

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 20, NO. 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2000

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Can You Be Deceived? Why People Are Duped and How Not to Be

by G. Richard Fisher

“Will you walk into my parlor?” said a spider to a fly; ‘Tis the prettiest little parlor that you ever did spy” (Mary Howitt).

The inspired Apostle Paul warned us: “Let no one deceive you” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). It is apparent that we are vulnerable to deception and we must not forget it. We must be on guard and protect ourselves against it. There is deception everywhere in the religious world. We *must* be alert.

Deception can only deceive if it looks somewhat like the real thing. Apologist Craig Hawkins explains:

“We must realize that the way to deceive people with counterfeits is to imitate the genuine article as closely as possible. For example, if counterfeiters want to pass off fake one-hundred-dollar bills, they do not print Donald Duck’s picture on purple paper. Instead they attempt to duplicate a true bill. Similarly, despicable persons who try to deceive others attempt to appear genuine and sincere. They do not walk up to you and inform you that they are there to deceive and defraud you. The far more effective method is faking friendship and fidelity.”¹



Goethe taught that we are never deceived but that we deceive ourselves. It is true that religious huck-

sters are believed because people want to believe them. People want the claims to be true. One of Martin Luther’s favorite sayings was “*mundus vult decipi*” — the world wants to be deceived.

Once a person has invested blood, sweat, tears and *money* into religious deception, he may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to admit he has been taken. Our hearts are where our treasure has gone. Our vested interest helps us keep the blinders on. We often only “see” what we want to see. The Bible presents a complex picture in regard to deception and assures us that God holds both the deceiver and the deceived accountable.

In the first chapter of the book of Zephaniah, the Lord charges and convicts both the people and the corrupt leaders they followed. Lamentations 2:14 indicates the same:

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THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

Nearly two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked from Judea up through Samaria, he encountered a woman at "Jacob's well" near the city of Sychar. That ancient well is still there today as a monument to this life-changing event.

The teaching that Jesus presented to the woman is preserved in Scripture in John's Gospel (John 4). During His conversation, He revealed to the woman that He was the Messiah and the very source of "living water" and "eternal life."

There's also a more recent narrative of another woman at a well. However, this one is not a chronicle or record of historical facts as is John's account, but rather is a modern-day parable. It is an illustration I have often used to demonstrate the plight of those caught within the dangerous and unhealthy web of cultic and aberrational doctrine and how escape can be made from the degenerating effects of such teaching and teachers. The story unfolds in this way:

There once was a woman who lived in the country. One day, some friends and neighbors began telling her about a newly discovered well which they said was a source of water which contained great medicinal value. It, they claimed, had healing properties which far exceeded anything she could obtain from her own well. While affliction and unrest still seemed apparent in the

lives of her friends and neighbors, their exuberance as they drank from the well soon overwhelmed her. She too found herself committed to this alluring source of water.

However, in time she began to realize that what she experienced was not excitement as a result of drinking from the new-found well. It seemed to be more externally generated, not really from within because of the water itself. In fact, she sensed just the opposite — that she was weak, sick and apathetic. In time, her condition grew worse, and despite the disapproval of her friends, she went to her doctor and described her symptoms, hoping for a diagnosis.

After listening carefully to the woman, running several tests and gathering personal data, the physician wisely determined that the well water she was drinking was contaminated. He told her to drink water from another, more healthy, source. He also prescribed a strong medication to clear up the many toxins which had entered in her system as a result of the polluted water.

Several weeks passed and she returned to the doctor for a follow up visit. Her complaints of feeling weak, sick and spiritless persisted. Puzzled by lack of any small sign of improvement in her condition, "Just keep drinking water from a healthy source and stay on the medication to clear up the toxins," the doctor emphasized to the woman.

A few more weeks passed and yet another visit to the physician revealed the same symptoms continuing to

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PFO NAMES TWO NEW DIRECTORS

Personal Freedom Outreach recently added two new members to its staff. In April, Dr. James Bjornstad and Mr. Philip Cetnar were appointed to PFO's Board of Directors.

James Bjornstad is professor of philosophy at Cedarville College in Cedarville, Ohio. He is a recognized scholar and author in the field of cults, the occult and apologetics. Bjornstad has spent nearly 40 years in religious research. In addition to his proficiency in the field of alternate religions, he has been a pastor, an academic dean and college president. He has been on PFO's Board of Reference for the past 10 years.

Also named to PFO's Board is Philip Cetnar. He is the director of PFO's Philadelphia area office and the son of directors Joan and the late Bill Cetnar. He co-founded a local training and witnessing counter-cult ministry and is responsible for maintaining PFO's web site. Cetnar, his wife, Priscilla, and two children live in Mount Laurel, N.J.

Also in April, PFO accepted and announced the resignation of Edgar L. Havaich from its Board. Havaich resigned as director because of time constraints. He faithfully served on PFO's Board since his appointment in 1989.

—MKG

NEW NAME FOR RLDS CHURCH

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) has adopted a new name: "Community of Christ."

RLDS delegates met in April at the church's world conference in Independence, Mo., to discuss a name change for the denomination. While "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" will remain the denomination's legal name, the new name by which they will be identified, Community of Christ, will be instituted after the end of the year. The two-thirds majority vote needed to approve the change was easily surpassed; 1,979 (77%) voted for and 561 voted against.

Among the issues discussed was the church's problem with frequently being mistaken for the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mark A. Scherer, world church historian, told the *Kansas City Star*:

"Primary to the existence of the reorganization was the desire to distance the church from the Utah Mormons for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the Utah Mormons were practicing polygamy, which the reorganized church membership felt was heresy."

The RLDS church is only one of more than 100 groups that splintered from the church founded by Joseph Smith Jr. after his death in 1844. While Brigham Young led the majority of Smith's followers to Utah, others believed that a descendant of Smith should head the church as prophet. In 1860, Smith's son Joseph Smith III, was accepted and installed as president of the church. During the rest of the 19th century, the sect moved its headquarters around Illinois. In the early 1900s, the church established its formal headquarters in Independence.

The RLDS denomination has a membership of less than 250,000 and is the second-largest of the Mormon sects. The Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints counts more than 10 million members.

—AMG

FOUR DIE AT HINN'S KENYA CRUSADE

Four people, including two young children, died while attending healing evangelist Benny Hinn's crusade in Nairobi, Kenya, last May. The report from the Reuters news service said police told a local newspaper, the *Kenya Times*, that "the four had been released from a hospital to be cured at Benny Hinn's 'Miracle Crusade.'"

In addition to the four deaths, it was reported that "Ten other people suffered serious injuries including broken jaws after falling from trees they climbed to get a view of the American preacher."

An earlier news article, which appeared in the *Daily Nation*, identified one of the deceased as Clondin Adhiambo, "an ailing four-month-old baby." The infant was taken to Hinn's meeting by her mother. The newspaper reported that according to police, "the baby's condition worsened at the prayer venue and she was taken to MP Shah Hospital where she was pronounced dead on arrival."

The Reuters story noted that faith healing in Kenya has become a well-received enterprise. "Preachers promising miracle cures from ailments ranging from AIDS to blindness have become increasingly popular in recent years in Kenya, a country where health care is out of the

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GREGORY BOYD'S INFINITELY INTELLIGENT CHESS PLAYER



The Remaking of God in Man's Image

by G. Richard Fisher

Gregory Boyd, professor of theology at Bethel College in Minneapolis, writes: "We might imagine God as something like an infinitely intelligent chess player."¹

The Apostle Paul wrote: "They ... changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man."²

Is God really a lot like us? Is He growing, learning and unable to know all the future with any accuracy? Is God infinite or is He finite and limited in His knowing? Has the Christian Church really been wrong — or at least confused on these points — for 2000 years? Is God, after all, really just an infinitely intelligent chess player?

Are we no longer able to sing "Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, there is no shadow of turning with thee"? Is the problem of evil really addressed if we make God less than perfectly and exhaustively all-knowing?

Is this "New Theism" better and more correct than the historic classic Theism of the last two millennia? Has the Church been wrong in believing that God's omniscience stretches into the future? Is omniscience just God knowing all there is to know *right now*?

Gregory Boyd's new book, *God of the Possible*, is a sad and frightening volume to read. A better title would be "The Death of the Orthodox God."

His views have been correctly labeled neotheism.

It would take a book-length treatment to handle and answer in-depth Boyd's many doctrinal errors in his book. In the interest of time and space we will deal with the most salient points.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL COMMITMENT OF NEOTHEISM

At certain points in his scheme, Boyd seems to make man much more than God and God much less than man. We all know the reality of our ability to plan and to plan definitely. We also can bring those plans to pass days, weeks or years later. Man can know ahead of time what he plans to do and carry that out and bring it to fruition. God has designed us that way.

However, in Boyd's view, God can't always do that because we might decide differently. Boyd states: "future free decisions do not exist (except as possibilities) for God to know until free agents make them."³ Further, Boyd suggests: "God's mind is not permanently fixed ... some of what God knows regarding the future consists of things that *may* go one way or another."⁴

In fact, Boyd says that God gave confirmation to a lady that turned out

to be a disaster: "I suggested to her that God felt as much regret over the confirmation he had given Suzanne as he did about his decision to make Saul king of Israel."⁵ Yet Boyd couldn't be sure God gave her the confirmation. If that were certain, Suzanne couldn't trust God for any "confirmation" in the future.

If Boyd's philosophy is true, we have more freedom than our creator. In spite of all Boyd's nuancing and insisting that God will pull it all out in the end, he cannot be sure if God is in control right now.

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF NEOTHEISM

Boyd illustrates further his premise for his readers:

"...this motif of future determinism does not warrant the conclusion that God predestines and foreknows as settled *everything* about the future. ... there is a second major motif in Scripture that depicts the future as partly open. Balancing the determined aspects of the future is a realm composed of open possibilities that will be resolved only by the decisions of free agents."⁶

Boyd also believes "God's call to covenantal faithfulness has involved testing. God is seeking to *find out* whether or not the people he calls will lovingly choose him above all else."⁷ Note his comment: "God is *seeking to find out*."

Was God's test of Abraham for His own benefit? Was God taking a huge risk as Boyd suggests? Is it really true that: "In a cosmos populated by free agents, the outcome of things — even divine decisions — is often uncertain"?⁸ If this is true, what could be certain?

What Boyd looks at as risks on God's part⁹ can be understood in other ways. Bible expositor John Haley examines the testing of Abraham and concludes:

"The words addressed to Abraham, 'Now I know that,' etc., are equivalent to saying, Now I have established by actual experiment that which I previously knew. I have demonstrated, made manifest by evident proof, my knowledge of thy character."¹⁰

In the preface of his book, Boyd tells of his first experience of awakening some 17 years ago as he was reading 2 Kings 20. God said to Hezekiah, "Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die: you shall not recover" (v. 1). Boyd's new insight is simply explained: "2 Kings 20 ... seemed to suggest the future is to some extent open and that God does not know every detail about what will come to pass. ... About three years later, I became convinced that the customary view — that the future is exhaustively settled and that God knows it as such — was mistaken."¹¹

Boyd describes a personal metamorphosis that I would describe as becoming almost god-like: "Among other things, I have found that parts of the Bible and certain aspects of life make much better sense to me now than they did before. I have discovered a new appreciation and excitement regarding my own responsibility in bringing about the future."¹² He mentions the positive result of a more passionate prayer life. Does this suggest that perceived benefit makes a thing right? Is it to suggest that those who do not hold his view have a shallower and otherwise less than a deep and exciting prayer life?

Boyd calls those who do not hold his view "misguided" and suggests that those who believe the future is

settled may contribute to evil and sin in their lives.¹³

When Satan said to Eve: "has God said?" (Genesis 3:1), he was implying and having Eve assume that God was almost as limited as she was and actually did not know much more than she could figure out herself. Eve was led to believe she controlled her own future. Satan was suggesting that Eve could bring about her own future — a future that God did not totally control or know. Her biggest temptation was believing she was autonomous and that God could not predict her future for her.

