Fallacy of Clinical Evidence in Spiritual Matters," "Ancestral Demons" and "Experience-Based Theology."

The tape series is a response to Neil Anderson's "Resolving Personal and Spiritual Conflicts Conference" which has gained the patronage of Evangelical churches across the nation.

Rugh's main point cannot be missed and that is that to depart from the biblical teaching regarding how a believer is sanctified is a frontal attack and a downright denial of the sufficiency of the work of Christ and the Scriptures. We do not need "experts" and "bondage breakers." We need good theology. That is what Gil Rugh gives us.

—GRF

THE CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE TO GUIDANCE

by Jay E. Adams

Timeless Texts, 97 pages, \$8.95

The question of guidance and knowing how to make right decisions in life can be a troubling one indeed. How can a believer know what is or what is not God's will for their life? It is a crucial issue that has given kindling to shepherding and abusive sects. It is also an issue to which a vast amount of misguided counsel has been offered — even from within mainline churches and from otherwise reputable Bible teachers.

Most Christians look to the Bible, prayer, counsel of others, circumstances, reason and peace as the reliable arbitrators for knowing and discerning God's will. And these six guidelines appear to be wise and safe factors in making Godly decisions in life — after all are we not to pray without ceasing and told in a multitude of counsel there is wisdom? Yet when it comes to the issue of guidance for the Christian, Jay Adams contends that five of the six elements mentioned above are *wrong!*

Adams demonstrates how Scripture is to be the sole and final source for a Christian's guidance. He sets forth to show how all of these other factors leads one to look for guidance in "all sorts of wrong places." Following those avenues which contain a human element, and which as such are undependable, "will land those who do so in more difficulties than they already had." His, then, is a battle cry similar to the Reformers centuries ago: *sola scriptura*. He brings the reader back to the understanding that experience is not the judge of the Bible, but the Bible is the judge of experience. Too often, knowingly or unknowingly, Christians get the "cart" (experience) before the "horse" (Scripture).

The book is brief and succinct. It will be, for most readers, a quick read. While Garry Friesen's definitive work on the subject (*Decision Making and the Will of God*) may be intimidating to the average Christian, Adams' publication will not be overwhelming. And, just perhaps, may whet the appetite of some to consider Friesen's 452-page volume.

Adams deals with the problems and provides the scriptural solutions. He names names and in doing so

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Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$1.75 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.