Boyd's view is that people "Through God's grace and power, they help *create* the future."¹⁴

Scripture nowhere states that the purpose of grace is to help us create the future. Through God's grace new life is created in us but we do not create anything by or through grace. Through the empowerment of grace we may change some things but how can we be said to create anything since only God creates.

Any lexicon or book on word studies will define grace (Greek: *charis*) as lovingkindness, bounty or goodwill. It is God's unmerited favor in the face of our demerit. It has an objective and subjective aspect.¹⁵ Grace is not something we do (Romans 11:6). *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* explains it this way: "the predominant sense of favor, with an undertone of meaning that the favor is undeserved" and that "The essence of the doctrine of grace is that God is for us."¹⁶ Jesus is the grace of God toward us.

Boyd describes his new view as "an intriguing — and in my [i.e., Boyd's] estimation, wonderful — way of thinking about God and the future."¹⁷ He also says that "God '[declares] the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done'"¹⁸ which for Boyd means only the end of some things and not all things.

To accept Boyd's view of things, we would have to live under this frightening prospect:

"It is true that according to the open view things can happen in our lives that God didn't plan or

even foreknow with certainty (though he always foreknew they were possible). This means that in the open view things can happen to us that have no overarching divine purpose. In this view, 'trusting in God' provides no assurance that everything that happens to us will reflect his divine purposes, for there are other agents who also have power to affect us, just as we have power to affect others. This, it must be admitted, can for some be a scary thought."¹⁹

This assertion is made apparently without regard to Romans 8:28.

It is evident early on that Boyd very deftly rigs the game and suggests that to divide over this issue would be unloving:

"It certainly is not a doctrine Christians should ever divide over. ... With each of you I pray that our Baptist fellowship, and evangelicalism in general, will come to see more clearly that the love with which believers debate issues is more important to God than the sides we take. To all, I offer this humble perspective for your consideration in love."²⁰

Boyd says he knows what is really important to God but offers no scriptural backing for the statement.

Consider rather the Apostle Paul's words:

"I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of many" (Romans 16:17-18).

Paul is at least saying we *must* speak the truth in love, even if it divides.

Boyd then tells us that compared to the central doctrines of our faith, this issue of the future being only partially open to God or "exhaustively settled" is "relatively unimportant." If it is "relatively unimportant" why write a book on it? Somehow his words do

not ring true. A teaching that radically affects our view of God, man, the Bible and the future is very important.

Let's revisit briefly the primary scriptural element of Boyd's great "awakening" — 2 Kings 20. If we adopt the view that God's statement to Hezekiah was absolute, we have God either lying or confused. God said that Hezekiah should set his house in order "for thou shalt die and not live." Viewing this as an absolute only increases the dilemma for Boyd. The statement was that Hezekiah would "die and not live." If Hezekiah lived, God lied or at least could not follow His own absolute statements and is totally wrong at times.

In the past, commentators have not viewed this statement as absolute but as conditional, that is, it had an implied condition that the king apart from repenting would certainly die. That makes sense and will agree with another important Scripture, as we'll see.

Adam Clarke, whom Boyd himself describes as "the great Bible commentator,"²¹ explains the conditional nature of God's words:

"Hezekiah knew that, although the words of Isaiah were delivered to him in an *absolute* form, yet they were to be *conditionally* understood; else he could not have prayed to God to reverse a purpose which he knew to be irrevocable. Even this passage is a key to many prophecies and divine declarations."²²

Comparing Scripture to Scripture bolsters the conditional view. In Hezekiah's psalm of praise, after his healing, he acknowledges that "The Lord was ready to save me" (Isaiah 39:20), not "God did not know what He or I would do and I had to just pray hard enough to change His mind and create my own future." Hezekiah understood the conditional nature of God's words. Neotheists make the same mistake with other conditional passages.

Boyd is so bold to say "some of what God knows regarding the future consists of things that *may* go one

way or another. He adjusts his plans — changes his mind — depending on what does or does not take place."²³ It surely sounds like God is time-bound and scurrying to process billions of bits of information as things unfold and He learns what is going on. Suggesting that God at least knows all the varied possibilities does not help much. Boyd even suggests that some prophecies "did not *have* to take place"²⁴ and that some are "*illustrative*, not *predictive*."²⁵

PASSAGES DISPROVING NEOTHEISM

Orthodox theologians (also called Classical Theists) for centuries have talked about the immutability of God, that is, that in His nature, essence and character, He cannot and does not change. From the Prophets to the Apostles to the Church Fathers and Reformers, they all with one voice affirmed that God had an unchanging nature and knew all things — even the future — perfectly. This is explicitly and repeatedly taught in the Bible. God may change His program (external) but His being never changes. He does not have to learn or acquire information. He is perfect, knowing the end from the beginning. He does not change His mind in the human sense. The Scriptures abound with the concepts of God's immutability, omniscience, perfection and complete foreknowledge. Consider the testimony of Scripture:

"He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29, NIV).

"Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD" (Psalms 139:4, NIV).

"Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit" (Psalms 147:5, NIV).

"I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come" (Isaiah 46:9-10, NIV).

"I the LORD do not change" (Malachi 3:6, NIV).

"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19, NIV).

"Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18, KJV).

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8, NIV).

God's omniscience and foreknowledge is everywhere in Scripture and has been held consistently by historical orthodoxy. Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:2 contain plain statements that God foresees the future. Christ's death was planned and known before the foundations of the world (1 Peter 1:20-21).

Standard works on doctrine insist on God's immutability as William Evans asserts: "He remains forever the same, and unchangeable."²⁶

Henry Clarence Thiessen echoes Evans' foundation: "By the immutability of God we mean that in essence, attributes, consciousness, and will God is unchangeable. ... Any change in His attributes would make Him less than God."²⁷

James Petigru Boyce, a 19th-century Baptist stalwart, lays out in his 493-page *Abstract of Systematic Theology* the attributes of God as contained in Scripture: "By the immutability of God is meant that he is incapable of change, either in duration of life, or in nature, character, will or happiness. In none of these, nor in any other respect is there any possibility of change."²⁸

Boyce said of immutability: "It is expressly taught by the Scriptures" and then listed "a few passages" to uphold his maxim:

"(a) They declare him to be unchangeable in *duration and life*: Gen. 21:33; Deut. 32:39, 40; Ps. 9:7; 55:19; 90:2; 102:12; Hab. 1:12; Rom. 16:26; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16. (b) They affirm the unchangeableness of his *nature*: Ps. 104:31; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 1:23; James 1:17. (c) They also assert that his *will* is

without change: Job 23:13; Ps. 33:11; Prov. 19:21. (d) His *character* is also said to be immutable, as for example his *justice*: Gen. 18:25; Job 8:3; Rom. 2:2; his *mercy*: Ex. 34:7; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 107:1; Lam. 3:22, 23; Mal. 3:6; his *truth*: Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mic. 7:20; Rom. 3:3; 11:2, 29; 2 Tim. 2:13; Titus 1:2; his *holiness*: Job 34:10; Hab. 1:13; James 1:13; and his *knowledge*: Isa. 40:13, 14, 27, 28."²⁹

The Westminster Confession of Faith expressly reflects what the Church has always believed about God:

"There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions [meaning impure passions], immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory. ... his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."³⁰

Boyd understands the classical position very well:

"Most evangelical Christians take it for granted that God knows everything that is ever going to take place. They have been taught that the future is completely settled in God's mind and has been so from all eternity. This view is sometimes called the 'classical view of divine foreknowledge.' Though it has always been the majority view in the church, it is the view I will be arguing *against* throughout this work."³¹

PROBLEMS OF NEOTHEISM

Boyd seems to be diminishing God greatly by his view that:

"...it might help if we think of God's power and our say-so in terms of percentages. Prior to creation, God possessed 100 per-

cent of all power. He possessed all the say-so there was. When the Trinity decided to express their love by bringing forth a creation, they invested each creature (angelic and human) with a certain percentage of their say-so. The say-so of the triune God was at this point no longer the only one that determined how things would go. God's personal creations now possessed a measure of ability to influence what would occur. This was necessary (as was the risk that went with it) if God's creations were to be personal beings who had the ability to make authentic choices, including the choice whether to enter a loving relationship with him."³²

Boyd defines (in context) the say-so of God as his power. However, all power belongs to Jesus (Matthew 28:18). Any derived authority we have is certainly limited by God's power and ultimate will. We have no absolute and ultimate power and say-so as Boyd suggests. God's essential and absolute power is as noncommunicable as His omnipresence. He is the only omnipotent One. Any derived "power" that we have is to be used sharing Christ and obeying God.

Baker Book House formerly printed books that were orthodox and Reformed. Early in 2000, it promoted in its advertising catalog Boyd's book, *God of the Possible*, calling his view "the open view of God." Baker said Boyd outlines "an alternate open view" to the traditional view that God always knows what will happen in the future.

For all the posturing and nuancing, the question boils down to this: does God know all the future or does He not? To say He might just know a little of or even most of it denies all the Scriptural passages that say He knows all of it. If He is ever-growing, ever-learning and adjusting, He is not unchanging. It appears Baker Book House is capitulating to a weak and terminal aspect of Postmodernism: the idea that everyone's viewpoint is valid.

Earlier this year, *Christianity Today* ran an editorial titled, "God vs. God

— Two competing theologies vie for the future of evangelicalism." The magazine named Clark Pinnock, John Sanders and Boyd as being purveyors of a new view of God. The editorial commented:

"Such a God, this theology argues, does not exist in changeless perfection outside of time, but must rather take risks by engaging his lost creatures in truly mutual relationships that have no guaranteed outcomes. Thus God does not genuinely know the future, and he actually changes his mind when shifting situations demand it."³³

The CT article further says that Process teachers "psychologize God." It seems that God in the finite godism view is more the Wizard of Oz than Jehovah Elohim, the great I Am. Others that subscribe to this new view are Adventist Richard Rice (his book is titled, *The Openness of God*), Stephen Davis and Anthony Kenny.

As we will see, the problem with this new "theology" is not theology at all but hermeneutics and presuppositions — the selected Scriptures and literalization of those passages that prop up the premise. Its exponents fail to recognize that while God may use figures, metaphors and human analogies to speak of Himself to help our understanding, it does not change His essential being.

Boyd himself answers the question regarding the verses that speak of God "changing" or "repenting" or "regretting":

"The Bible sometimes uses figures of speech that portray God in human terms (anthropomorphisms). ... Classical theism largely relies on the understanding that all passages describing God as changing are anthropomorphic."³⁴

Boyd's teaching is not new. It has a history and roots outside of evangelicalism that can be traced to the early 1800s and names like Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, who have been described as "considering experience as the ultimate court of appeal."³⁵

Technically, Whitehead and Hartshorne teach what has been labeled panentheism. Boyd's view is a close cousin, though he would deny it and tries to distance himself from it. However, from our perspective, Boyd's ideas are a move toward panentheism or at least a modified and Christianized version. It lies somewhere between panentheism and classical Theism.

This teaching has been called "Finite Godism," "Processianism," "Open God Thought," "Openness of God view" and "Free Will Theism" but is most often referred to as "Process theology." Dr. Robert Morey explains the overall views of Process theology:

"Process theology (or processianism) teaches that the infinite God of historic Christianity is a myth. In its place is erected a finite god who is incapable of knowing or controlling the future because he is not omniscient, omnipotent, perfect, immutable, or, in some cases, omnipresent. The finite god of processianism is trapped in a chance-driven universe that is out of his control. He himself is caught up in an ongoing process and is evolving in his nature toward an unknown future. Only time will tell what this god will end up being."³⁶

Boyd no doubt would not want to be referred to as a Process theologian since, for now, he only redefines omniscience and foreknowledge and not the other omni-attributes of God.

Boyd erects the old straw man that classical Theism is just a product of Plato and Greek thought. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Morey dispels the myth propagated by Process theology that Classical Theism is "Greek thought," since the opposite is true:

"And, indeed, it will take a great deal of imagination to picture Moses and the prophets learning about God from the Greek philosophers who were not even born until hundreds of years later!"³⁷

It was the Greeks who had growing and emerging gods.

We must never forget the truth and reality that Greek gods and goddesses were processing, discovering, growing and learning.

The Greeks may have looked for an unchanging metaphysical principle but they never identified it with God. Dr. Norman Geisler reminds us that an unchanging God "was the unique Judeo-Christian contribution to philosophy of religion."³⁸

God is remolded and redefined in Process theology. Philosophically it applies evolution to everything in the universe, including God. Whitehead dealt in speculative philosophical metaphysical interpretations about personal identity, teaching that since identity is formed by changing relationships and growing experiences, God's identity must be formed the same way. Hartshorne seemed to say that the word "perfect" had to be redefined as a sort of progressive perfection.³⁹

Geisler further explains the presuppositions of Process theology:

"Hence the world and God are mutually dependent. Moreover, the creatures in the universe contribute value to God's life. The inclusive aim or goal of all creatures is to enrich God's happiness and thus help him fulfill what he lacks. ... God is a cosmic Sympathizer rather than a cosmic Activist."⁴⁰

Boyd's *God of the Possible* is not his first attempt to launch Process theology and give it credibility. His 1992 book, *Trinity and Process: A Critical Evaluation and Reconstruction of Hartshorne's Di-Polar Theism Towards a Trinitarian Metaphysics* (Peter Lang Publishers) was an attempt to refashion Hartshorne's di-polar theism into a more palatable form and create a Trinitarian metaphysics, as his long subtitle explains. Using Hartshorne as a basis, which is questionable, Boyd corrects those things he feels are in error in Hartshorne's system and tries to develop a more Christianized construct. He nuances and reshapes to create a more biblically palatable end-product.

Boyd's early book was panned by Christian Research Institute. The re-

view described Hartshorne as "the most forceful contemporary critic of classical Christianity."⁴¹ In the CRI piece, reviewer William Watkins weaves methodically through Boyd's almost incomprehensible meanderings and metaphysics of God as an ongoing event and temporal — one who is surprised by the free acts of His people. While some have branded Boyd's position as heretical,⁴² Watkins takes a kinder view:

"And even though I find TP's [*Trinity and Process*] revised view of God seriously confused (is God infinite or finite?), I do not believe it can fairly be labeled heretical. It should rather be considered aberrant, in a class with the 'open God' of Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, and others."⁴³

Early in 1993, PFO shared a similar point of view to that of Watkins. It was our opinion that Boyd's *Trinity and Process* was cumbersome, philosophical and easily misunderstood. The manuscript was difficult to read. Because of all these dynamics, at that time, we thought it not to be unorthodox. However, in light of the now more clear-cut declarations of his latest work which brings his premise down to a layman's understanding, it can be stated without qualification his view is clearly unorthodox.

John Piper, a colleague of Boyd in the Baptist General Conference, does not take the softer view of Watkins but says Process theology is:

"Not Historic, Orthodox Christianity ... what I cannot do is treat this view as though it belonged to historic, orthodox Christianity, much less biblical evangelicalism. It is a profoundly defective view of God and therefore will lead, if not checked, to the uprooting of true delight in God and the depreciation of his glory."⁴⁴

Piper continues:

"Jonathan Edwards shared this negative assessment of the denial of God's exhaustive definite foreknowledge, and therefore devoted a major section of his greatest book, *The Freedom of the Will*, to the defense of God's

foreknowledge of moral choices. The title of that section is, 'The Evidence of God's Certain Foreknowledge of the Volitions of Moral Agents.' Paul Ramsey, the editor of this volume of Edwards' Works explains Edwards' driving motive: 'Into the writing of [*The Freedom of the Will*] he poured all his intellectual acumen, coupled with a passionate conviction that *the decay to be observed in the religion and morals followed the decline in doctrine since the founding of New England*. In other words, doctrine matters for life and worship. Edwards believed passionately that a defective doctrine of God would, in the end, destroy delight in God and devotion to God. And above all, this meant that the glory of God would be lost in the church and in the world.'⁴⁵

Idolatry, which is the creation of other gods, is not looked on as just aberrant in Scripture but is seen as heresy and gross violation of the First Commandment. Israel suffered great judgments for distorting Yahweh's true nature and character. They were to have no other gods before Him.

In a startling move (May 19, 1998), Bethel College and Seminary, Boyd's employer, issued a statement paper from their Committee for Theological Clarification and Assessment saying that Open View Theology "is within the bounds of evangelical Christian orthodoxy and compatible with the theological commitments expected of faculty members at Bethel."⁴⁶

The framers of this resolution say they do not agree with Boyd's views but can live with them. It remains to be seen if this explosive and critical issue will split the Baptist General Conference. They apparently have succumbed to Boyd's appeal for love and no division. Boyd, in his book, applauds the "irenic leadership" of "Jay Barnes, provost of Bethel College, and Truett Lawson, executive pastor of the Minnesota Baptist Conference."⁴⁷

Robert Strimple shows that Process thought is a rehashing of the old Socinian heresy and says of this

movement that had been rejected by the Church: "Socinianism also held to a heretical doctrine of God."⁴⁸ Strimple says also that God's complete and infallible omniscience (perfectly knowing past, present and future) was a "universally held Christian doctrine."⁴⁹

R.K. McGregor Wright levels his guns at Process theology:

"Finite godism is just another variety of pagan idolatry, while a 'Christian' finite godism is just a form of syncretism, the fruit of intellectual worldliness, of abasement before the spirit of modernity as it appears in successive ages."⁵⁰

The further gist of Boyd's argument is that there are Scriptures that say God knows the future perfectly and exhaustively⁵¹ and then there are Scriptures that seem to indicate that He does not, but "repents" and "changes His mind" and so forth.

Boyd concludes that both sets of Scripture are true and the answer to the dilemma is that there are some things God knows exhaustively and perfectly and there are some things He does not. God has perfect knowledge about certain things but not others.

Boyd concludes that both sets of Scripture are literal;⁵² therefore God must know some future things or is at least pretty sure of them or makes sure those things happen one way or the other.

Then, in a strange contradiction of his own premise, Boyd argues that even the settled part of the future that God knows for sure, is not settled:

"Thus, even when the Lord announces that some aspect of the future is settled, it may still be alterable. The 'settledness' may be conditioned on unsettled factors, such as decisions we make. What this shows us is that not only is part of the future open, but also some aspects of the future that God has announced as settled are to some extent open. God's mind can yet be changed, a biblical truth that is difficult to square with the classi-

cal view of divine foreknowledge."⁵³

The heading on this is "The Openness of Biblical Prophecy," which means that Boyd believes God's prophecies can fail or be wrong. This leaves us absolutely nowhere and God at the mercy of our decisions.

The deep dilemma Boyd creates is that the test of a true prophet in Deuteronomy 18:22 could not be valid. A God of limited omniscience makes it impossible to test a prophet for accuracy.

Boyd moves on to bolster his view of prophecy from physics and social science,⁵⁴ but ends up making statements that are not much more than educated guesses. He says that "God knows the character of Satan well enough to predict some of his strategy at the end of the age when he releases his fury one final time."⁵⁵ So God "predicts" things about Satan based on Satan's character. It is an informed projection.

Even Peter's denial was based on "one very predictable aspect of Peter's character."⁵⁶ This hardly answers the question of how Jesus could simply predict the exact time of a rooster crowing three times since the foreknown timing has nothing to do with animal proclivities but absolute certainties about the future and its details.

One of the other major elements in Boyd's overall argument is even less convincing: the idea that God could not know a future that has not happened since it has no reality yet (at least to us).

A God who cannot know a future that has not happened for us cannot have knowledge of any part of the future. Boyd's view here demolishes all he has said about God knowing some of the future. Boyd will try to pose that God is committed to try to make it happen but that is effort, not knowledge.

Boyd then falls back on the idea that God has knowledge of all the possibilities (hence his book's title, *God of the Possible*), therefore cannot ever be taken by surprise.⁵⁷ Boyd offers that God infallibly knows possibilities.

That is of little help to us. If I knew someone could get from the 25th floor of an office building to the ground level either by elevator, taking the stairs, climbing down a rope out of a window, being rescued by firefighters, jumping off the roof or out of a window, or carried out dead by paramedics, I still would be surprised by several of these choices. My awareness of all the combinations does little to prepare me to deal with the worst if it occurs.

Multiply that by the billions of people with billions of possibilities and it makes little sense to offer that knowing possibilities means much at all. Possibilities are just that. They are not certainties.

Boyd declares that an open view of providence is simply "choose your own adventure" stories.⁵⁸ Read what Thiessen has to say in his *Introductory Lessons in Systematic Theology*:

"Etymologically the word 'providence' means *foreseeing*. From this basic idea has developed the meaning of foreseeing, or providing for the future. But in theology the word has received a more specialized meaning. In this field providence means that continuous activity of God whereby He makes all the events of the physical, mental, and moral phenomena work out His purposes; and that this purpose is nothing short of the original design of God in creation. To be sure, evil has entered the universe; but it is not allowed to thwart God's original, benevolent, wise, and holy purpose."⁵⁹

Boyd floats the premise that God could not have known in advance about the evil that would be committed by Adolph Hitler: "this was not foreknown as a certainty at the time God created Hitler."⁶⁰ Boyd thinks he has rescued God from bad press and helped with some resolution of the problem of evil. He has done no such thing but only pushed the problem up a bit.

Boyd still has to answer the glaring question left, which is, after God did find out what Hitler *was doing* already in the late 1930s and early 1940s —

why didn't He put an immediate stop to it when He discovered it? After all, Boyd tells us "He is 'there' when the information originates."⁶¹ Boyd has not rescued God, even though he says his view "makes more intellectual sense" and has the "ring of truth."⁶² We think not.⁶³

Boyd should have taken his own advice when it comes to mysteries about God:

"Even if this is a mystery to us, it is better to allow the mystery to stand than to assume that we know what God's wisdom is like and conclude on this basis that God can't mean what he clearly says."⁶⁴

Boyd may have abandoned classical Theism and may want us to abandon it, too, but he does not have a viable alternative to offer.

THE PARALLELS OF NEOTHEISM

Boyd suggests that there have been a few scattered people in Church history who shared his view, though he offers little documentation.⁶⁵ What he fails to mention are the liberals and cult groups who hold to finite godism.

It is troubling that the God of possibilities is much like the god of the cults. In fact, the caricature of God in Process theology mirrors cultic teaching. Morey explains:

"Now the reader may be thinking that only some far-out cultist would believe in such a god. In fact, this used to be the case. Beyond the secular philosophers, the Jehovah's Witnesses have been the most aggressive religious body to teach openly the concept that God does not know the future and thus he is not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. The concept of a finite god or gods is also a part of Mormonism, Armstrongism, and frequently appears in New Age material. What is little known is that since the turn of the century mainline liberal universities, colleges, and seminaries have been teaching a finite god. Alfred North Whitehead at Harvard (Unitarian) and John Brightman

at Boston University (United Methodist) are examples of this."⁶⁶

Consider the words of Mormon church founder Joseph Smith:

*"It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible. ... and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one."*⁶⁷

The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that God chooses not to know certain things and thereby limits Himself in His knowledge of the future.⁶⁸ The logical inconsistency of the Jehovah's Witnesses' position is that if God plans not to know certain events, He must have known all events from the beginning as a reference point for His choice. If He knows what events He does not want to know, then He knows them all.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also teach that God gets knowledge from His angels, who gather information for Him.⁶⁹ They further teach that God did not know Adam and Eve would fall.⁷⁰

In a Dilbert cartoon, Dilbert's cat says: "Dilbert, you've become too aware of reality. I'm sending you to 'cynics anonymous.' A higher power will help you regain the naive optimism that once made you a perfect employee." Dilbert then asks: "Why can't the higher power change me while I'm sitting here?" His cat responds: "Fluorescent lights block His power." Sounds silly (and it is intended to be) but the Dilbert cartoon is simply presenting the idea of a limited God.

Boyd seems to hold to the idea that there is only one way of knowing the future, that is, the way we as humans know it. Since there is only one basic

way of knowing the future, that must be the way in which God knows it; that is, sequentially or one current moment at a time. We have reason to question that idea because Isaiah tells us that God's "thoughts are not our thoughts" (55:9). We have at least the suggestion that God does not think exactly like we think.

Further, 2 Peter 3:8 reminds us "that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." If nothing else, Peter is telling us that God is not time-bound. God does not relate to or experience time as we do.

Boyd's own position at many points (the suggestion that God may know at least some of the future) demands that God knows in a totally different way from the way we do. If He knows any of the future, that is much more than a human knowing.

Boyd's proposition is that if God knows the future, it somehow negates free choice or freedom to choose. One proposition does not follow the other as Geisler shows:

"Since God is an omniscient being, he knows with *certainty* what we will do *freely*. ... So, God does not have to wait to see what will happen. He knows it eternally in his eternal mind. Hence, his knowledge is not dependent on it happening (as Molinists claim). A totally independent being cannot be dependent on anything. And since God's knowledge is one with his eternal and independent mind, it follows that God knows everything that will yet be (to us) within his eternal and unchangeable essence. ... from God's perspective (since he knows the future infallibly) every thing is certain. But as noted above, this does not mean that from the human standpoint these actions are not chosen freely. It is simply that God knew for *certain* how they would *freely* exercise their choice."⁷¹

All through Jewish history, the Old Testament Jews did not ever think that God's perfect foreknowledge inhibited free choice. As George Foot Moore observes, "The sententious

words of Akiba are familiar: 'Everything is foreseen (by God), and freedom of choice is given (to man).'"⁷²

Strimple affirms:

"The Bible never presents the fact that God orders all things according to the purpose of His sovereign will as a threat to human freedom. Rice and Pinnock see a great tension, even an impossible contradiction, between any affirmation of God's sovereign foreordination and an affirmation of man's true freedom. The Bible does not. The insistence by these 'free-will theists' that there is an irrational tension here — and thus we must choose which truth we shall affirm, God's absolute sovereignty or genuine human freedom — strangely echoes the concern that has been the driving motivation of modern atheism, whether in Ludwig Feuerbach (who influenced Karl Marx so strongly) or in Friedrich Nietzsche or in twentieth-century existentialist Jean Paul Sartre. We might call this a seesaw (teeter-totter) conception: if humans are to 'go up' (be recognized for all that they are, as significant and valuable), then God must 'go down.' God is viewed by such thinkers as the greatest imaginable threat to the dignity and freedom of man. But the biblical perspective is diametrically opposed to that notion."⁷³

Boyd may be overreacting to hyper-Calvinism and jumping to the opposite extreme.

Boyd appeals to Methodist expositor Adam Clarke as one who "espoused, in one form or another" the openness view.⁷⁴ The best that could be said about Clarke, at least at this point, is that he was extremely contradictory. In discussing foreknowledge and omniscience, Clarke, the normally consistent Arminian, makes two conflicting points.

Clarke stated that "Omniscience, or the *power to know all things*, is an attribute of God."⁷⁵ In a cumbersome argument, Clarke proposed that there can be no foreknowledge, strictly

speaking, since God dwells in eternity living in futurity. All past, present and future are the same to God. When we speak of future or past, Clarke says these are relative terms which "can have no relation to that God who dwells in every point of eternity; with whom all that is *past*, and all that is *present*, and all that is *future* to man, exists in one infinite, indivisible, and eternal NOW. ... God's *omniscience* implies his *power to know all things*."⁷⁶

Then Clarke begins to mire himself in contradiction to try to save his view of man as a free agent. His argument is that God, who is omnipotent, does not always exercise omnipotence. God who is omniscient, in Clarke's view, does not always exercise omniscience. God is not obliged to do all He can do, therefore He is not obliged to know all He can know. God, in Clarke's scheme, ordains certain things that are absolute and unalterable and ordains certain things as contingent and leaves them up to man's decision.

Yet Clarke quotes from Bird's Conferences: "God doth necessarily foreknow all that will be done. ... God indeed foreknoweth all things, because they will be done; but things are not (therefore) done, because he foreknoweth them."⁷⁷ It seems we can choose which side of Clarke we want.

THE PERILS OF NEOTHEISM

We can believe what the Bible says about God's ability to know all things — even things in the future. Isaiah 25:1 tells us that God's "counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." Those counsels tell us that God is all knowing as in Psalm 147:5, "His understanding is infinite" and 1 John 3:20, "God knows all things." We are reminded in Acts 15:18, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Because man is one of His works we can conclude He knows all about us from the beginning of the world.

To propose, as Boyd does, that God knows what He will do — but not what we will do — is an outright denial of biblical teaching. If God were limited in knowledge as to our choices, there would be precious little

He could know.

Limited knowledge on God's part, as we have noted, belonged to Socinianism, liberalism and cults for the most part. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God's knowledge is limited, rather the opposite. We believe that Boyd is trying to rob us of a true picture of the true God. Talking of God as "open" is just a euphemism for limited.

This is not a debate between Calvinists and Arminians, since both have always held to God's perfect, complete and comprehensive foreknowledge. Foreknowledge to both camps meant all knowledge perfectly: past, present and future.

God knew what Pharaoh would do (Exodus 3:19; 7:14; 9:30; 11:19). The future of King Cyrus was given by God (Isaiah 40:28). Jesus knew exactly what Judas would do (John 6:64). He knew what Peter would do in every detail (Mark 14:30; John 21:18-19). He described the destruction of the Temple (Matthew 24), so He knew what the Romans would do. Jesus based the claims of His deity on the fact that He had knowledge of the future, "From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am" (John 13:19). No prophecy, no deity. Prophecy demands perfect foreknowledge. There is not a hint of contingency in the New Testament and it is only by literalizing non-literal material in the Old Testament that we can suggest a limited God.

The denial of any of the omnibuttributes of God results in not only serious problems but also devastating loss for the Church. Consider the results of dropping or compromising even one of the omni-passages from Scripture:

• *Disregard for our rich heritage.* All the rich creeds that reflect good theology would have to be trashed or rewritten. Now we must abandon most of the Church Fathers as being ignorant. Now we must ignore the Reformation along with Luther, Calvin, Melancthon and all the others. Now we must sneer at Puritans, and men such as Spurgeon, Whitefield and Edwards. How high-minded and

proud we have become when we destroy the foundation of 2000 years of Church history and profess to know more than all who went before us.

Our church history books have to be trashed, along with most doctrine and theology books. All of our major seminaries and Bible colleges would have to throw away much of their curriculum since it is based on outdated teaching. We could only keep the old textbooks as odd curiosities filled with errors.

• *Disillusionment with the Church's teaching and its hymnody.* No longer can we teach and sing, "How Great Thou Art." No longer can we sing with assurance: "I know who holds the future." No longer can we sing: "Holy Holy Holy, Lord God Almighty," since he is not *All-Mighty*. We now share His "say-so." Our hymnbooks would have to be radically revised if not abandoned.

Men in the pulpit and missionaries who continued to spread the "misguided" and misinformed error of classical Theism would have to be just tolerated or perhaps removed. The new breed of "finite god" teachers would have to try to give comfort to those who could no longer have faith in the pages of the Bible or in a God who was all wise and incomprehensible, knowing the end from the beginning. They could offer no substitutes — only possibilities.

• *Delusion as to who we are.* To bring God down changes the way we view everything in life. The ramifications for understanding man would be mind boggling. Morey explains:

"In short, as long as God is viewed as infinite, the idea that a finite creature is or can become equal to God is impossible. But what if God is reduced to a finite, imperfect, fallible being? What if it is claimed that God is no different from any other finite, imperfect, fallible being, angelic or human? What if God is limited by the space-time universe in the same ways as all other finite creatures? The creature can then begin to entertain delusions of grandeur that he can be or is equal to God."⁷⁸

Endnotes:

1. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2000, pg. 127.
2. Romans 1:22-23.
3. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 120.
4. Ibid., pg. 75, emphasis in original.
5. Ibid., pg. 105.
6. Ibid., pp. 53-54, emphasis in original.
7. Ibid., pg. 64, emphasis in original.
8. Ibid., pg. 58.
9. Ibid., pp. 57-58.
10. John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1951, pg. 57.
11. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 8.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., pp. 18, 130, 93.
14. Ibid., pg. 94, emphasis in original.
15. See for example, W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pp. 499-501.
16. Everett F. Harrison, editor, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960, pg. 257.
17. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 9.
18. Ibid., pg. 30.
19. Ibid., pg. 153.
20. Ibid., pp. 8, 9.
21. Ibid., pg. 115.
22. Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentaries*. New York: Abington Press, no date, Vol. 2, pg. 549, italic in original.
23. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 75, emphasis in original.
24. Ibid., pg. 171, footnote 2, emphasis in original.
25. Ibid., footnote 5, emphasis in original.
26. William Evans, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, pg. 35.
27. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952, pg. 127.
28. James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. Escondido, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Gospel Foundation, 1887, pg. 73.
29. Ibid., pp. 73-74, italics in original.
30. G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980, pg. 23, note added.
31. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 10, emphasis in original.
32. Ibid., pg. 97.
33. *Christianity Today*, Feb. 7, 2000, pp. 34-35.
34. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 118.
35. Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990, pg. 945.
36. Robert A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods*. Southbridge, Mass.: Crown Publications, Inc., 1989, pg. 9.
37. Ibid., pg. 216.

38. Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997, pg. 96.
 39. See further, *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, op. cit., pg. 946.
 40. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1999, pg. 577.
 41. William Watkins, *Christian Research Journal*, "A Summary Critique," Fall 1993, pg. 43.
 42. Ronald Nash calls Process theology a dangerous heresy and in a phone conversation (2/4/00) with this author, Dr. Jay Adams branded Process theology as heresy.
 43. Watkins, "A Summary Critique," op. cit., pg. 44.
 44. John Piper, "Is the Glory of God at Stake in God's Foreknowledge of Human Choices? Jonathan Edwards' Response to Gregory Boyd," July 1998. This article is available on Desiring God Ministries web site (<http://www.desiringgod.org>).
 45. Ibid., italic in original.
 46. "God, Foreknowledge and the Baptist General Conference." This multi-page document is available online at: <http://www.opentheism.org/resolution.htm>

47. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 9.
 48. John Armstrong, editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, pg. 140.
 49. Ibid., pg. 139.
 50. R.K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996, pg. 226.
 51. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 53.
 52. Ibid., pg. 54.
 53. Ibid., pg. 44.
 54. Ibid., pp. 45-46.
 55. Ibid., pg. 49.
 56. Ibid., pg. 35.
 57. Ibid., pg. 61.
 58. Ibid., pg. 43.
 59. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*, op. cit., pg. 177.
 60. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 98.
 61. Ibid., pg. 133.
 62. Ibid., pp. 90-91.
 63. For a more balanced view of sin, suffering and evil, we recommend the following: *The Power of Suffering* by John MacArthur, *As Silver Refined* by Kay Arthur, *When God Weeps* by Joni Eareckson Tada and *Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?* by Martin R. DeHaan II.
 64. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 57.

65. Ibid., pg. 115.
 66. *Battle of the Gods*, op. cit., pg. 10.
 67. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, pp. 345-347, italics in original.
 68. See for example, "Foreknowledge, Foreordination," *Insight on the Scriptures*. Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Vol. 1, 1988, pp. 851-860.
 69. See *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1970, pg. 471.
 70. See *The Watchtower*, June 1, 1953, pg. 341.
 71. *Creating God in the Image of Man?*, op. cit., pp. 108, 111, 133, emphasis in original.
 72. George Foot Moore, *Judaism*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Vol. 1, 1960, pg. 455.
 73. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, op. cit., pg. 142.
 74. *God of the Possible*, op. cit., pg. 115.
 75. *Clarke's Commentaries*, op. cit., Vol 5, pg. 702, emphasis in original.
 76. Ibid., emphasis in original.
 77. Ibid., pg. 703.
 78. *Battle of the Gods*, op. cit., pg. 18.

CAN YOU BE DECEIVED?

(continued from page 1)

"Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; They have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions."

It seems that for many complex reasons, one of which is the spurious idea of ongoing revelation (along with a diminished view of the sufficiency of the Bible), many people are predisposed to credulity. That is, they are gullible and likely ready to believe anything even on very slight evidence or sometimes with no evidence at all. Testimonials and dramatic stories sell.

The Bible does not go into a lot of intricate detail as to the psychology of deception; it does not have to. What it does is give us warning about its reality and specific instruction on how to deal with it.

The words deceit, deceitful, deceitfully, deceitfulness, deceive, and deceptibility are used again and again

in the Bible. It is one of the major themes. There are warnings everywhere in Scripture about being deceived. There are numerous warnings about the users and purveyors of deceit. The underlying Greek words for deceit cover everything from self-deceit to the practice of deceit by unprincipled religious teachers and con artists. So we are warned repeatedly and must be ready (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-14).

Deceit is defined as:

"1. The act of representing as true what is known to be false; a deceiving or lying. 2. a dishonest action or trick; fraud or lie. 3. the quality of being deceitful."²

British scholar W.E. Vine defines the Greek words *apate* and *dolos* that underlie the various English words for deceit:

"APATE ... to cheat, deceive, beguile, that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement or influence ... In Col. 2:8, 'vain deceit' suggests that deceit is void of anything

profitable. ... DOLOS ... primarily a bait, snare; hence, craft, deceit, guile."³

UNHOLY WATER

Fiction writer Robert Rosenberg captures the concept of deceit in his first mystery novel, *Crimes of the City*. Detective Avram Cohen is the lead character and is investigating the murder of two nuns in Ein Kerem, west of Jerusalem. A Messianic rabbi, Ovadia, who is using his religious influence to cover drug running, is described by Cohen:

"The only real difference seems to be that he figured out that if he calls it religion, he can get away with things. He's playing the saint, selling blessed water from a faucet."⁴

So, deceitful men get away with things under the guise of religion and playing the saint while they sell worthless panaceas. Years ago we would call them "snake oil salesmen."

To help us in our study, first we need to see...

THE REALITY OF DECEPTION

Y2K scams proliferated and people were being bilked out of money through the selling of fear and paranoia. Internet myths are being circulated and are growing like fungus. One can be "ordained" over the Internet for no charge in 20 seconds. And, for what it is worth, there is an assortment of "degrees" that you can purchase. The myth that U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno promoted (on the news program *60 Minutes*) a definition of "cult" that included evangelical believers was actually believed and proliferated even though it has been debunked. For the last 25-plus years, PFO has and continues to get pleas in regard to the bogus Madalyn Murray O'Hair/FCC petition. Other FCC stories continue to mutate and circulate.

The vanishing hitchhiker is still showing up regularly in evangelists' stories. And then there's the missing day, hell found and tape recorded in a Siberia cavern and, let's not forget, Procter and Gamble's sellout to Satan. All of these reports are still making the rounds. Rumors are fascinating and they do sell. There are so many myths and urban legends that retired English professor Jan Harold Brunvand has put together, *The Colossal Book of Urban Legends* with the main title being, "Too Good To Be True." Myth-debunking has spawned a whole industry for that genre of books.

The title of a new study of urban legends by Brunvand (and published by the University of Illinois Press) really underscores the susceptibility to hearsay: "The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story!"

Charismatics in Toronto (and elsewhere) are passing off as gold what has tested out to be cheap glitter. Also there has been the planting of feathers that are claimed to be the work of angels. Hokey pictures — and just plain bad photography — with fire superimposed on crowds of people is supposed to prove the new "baptism of fire."

Even heartwarming stories from seemingly sincere men can be used to

deceive. Paul warned us: "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

IT'S IN THE BOOK — A LOT

Remember that Satan duped Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3). The Israelites followed the impostor Korah to their own destruction (Numbers 16). Saul was drawn in and deceived by the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). Jeremiah warned of false and wicked "shepherds" who would deceive and destroy the sheep (Jeremiah 23). We can be easily seduced if we do not hold on to and really know God's Word.

Kathryn Lindskoog has astutely commented that "Some Protestants love any heartwarming stories that seem to authenticate the Bible, whether they are true or not."⁵ There is no end of undocumented stories and claims by modern pied pipers.

There are so many Christian myths and urban legends accepted as fact in the Church that it is embarrassing. In some instances they are harmless, in other instances they are costly and even deadly. However, the world looks at the gullibility and silliness of some professing Christians and mocks. We lose the battle because of the effects of our being deceived and looking ridiculous.

The Old Testament constantly exposes the cons. We are shown the magicians in Moses' day who could fake the miracles of Moses (up to a point, Exodus 8 and 2 Timothy 3). Jacob's tricking and scheming are laid out. Laban is exposed. In Isaiah 30:10 the people cried: "prophesy illusions."

The book of Proverbs warns again and again about deceit, false balances, being taken in by deception whether in the moral realm, or the everyday realm of life and practical living. The Bible repeatedly insists on truth, calls us to truth, demands truth.

Jesus in Matthew 7:15 warns of false prophets and Paul in Acts 20:29-30 warns about "grievous wolves" who will not spare the flock.

WHOPPERS DELUXE

The deceivers are getting more shameless all the time. Inner-City Christian Discernment Ministry reports on Rod Parsley's "Whopper." Parsley sent his constituents a letter dated April 2, 1999, in which he claimed to heal a man of full-blown AIDS. No name, address or documentation was given. It was just a tall tale.

Joan Gieson, who served for many years at Benny Hinn Miracle Crusades doing stage introductions of the "healed," reported at one of Hinn's meetings that the woman on stage had been thrown out of a automobile, hit by three cars, run over by a tractor trailer, was taken to the morgue, marked DOA with a tag put on her big toe. The lady stood there looking like she was in a drug stupor. No documentation, proof or medical records were offered — just wild claims.

Marilyn Hickey is selling anointed red rubber bands to wear on the wrist for seven days for only \$10.00. In the past she has offered blessed pennies, miracle carrot seeds and magical healing cloths. It is a travesty.

Former "signs and wonders" leg lengthener, C. Peter Wagner, reports stories that in Argentina people lose large amounts of weight in the meetings and that bald men grow hair. Again no proof, no documentation, no witnesses, no specimens. We are told if we do prayer walks, demons will flee out of their geographical strongholds. If this was true the demon busters could have taken back all the ZIP codes from Satan years ago.

IT JUST IS NOT WORKING!

Inner-City Christian Discernment Ministry has also posted information on just how physically sick modern healers get. These healers also regularly seek medical attention for themselves and their family. It is one of their best-kept secrets although the facts are slowly leaking out.

In ICCDM's report entitled "It's Not Working For Them Either!" they chronicle:

• the deaths of John Wimber and his son Chris, both of whom died of cancer;

• E.W. Kenyon died in a coma with a malignant tumor;

• John Osteen sought medical help for his wife Dodie's cancer;

• Word-Faith publisher Buddy Harrison died of cancer;

• Fred Price got chemotherapy for his wife. He did not name it and claim it.

Further, ICCDM reminds us that Jamie Buckingham died of cancer and Charles Capps' wife got medical treatment for her cancer, as did Joyce Meyer. Mack Timberlake is getting medical attention for throat cancer and healer R.W. Shambach, who regularly tells his gullible followers, "You don't have any problems, all you need is faith in God," has had a quadruple bypass. Add to that, Prophet Keith Grayton who died of AIDS complications, Kenneth Hagin's sister who died of cancer, Hagin's wife who was operated on and Hagin himself who wears glasses and you begin to see the hypocrisy.

The list goes on and on. Kathryn Kuhlman died of heart disease. A.A. Allen died from alcohol abuse and Aimee Semple McPherson died from an overdose of barbiturates. John Lake died of a stroke and Gordon Lindsey of a heart condition. Daisy Osborn died of cancer that she claimed was healed. How does one explain this since all the above claim healing powers and special visitations from God? Self-deluded? Or just deluding others?

What about the other "miracle workers"? Robert Tilton dealt with lawsuits, lies and divorces while he collected millions. Peter Popoff was exposed by the secular world as a fraud when it was revealed his "words of knowledge" were received through an electronic earpiece. Leroy Jenkins was convicted for tax fraud. Jimmy Swaggert is a serial adulterer and multimillionaire. W.V. Grant was jailed for tax fraud and has divorced his wife. The world of televangelists is a sick, dysfunctional and sinful world.

These people claim that they have seen Jesus, seen angels, have extraordinary powers, are the anointed of God and the recipients of direct revelation. *Charisma* magazine touts them as Christian leaders, apostles and miracle workers and tries to give them credibility through smoke and mirrors using fantastic stories, unproven claims and slick advertisements. It is such a sham. Based on the above it should not be hard for the reader to decide what is really going on.

REAL JEWELS

Kathryn Kuhlman gave false hope, which is worse than no hope at all. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada recounts her experiences:

"And so, when I was released from the hospital, my friends would drive me to Washington, D.C., so I could be first in line at the door whenever the famous faith-healer, Kathryn Kuhlman, came to town. Miss Kuhlman breezed onto the stage in her white gown, and my heart raced as I prayed, *Lord, the Bible says you heal all our diseases. I'm ready for you to get me out of this wheelchair. Please would you?*"⁶

Tada goes on:

"God answered: I never walked away from my chair. The last time I wheeled away from a Kathryn Kuhlman crusade, I was number fifteen in a line of thirty wheelchair-users waiting to exit at the stadium elevator, all of us trying to make a fast escape ahead of the people on crutches. I remember glancing around at all the disappointed and confused people and thinking, *Something's wrong with this picture. Is this the only way to deal with suffering? Trying to desperately remove it?*"⁷

Wheelchairs in a meeting are incredible props and powerful symbolic tools even if nothing happens. They create great effect for healers. W.V. Grant used to truck them in for effect. In Canada, architects have hung them on the pillars at St. Anne's Church in perfect symmetry.

When the chips are down, the "biggest" names don't come through — Oral Roberts prayed for Kathryn Kuhlman in the hospital twice. She was resuscitated by hospital staff twice but the enlarged heart she carried for more than 20 years finally gave out. Kuhlman pulled in an income of \$1 million a year and died with a vault full of jewels.⁸ Joni Eareckson Tada will get her jewels in heaven.

Tada shares the sad aftermath of the healing crusades:

"I wonder how many of those sullen-faced folks at the elevator after the healing crusade still believe in God? That was almost thirty years ago. Are they still waiting in line? Still hoping? 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick,' and a heart can break only so many times."⁹

Faith healer Benny Hinn, who claims to receive "anointings" at the grave sites of Kuhlman and McPherson, has fostered deceptions that are crass and blatant but very well-documented. His claims of surviving a plane crash unscathed do not match up with the law enforcement report which details the accident. The heroin-overdose deaths within his own organization show his impotence. His constant threats of lawsuits and cursing of detractors' children show his spiritual bankruptcy. His claims of raising the dead have all been shown to be lies.

The banter can even turn rude, crude, vile and vulgar. Take the comments of Hinn's wife, Suzanne, who is now "ministering" with her husband: "You need a Holy Ghost enema," she told her former Orlando congregation. The rest we will leave out. Shortly after that she charged back and forth across the stage hollering into the microphone and did a big belly flop on stage to the howling delight of her audience.

Clips of the above were run on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* for all the world to see and ridicule.¹⁰ It has provided Hinn with another black monetary hole of legal expenses in his empty threats of lawsuits against the

network and *The Daily Show* producers. It gives every Christian a bad name.

According to 1 Timothy 3:4-5, an elder is to rule his house well. If he cannot rule his house, he cannot rule the Church. At the very least Hinn could have his wife apologize, clean up her act and stop belly-flopping on stage.

How the shocking banter of Mrs. Hinn must grieve the Holy Spirit. Her husband at times has threatened those who disagree with him with suggestions that they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit. He even once called for a "Holy Ghost machine gun" to blow off the heads of his detractors. However, the suggestions of his wife may be very near blaspheming or at least seriously degrading and mocking the Holy Spirit. Yet there has not been an outcry from Hinn's following.

Is the Charismatic world getting so jaded that nothing shocks it any more? Hinn has gone from getting an anointing at graveyards to full-blown necromancy (added to his lies and false prophecies) and his crowds only get bigger.¹¹

One of the ways deception is promoted is by the terrible misuse and twisting of Scripture to try to shore up wild claims.

There has been a constant misuse of Jeremiah 31:22, "for the Lord has created a new thing in the earth." We have been told that each new excess is that "new thing." Holy laughter was described as the new thing. Various "revivals" and bodily manifestations were touted as the new thing. Some are claiming the new thing is yet to arrive.

CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

Invariably, cults spawn false doctrine by using proof texts out of context. Extremists were saying that revival was sweeping the land and we could expect to see anything because God was going to do a new thing. But just as Peter warned, they are twisting the Scriptures to say that the new thing is anything they pro-

claim it to be, no matter how wild or weird.

The "new thing" is foretold in Jeremiah 31:22. In verse 31, the "new thing" is clearly expounded and explained as follows, "Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel." So the new thing is *the New Covenant*.

Charismatic extremism, I believe, is trying to rob us of the new covenant. Keil and Delitzsch work out all the contextual nuances in the Hebrew text of Jeremiah 31 and conclude that the new thing is not some emotional experience, but that "Herein is expressed a new relation of Israel to the Lord, a reference to a new covenant which the Lord, ver. 31ff., will conclude with His people."¹²

The so-called "new thing" of frenzies, manifestations, spastic fits, and out-of-control emotions is, in fact, not new at all but a reproduction of bizarre behavior that cropped up in the Church periodically and was soundly condemned when it did. Whether it be the Camisard "prophets" of 1706 or the other outbreaks of the 18th century, strong words were used against the excesses and the Bible upheld as the only source of truth.¹³

Having seen the reality of deception we need to try to understand secondly, the roots of deception.

WHYS OF GULLIBILITY

Why are Christians so gullible and so prone to deception? What could possibly be behind it?

First, because the foundation of the Christian life is belief. However, that we can believe the wrong things is made abundantly clear by the Bible. We must know what we believe and why and that we are believing the right things. We cannot just believe anything. Our objects of faith must be God and His Word, not mere men or wild claims. Dr. Bruce Bickel reminds us:

"Too often what passes for unity is really compromise. It is better to be divided by truth than united in error."¹⁴

Second, the Christian is commanded to love. Love tends to be accepting and is willing to overlook. However, love that is not structured in truth is sentimentalism and is so wishy-washy it can be manipulated and led astray.

We cannot confuse love and emotionalism or love and feelings. Love is a commitment to truth and the highest good of others. Love does, as Scripture attests, "cover a multitude of sins."¹⁵ At times, that love means bringing a sinner back from the error of his ways.¹⁶ Love will not tolerate false teachings or lies which in the end hurt and destroy others. Biblical love insists on truth and true doctrine. Bickel has the correct take on love:

"Love, true love, cannot be divorced from truth. Scripture is quite clear that love rejoices in the truth! One cannot claim to love when one is not concerned about truth. The truth of Scripture must be the concern of one who truly loves."¹⁷

Third, we have a tendency to want to believe Christian leaders and Hebrews 13:7 indicates that generally we should. However the verse alerts us to be aware of their conduct as well. So it is not a blind following. Is the leadership we are following really modeling Christ and the Bible? Paul said we are to follow him "*as he followed Christ*." As commendable as it is to love and trust our leaders, we still have to be Bereans (Acts 17:11) and test *all* messages against Scripture. We do our leaders a great service by being mutually accountable. Leaders are vulnerable without the help and balance of others.

Fourth, we can be brainwashed by religious television and are being told that to question is "heresy hunting" or it is a "religious spirit" or "white cane religion" or a "Jezebel spirit" or worse. We are cowed by being threatened with the possibility of committing the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit even though we are just trying to be discerning. We should not be manipulated by a turning of the tables and a guilt trip laid on us for questioning heresy. We should not be

in a church where there is no accountability or church discipline. In that setting, unrepentant sinners and autocrats are “above the law.”

Regrettably, very little stress is being put on the gift of discernment. All Christians are called to be discerning. We must check things out (1 John 4:1-6). More credibility needs to be given to legitimate countercult organizations (and their struggle and sacrifice) so that “iron can sharpen iron.” Good apologetic groups not only expose error, they keep teaching truth and keep laying a good foundation of doctrine which is so desperately needed today.

Fifth, it is hard for us to believe or imagine that slick magazines such as *Charisma* could be peddling deception and that such wonderful ministries (as being advertised) could not be on the up and up. It is hard for us to believe that “Christian” bookstores could be part of the problem. It is hard for us to believe that all the money being made is the reason for the collusion (and the advancement of the wild and weird). It is amazing that books teaching occult doctrine are now being marketed as “Christian classics.”

Sixth, perverted and unbiblical views that forgiveness means we put up with and overlook everything, even ongoing sin and disgrace. The word “repentance” is being milked and used to justify all manner of evil. True repentance will issue out in biblical change (Matthew 3:8, Acts 26:20, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 indicate that continuing sin and false teaching is not to be dealt with by forgiveness (unless there is repentance) but by a process of church discipline with a view to restoration. Love covering a multitude of sin cannot be taken to mean that we dump our blankets in the cesspool rather than try to clean it up.

Seventh, there is an enemy of our souls who goes about like a “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8). Satan is a master deceiver and we are called to put on the armor of God and confront his reasonings and errors and bring our

thoughts into captivity and in alignment to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Albert Barnes says it so well:

“Every power of thought in the heathen world; all the systems of philosophy, and all forms of opinion among men; all the purposes of the soul; all the powers of reason, memory, judgment, fancy, in an individual, were all to come under the laws of Christ. All *doctrines* were to be in accordance with his will; philosophy should no longer control them, but they should be subject to the will of Christ. ... All the *emotions and feelings of the heart* should be controlled by him, and led by him as a captive is led by a victor. ... The strongholds of philosophy, heathenism, and sin should be demolished, and all the opinions, plans, and purposes of the world should become subject to the all-conquering Redeemer.”¹⁸

Eighth, the Scriptures predict there would be a departure from the faith because of seducing spirits and doctrines of demons and that people would opt for myths and fables over the truth (1 Timothy 4:1-2, 2 Timothy 4:1-4). Jesus warned of deception in Matthew 24:24.

Though this writer does not agree with everything Helmut Thielicke taught, his words at the end of World War II come to mind:

“In our time we have come far too much in contact with demonic powers, we have sensed and seen much too clearly how mysterious and abysmal forces have seduced people and entire movements and steered them [in a direction] they themselves did not desire; we have all too often observed how an alien spirit has taken hold of people who had perhaps been quite nice and reasonable before.”¹⁹

Ninth, because we are being conditioned by our culture and television, we have lost the ability to blush. Everything and anything is paraded before us in the media as being permissible for our mental diet. Mur-

der, immorality, shock radio, abuse, perversion — nothing is off-limits. Nothing shocks us or grieves us. Our culture is becoming satiated and dulled and we are affected. Young people are piercing, branding and mutilating their bodies. Some seek even vampirism as an option.

Some in the Charismatic world need still more frenzy, wilder manifestations and altered states of consciousness to satisfy and then they keep going back for more “anointings.” They are spiritually and emotionally jaded. They are hooked not on heroin but on adrenalin. So many are addicted to emotions and emotional highs. Many burn out spiritually in their quest.

Tenth, we have become a culture of hero-worshippers and celebrity-seekers. Evangelical heroes and popular writers and speakers dictate, are given total allegiance and followed like rock stars. Like the Corinthians, we say we are of Paul and Apollos and Cephas (1 Corinthians 3:4). People have been led to believe that only the “biggies” carry the “anointing.” And if you want “it” you’ve got to come to them to receive it. “Fresh,” “Fire,” “New Wine” and every other brand and flavor of anointing are available to the Christian consumer.

Eleventh, we have substituted entertainment and “television religion” for a growing and intense serving relationship in a healthy, well-balanced church. Being in the presence of growing Christians in a doctrinally sound church is a wonderful reality check needed by all. Vibrant fellowship (including worship and Bible study) is an antidote to illusion and deception. We are full of blind spots and need others to help us make up areas in our pockets of deficiency and ignorance. Stray sheep are not only arrogant, they are very vulnerable.

Proverbs 27:17 forcefully reminds us: “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” To stay sharp, balanced and informed, one must take the words of Hebrews 10:23-25 very seriously and be a vital part of a vital fellowship. People have abandoned the church looking for a supernatural quick fix.

Twelfth, people have become “cliché-bound.” They are gullible and become easily subservient if someone says, “God told me,” or “the Lord said,” or “the Lord spoke to me,” or “the Lord impressed upon me.” After all, who can argue with God? The Church finds itself drowning in a sea of subjectivism away from the safe moorings of the objective Word of God! “I feel” and “I sense” have come to replace, “It is written.”

The power of the cliché is explained by Peter Berger:

“Once a cliché is firmly established in the minds of a particular group of people, it attains the quality of taken-for-granted truth and is very difficult to dislodge even by clear empirical counter-evidence. Human beings do not like to be confronted with what the psychologists call cognitive dissonance (“I have made up my mind; don’t confuse me with the facts”). What is more, thinking in general and rethinking in particular are fairly painful processes, and most people prefer to avoid this pain. The plausibility of a cliché does not depend on the amount or the quality of the evidence for it, but on the way it meets the social and psychic needs of a particular situation.”²⁰

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Tony Evans reminds us that Jesus is the only “celebrity” worthy of our total allegiance: “... human celebrities dim and pass from the scene. But one celebrity has glory that will never dim, and His fame will never decrease. He is, in fact, the only truly worthy celebrity in the universe.”²¹

Watchman Fellowship cited an *Evangelical Press* story on rumors and why Christians are prone to believe hoaxes and strange stories. The *EP* article offered the following four reasons:

“• They fit our worldview about spiritual warfare. • We don’t always take time to check them out. • They may seem to make sense to us. • We place too much

faith in things said by ‘experts.’”²²

So we can add those to the above list of twelve reasons.

In the end, the book of Revelation tells us (22:15) that those who practice deceit and falsehood will be outside of heaven and warns about adding or taking away from the Book, in other words manipulating even the words of God.

DECEPTION DOWN SOUTH

Take, for instance, what has been going on at Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Fla. Just about every week for more than five years there have been evening meetings held through the week (although fewer and fewer now). Pentecostal sign-seekers have come from all over the country to get the “anointing” or to “get in the river.” Occasionally, they claim to be unleashing even more powerful anointings. Many criticisms have been leveled at the leadership of Pensacola by countercult groups and through the award-winning investigative reporting of the city’s newspaper, the *Pensacola News Journal*. Some (but not all) of the criticisms revolve around:

- Personal fortunes in the millions accumulated by the leaders.
- A “revival” is being vigorously marketed and the techniques cloned.
- Constant lies about the depth and extent of the “revival” with the local community unchanged and abortion and crime rates going up in Pensacola. Everything is overhyped and embellished.
- The manipulation of numerous individuals as the leaders promote and orchestrate mass hysteria, altered states of consciousness, frenzies, pandemonium, and what is more like a pagan ashram than a church. Emotion is valued over reason and order. Manifestations are the driving force. Frenzy is “in.”
- Teachings inconsistent with the Bible.
- Extravagant claims by speakers claiming to miraculously multiply food and to raise the dead with

absolutely no documentation or proof. The same speaker claimed to do “Holy Ghost car washes” by driving his vehicle underwater.²³ Blowing a ram’s horn to chase the devil out of town is advocated. Videos professing such nonsense are marketed and sold by those within the revival.

The events at Brownsville have been called a “revival” by the principal leaders. Michael Brown has been referred to as the “theologian of the revival.” In Brown’s very own words what is going on in Pensacola *cannot* be called revival. By Brown’s *own definition* the events at Brownsville are not a revival at all! Brown’s own criteria judge Brownsville pandemonium as less than true revival.

In his book, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*, Brown defines revival:

“What is revival? It is God ‘stepping down from heaven’ and baring His holy arm. He comes and acts and speaks. There is a holy Presence and a word on fire. God is in the midst of His people. The Lord is shaking the world. That is revival! It is a time of visitation. If it is confined to one church, it is not revival. If it is confined to the meetings themselves, it is not revival. If it can all be traced to the efforts of man, it is not revival. *If it does not ultimately affect the society, it is not revival.*”²⁴

BROWNOUT IN BROWNSVILLE

Then Brown goes on to insist that to be called true revival it has to change American culture. Consider this criteria: “As long as homosexuals march brazenly down our streets and serve in leading positions in our governments ... we are not experiencing revival!”²⁵

During the recent Memorial Day weekend, Pensacola again had annual lesbian and gay festivities and last fall “the nation’s first gay and lesbian bank” opened in Pensacola.

But Brown continues with:

“... as long as abortion clinics and pornography theaters thrive; as long as ‘Christian’ young

people watch MTV and 'Christian' adults watch HBO; as long as the jails have too many prisoners and the mission fields have too few laborers; as long as greed and materialism rule most of the world and much of the church; as long as humanists, new agers, and atheists dominate our college faculties; as long as these things are at the forefront of our society, we are not experiencing revival! Sweeping revival in America would mean upheaval. *The holy Presence would change the complexion of our nation dramatically.*"²⁶

Why has Brown been calling meetings at Pensacola "revival" when by his own definition it's not revival? He will have to eat his own words. What has been going on at Brownsville Assembly *cannot be called revival by Brown's own criteria.* Our Lord's words in Matthew 7:2 have significance here.

Truly, Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola could be called "The home of the whoppers." The *Pensacola News Journal* caught Pastor John Kilpatrick flatfooted with a few of his tall tales:

"Kilpatrick also told the journalist covering his appearance in Arizona that Alabama Gov. Fob James was saved at the Brownsville revival and that the governor is a regular revival attendee. James' office says otherwise. David Azbell, spokesman for James, said the governor is an Episcopalian and has never attended the revival."²⁷

There is even more of this elastic tale:

"Kilpatrick also said in Arizona that U.S. Rep. Joe Scarborough, R-Pensacola, was saved at the revival. A spokesman for Scarborough, who is a Southern Baptist, said the congressman attended only two Brownsville Revival services."²⁸

How can real revival be based on myths, lies and made up stories? It is utter nonsense to suggest that the "Spirit of truth" is spawning lies.

It appears now that Brownsville's five-year run is significantly winding

down with evangelist and key player Steven Hill moving to Dallas and the Awake America road show cooling off.²⁹

Having seen the reality of deception and having delved into the roots of deception, we must now consider *the remedy for deception.*

WISE, NOT GULLIBLE

How can Christians guard against being swindled and deceived? How can they keep themselves from following the masses into error and deception? It is not by being paranoid but by being sharp. *They must be SHARP and stay SHARP.*

S-H-A-R-P

S — Search the Scriptures daily. Know the Word of God and read it in context. Hosea 4:6 says: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." We need to be constantly hiding the Word in our hearts. History attests to the tragedies that occur when God's Word is neglected. Remember that the unspeakable mischief and misery in Salem in the 1690s was the acceptance of "spectral evidence" (that is, that Satan could take the form and shape of innocent persons) which did not have a shred of biblical evidence. Many innocent people died. We must search God's Word. There are eight spiritual revivals in the Old Testament. Everyone of them was centered on the Word of God. True revivals are based on the reception of God's Word. It is the foundation for any true and lasting revival.

H — Hold on to God in prayer for wisdom and discernment. Herbert Lockyer reminds us:

"Craftily and cleverly, Satan hides his snares, and we have to constantly pray that we may always be aware of his tricks."³⁰

Jesus said: "Men ought to pray and not faint" (Luke 18:1). Ephesians 6 makes clear that prayer is a vital part of our "armor" and protection.

A — Accept no claims of man at face value no matter how compelling or slickly presented. Remember Jeremiah 12:6:

"For even your brothers, the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; Yes they have called abundantly after you. Do not believe them, even though they speak smooth words to you."

This is not being paranoid, only discerning and cautious. Obviously if the teacher has a long proven track record, we can be more accepting. Proverbs 15:14 is a timely word: "The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps." Remember that the person passing on the information may be deceived.

R — Require documentation (two or three witnesses) and proofs for stories and illustrations that are claimed to be true. Accept no less. Do not assume something has happened because someone says so or it is in a book or video. Even sincere believers may be misinformed and be passing on misinformation. Think how long the Crying Wind, John Todd, Betty Malz, Mike Warnke and Y2K lies were circulated and accepted. Christian bookstores and Christian ministries helped circulate these. Demand evidence, remembering that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

P — Pursue only reputable ministries, teachers and commentaries. Insist on doctrinal statements and detailed financial reports. Take seriously documented reports of false teaching, mismanagement of money, outlandish claims and poor doctrine. Even the secular press can only report what is there. It is unfortunate that they have become the watchdog of the scammers. The Church should be doing the job.

Stay SHARP. Don't be duped by deceivers or deceit.

Endnotes:

1. Craig S. Hawkins, *Witchcraft*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998, pg. 140.
2. "Deceit," *Webster's New World Dictionary*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, pg. 365.
3. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pp. 270-271.
4. Robert Rosenberg, *Crimes of the City*.

New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, pg. 278.

5. Kathryn Lindskoog, *Fakes, Frauds & Other Malarkey*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, pg. 266.

6. Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes, *When God Weeps*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, pg. 19, emphasis in original.

7. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

8. See further, Jamie Buckingham, *Daughter of Destiny*. Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1976.

9. *When God Weeps*, op. cit., pg. 20.

10. Comedy Central, *The Daily Show*, "God Stuff" segment for June 21, 1999, tape on file.

11. See further, *The Quarterly Journal*, "Prophecy or Presumption?" Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 5-9 and "Benny Hinn's Move Into Necromancy," Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 5-10.

12. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.:

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Vol. VIII, 1984, pg. 30.

13. See further, Ann Traves, *Fits, Trances and Visions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 15, 19.

14. Bruce Bickel in the preface of Don Kistler, General Editor, *Sola Scriptura*. Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998, pp. xi-xii.

15. Proverbs 10:12, 1 Peter 4:8.

16. James 5:20.

17. *Sola Scriptura*, op. cit., pg. xii.

18. Albert Barnes, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1975, pg. 886, italics in original.

19. Helmut Thielicke quoted in Uwe Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993, pg. 139.

20. Peter Berger in the forward of *The Fabricated Luther*, op. cit., pg. 9.

21. Tony Evans, *Who is This King of Glory?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, pg. 12.

22. "Global News In Perspective," *Vantage Point*. Birmingham: Watchman Fellowship, April 1999, "Janet Reno Defines Cult — Another Hoax Currently Making the Rounds," pg. 6.

23. See *The Quarterly Journal*, "The Remarkable Exploits of David Hogan," Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 1, 13-21.

24. Michael Brown, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire*. Shippensburg, Pa.: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 1996, pg. 235, emphasis added.

25. *Ibid.*, pg. 241.

26. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

27. John Allman, "Kilpatrick's claims cast doubt, leave questions unanswered," *Pensacola News Journal*, April 5, 1998, pg. 2.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See *Charisma* magazine, May 2000, pp. 24-25. Also the news update article in this issue of the *Journal*, pg. 22-23.

30. Herbert Lockyer, *Daily Promises*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984, entry for June 25.

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

plague the woman. With further investigation, the physician found that the woman had, in fact, not returned to a source of healthy water but was still drinking from the contaminated well. Moreover, he learned that she had not taken any of the medicine that he had prescribed.

The meaning of this parable?

The contaminated well water is the unhealthy doctrine and practice of false teachers, false prophets and the churches they spawn. The medicine is the antidote of a healthy church with scripturally solid doctrine and practice. The woman's afflictions are one's spiritual condition. To progress on the road of biblical sanctification (and get our spiritual feet on firm ground), we must not only stop drinking from the poisoned well, but we must get on proper medication (i.e., get into that good church home and digest sound doctrine).

For many members trying to exit cultic and aberrational groups, it is extremely difficult to accept such counsel and follow it through.

As my colleague G. Richard Fisher points out in his article on deception (found in this *Journal*), many have "invested blood, sweat, tears and money into religious deception" and for this cause "may be too embarrassed or too stubborn to admit he has been taken."

Further factors stifle the healing process as well. The sense of loss (including perhaps family, friends and finances) can be overwhelming. Likewise, the sense of fear. "What if my friends are right and the doctor is

wrong," they may reason. "Perhaps he's misdiagnosed my case. What if the group I am trying to leave is true after all — and it's just me? What if they are true prophets and I am blaspheming the Holy Spirit by my doubt and action?" can all plague the victim. The jaded mindset and the years of not really thinking can add even more fear and confusion. The spiritual terrorism techniques of these groups are overpowering and devastating and leave lasting scars.

At PFO's recent Conference on Biblical Discernment, Pastor Fisher addressed the struggles and grief of ex-cult members. In his workshop, *Getting Out – Getting On*, (designed to help the exiting member) he mapped the intricacies of the grieving process and offered practical help for one coming out of an abusive group:

"There can be the smothering feeling of loneliness. And do you know what? Sometimes the person toys with wanting to go back. Do you know why they want to go back? Because they want to feel better. Not because it makes any sense to you and me, but because they want to feel better. They are just tired of feeling bad. So they decide, 'Maybe if I go back — maybe I'll just go back for a while. Maybe I'll just reconnect a little bit because it will make me feel better.' But you see now they're beginning to take their feelings and put their feelings above God's Word. They're making feeling better, more important than obedience to God. ... We will do anything for self-comfort, especially when we're used to doing things for self-comfort; even, sometimes, things that don't make a lot of sense. Someone has said that there are some people who will stay in hell because they know the names of the streets. No matter if the terrain's dangerous, the terrain's sinful,

the terrain's unhealthy. You sort of know the terrain. ... there's a certain weird comfort and safety factor even in insane places if you know how it all works. ... Because to be on terrain they don't know is very, very fearful" (G. Richard Fisher, *Getting Out - Getting On*, cassette tape).

As difficult as it may appear and as hard as it is to try, one *must* go on — and above all, stop drinking from the contaminated well and be committed to the antidote. Life and habits will have to be reorganized. And you must remember: You can't change the past. Dr. Jay Adams zeros in on the debilitating effects of dwelling on the past:

"Some persons focus on the past. So long as they do, change will not be possible, since no one can change the past. It is not the past that needs to be dealt with; actually the past no longer exists. It is not his *past* that needs changing; it is the counselee *himself as he now is* who must change. Counselors must help the counselee to refocus from the past to its effects upon the present. They must explain that the past is present in the life patterns of the counselee himself and in the present effects of past activities. Just as those who focus on the future (which does not exist) in worry do not change, so too those who expend their energies and concern upon the past (which does not exist) find that they are unable to make the required adjustments" (Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, pp. 172-173, italics in original).

The Apostle Paul offered this example and advice to the believers at Philippi:

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul left his impressive-sounding Jewish pedigree behind. As Jesus said, "the Truth will make you free" (John 8:32); He has the power to set you completely free (8:36). The unhealthy doctrine and practice of false teachers and aberrant churches must be left behind. The healthy discipline of being in a well-balanced church family with worship, Bible study, service, and fellowship must be established and continued. It will be just what the doctor ordered! A caring body of true believers is also needed for support in the fearful times.

God is bigger than your fear, God is bigger than your afflictions, God is bigger than your hurt. He will see you through — His Word guarantees it:

"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are things I will do; I will not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16).

—MKG

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

reach of many ordinary people and living standards have been gradually falling for years," the report stated.

Before the Kenya services, Hinn took publicity of his crusades to a new level. On several television broadcasts, he suggested that Jesus Christ would personally and physically appear at the Kenya meetings. However, such purported appearances apparently are not unheard of among Kenyans. The *Kenya Times* reported in its June 22, 1988, edition that about 6,000 worshipers at a Muslim village in Nairobi believed they saw Jesus Christ in broad daylight.

The newspaper described that a tall, white-robed, barefoot and bearded figure appeared at the Church of Bethlehem during a miracle prayer meeting conducted by spiritual healer Mary Sinaida Akatsa. The man believed to be Jesus left the meeting by car, but the driver later claimed he was instructed to stop the car at a bus terminal where the man got out "walked a few paces beside the road and simply vanished into thin air." The *Times* article also identified the person claiming to be Jesus Christ as the Lord Maitreya. New Age guru Benjamin Creme stated that "Maitreya's appearance was in keeping with the crowd's expectations, as Jesus Christ, hence his bearded face and biblical robes."

Despite Hinn's hype of the crusade in early May, media coverage of the event was sparse. The limited coverage by the secular media appears to be a strategy orchestrated by Hinn's ministry to control and filter crusade details. A reporter for the *Daily Nation News* told PFO that "there was minimal coverage as the local press were prevented from entering the crusade compounds."

A freelance news writer in the United States told PFO that while Hinn's organization permitted her to attend the Philadelphia Miracle Crusade (which was held a few weeks after the Kenya meetings), no cameras were allowed. The reporter was further instructed that she was forbidden to speak directly to anyone presented onstage as healed. Any details of those claiming to be healed were to come solely from Hinn's crusade representatives.

—MKG

A HEAVYWEIGHT DIVORCE SETTLEMENT

Three-time heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield and his second wife, Janice, reached an out-of-court divorce settlement in March. The agreement, which ended the couple's 3½-year marriage and full year of divorce proceedings, precluded what could have been a very messy split, including the incarceration of Holyfield's pastor, the Rev. Creflo Dollar, for refusing to give a deposition in the case.

The couple first met in June 1994 at faith healer Benny Hinn's Philadelphia Miracle Crusade. Two months earlier, Holyfield had lost his championship belt and had retired from boxing after receiving what later was learned to be an erroneous medical diagnosis. Holyfield traveled from his home in Georgia to Hinn's meetings "to get closer to the Lord." He said that while there, he "got anointed and I got closer to the Lord and got healed as well."

While at the Philadelphia meetings, Holyfield agreed to foot the \$265,000 bill for Hinn's two-day crusade. As Hinn prayed for the then ex-boxing champion, he asked that God would "Give him a wife, because he's got five children that need a mother." Hinn then proclaimed that his future wife would be found among those attending the Friday morning service of the Philadelphia crusade. Attending that service was a Chicago-based physician and licensed minister, Janice Itson. Itson did volunteer work at Hinn's crusades. Holyfield met her there and soon afterward began calling her on the phone. The couple were married Oct. 4, 1996, in a private courtroom ceremony in Atlanta.

Apparently the marriage had as many twists and turns as the divorce case itself. While the union produced one child, Elijah Jedidiah Holyfield, two other children were born out of wedlock to Holyfield during his brief marriage to Janice. Holyfield has a history of marital infidelity. Of the nine children Holyfield has fathered, three were born to his first wife Paulette, one to second wife Janice, and the five other children were born out of wedlock. His first child with Paulette was born a year before their marriage in 1985.

Before the births of Holyfield's two children in late 1997, he told his wife of his infidelity, suggesting they divorce quietly. She declined. Ultimately, Holyfield filed for divorce in March 1999, citing irreconcilable differences. Charges and countercharges mounted.

According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Holyfield claimed "that a prenuptial agreement existed, an allegation denied by Janice Holyfield." The issue was never settled, the newspaper reported. In May 1999, Mrs. Holyfield sought that the divorce case be dismissed claiming that she and her husband had marital relations after he had filed for divorce, thereby constituting a reconciliation. Holyfield "said he couldn't remember when they had sex," the newspaper further reported. Fayette County Superior Court Judge Ben Miller, who presided over the divorce, denied Mrs. Holyfield's request, saying that Holyfield would only re-file his petition for divorce.

Holyfield also sought a paternity test on Elijah, the couple's child. John Mayoue, lawyer for Mrs. Holyfield, said he was "appalled" at the boxer's request given his "track record of fidelity." The *Journal-Constitution* reported that, "The tests showed the boxer was the father."

The divorce proceedings caught even more of the news media's attention when Mayoue alleged that Holyfield gave \$7 million to his pastor, the Rev. Creflo Dollar and his World Changers Ministries. *Charisma* magazine

quoted the Atlanta newspaper as stating, "The boxer reportedly gave more than half the sum to the church in the 60 days before his filing for divorce in March 1999." Mrs. Holyfield's attorneys wanted Dollar to account for the millions of dollars Holyfield gave to the church and to Dollar personally.

Dollar promised he would go to jail before he would respond to questions in a court deposition. He cited constitutional provisions for the separation of church and state, pastor-parishioner privilege, and his personal opposition to divorce as the reasons for his refusal. Judge Miller found the minister in contempt of court. Dollar appealed the judge's ruling. On March 9, the Georgia Supreme Court dismissed Dollar's appeals. However, the oral agreement between the Holyfields the following day put to rest the possibility of arresting Dollar.

Critics of the 38-year-old "prosperity gospel" preacher label him "Cash-Flow Dollar." His World Changers Ministry's property holdings include the World Changers Dome (built in 1996 at a cost of \$6.5 million), two homes (one valued at \$1 million, the other at \$1.25 million) and a pair of private jets (a Gulfstream Jet valued at \$5.3 million and a Gates LearJet valued at nearly \$1 million). According to a report in the *Christian News*, "Members are required to tithe and show church leaders their personal financial information."

Dollar's connection to the Holyfield divorce caused other unfavorable information to be published about the minister. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* further reported that last December, "100 Fulton County police officers were admonished for accepting \$1,000 apiece from Dollar." According to the newspaper, "Dollar sent the money to recognize the officers' service to the community. But the gesture was criticized because it came a month after two traffic tickets Dollar had received were downgraded to warnings."

Mrs. Holyfield's attorney said during the announcement of the initial oral settlement last March, "The parties have resolved the issues between them, and we fully expect to take a final settlement to Judge Miller within the next week or so." Mayoue further said the terms of the Holyfield settlement will remain confidential.

—MKG

EVANGELIST HILL LEAVES BROWNSVILLE REVIVAL

In March, Evangelist Stephen Hill announced to the congregation of the Brownsville Assembly of God that he will be leaving their church's "revival." The purported revival is said to have first begun on Father's Day, June 1995, when Hill was a guest evangelist at the Pensacola, Fla.-based church. Brownsville leaders, following the announcement, stated that the revival meetings will continue despite Hill's absence, *Charisma* magazine reported in its May issue.

"Revival is going to go on. People are still coming in from all over the world, and it would be wrong of us to sever that," the magazine quoted the church's pastor, the Rev. John Kilpatrick, as saying. Kilpatrick also dispelled rumors that there had arisen a division between Hill and other revival leaders. Dr. Michael Brown, who is regarded as the revival's theologian, in addition to staff pastors and guest speakers, will continue to lead the revival services.

"The time has come for the Hill family to relocate their ministry," Hill told *Charisma* magazine. "Pensacola is a difficult place to fly into, and sometimes I am away from my family for a whole day because it is impossible to get home to Pensacola," Hill said. Initial plans will possibly move the evangelist and his ministry to the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Hill's departure is just one of the many changes the revival has experienced recently. As the numbers attending the meetings began to diminish, the leadership sought to take the revival on the road with its "Awake America" crusades. (See *The Quarterly Journal*, "The Wandering River of Brownsville," Vol. 19, No. 2.) These traveling crusade meetings, which started in 1997 and were held in 12 major cities in the U.S., are currently being replaced by citywide prayer crusades led by Kilpatrick and scheduled for only six U.S. cities this year.

Music minister Lindell Cooley also appears to want to curtail his involvement with the revival — at least its road-show version. "I decided to no longer be a part of 'Awake America' because when I looked at all the time I would have been traveling, I just became overwhelmed," Cooley told *Charisma*. "I am going to travel very little next year so I can spend a lot of time with the Lord and write music. Being a part of the prayer crusades with pastor Kilpatrick requires a lot less travel than Awake America," Cooley added.

The magazine report tried to discount declining attendance at the Pensacola meetings by saying the revival "continues to draw hundreds of first-time visitors from around the world each week, although weeknight attendance has been down slightly during the slower winter season." The magazine also said that the revival meetings have "won 147,000 souls" to the Lord during the five-year effort. PFO has disputed this claim and proved it to be an exaggeration.

—MKG

WAY PRESIDENT RESIGNS

L. Craig Martindale has resigned as president of The Way International according to WayDale, a web site that looks "into the behind the scenes activities of The Way International and its Board of Trustees." The Internet document said, "News announced in a meeting of the elite Way Corps on 04/25/00 is that Craig Martindale, president of TWI has resigned from the board of trustees."

The article further revealed that "vice president Rosalie Rivenbark will become TWI's new president. John Reynolds will continue as secretary treasurer and Harve Platig will take on the vice president position."

Martindale was installed as the second president of the controversial sect in 1982, three years before the death of its founder and first president, Victor Paul Wierwille. Under Martindale's tenure, ex-members and critics contended that he led the group into becoming an even more authoritarian and spiritually abusive sect than his predecessor.

The WayDale material also said "It is believed that Martindale will continue to live in his exclusive log cabin at TWI HQ and continue to have all the resources (office facilities, servants, finances, etc.) of TWI available to him."

—MKG

TBN REGAINS MIAMI STATION

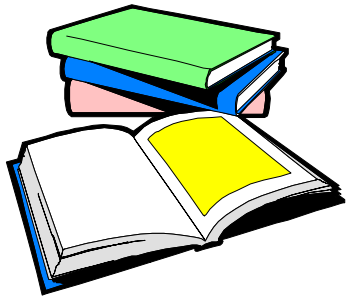
An April 1999 ruling by the Federal Communications Commission denying the Trinity Broadcasting Network has been overturned by a federal court. A decision by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for District of Columbia Circuit will allow TBN to regain the license to operate its Miami television.

In 1995, the FCC refused to renew TBN's license for the Florida station, stating "that TBN attempted to circumvent federal limits on TV station ownership by creating a sham minority-controlled company to hold the license." According to an *Orange County Register* report, the FCC contended that "Phil Aguilar, then pastor of Set Free Christian Fellowship in Anaheim was a mere figurehead serving TBN on the NMTV [National Minority Television] board."

On May 5, a three-judge panel ruled that "Although we defer to the Commission's interpretation of its regulation as requiring actual minority control, we find that neither the regulation nor the Commission's related statements gave fair notice of that requirement. We therefore vacate the Commission's denial of appellants' license renewal application." The court also admonished the FCC, saying it was stricter in its judgments of TBN than with other licensees.

TBN founder and president Paul Crouch said in a statement: "For nearly a decade this proceeding has hung like a dark cloud over Trinity, and I thank the Lord that this ordeal has ended with this exoneration. At no time did Trinity or NMTV ever attempt to violate the Commission's rules, and it's good to have the court confirm that." Crouch also is a director of NMTV.

—MKG



Books in Review

REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES WITH CATHOLICS

by Ron Rhodes

Harvest House Publishers, 359 pages, \$12.99

Popular author and Bible teacher Ron Rhodes serves up the third offering in his "reasoning from the Scriptures" series with his latest work, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics*. As with his previous two volumes (Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons), Rhodes again provides his readers with yet another wealth of solid information and helpful insight for sharing the Gospel.

The book is advertised as "a step-by-step guide to sharing the Good News with Catholics" and Rhodes himself states in the preface that "this book contains strong biblical arguments against a variety of Roman Catholic doctrines." The book delivers on both promises.

The volume first establishes evangelizing and dialoguing with Catholics. From there, key chapters of the book examine: the Apocrypha, Scripture vs. tradition; papal infallibility and church authority; justification; the sacraments (including the Mass and transubstantiation); penance, indulgences and purgatory; and the exaltation of Mary. Rhodes ties it all together with a brief chapter offering the "do's and don'ts" of witnessing to Catholics. Four appendices further examine infant salvation, ecumenism, relics and sanctification.

Throughout his writing, Rhodes draws upon the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other official and primary church resources to make his evaluations. The book is generously stocked with thought-provoking questions to direct toward your Catholic family and friends in order to help communicate the unbiblical foundation of much of their religion.

Rhodes has provided the Church with yet another excellent volume with which to speak the truth in love. With nearly 945 million Catholics throughout the world, very few Christians will never have opportunity to witness to a Catholic. Therefore it's a book for pastor, Sunday school leader and layperson alike.

—MKG

CREATING GOD IN THE IMAGE OF MAN?

The New "Open" View of God — Neotheism's Dangerous Drift

by Norman L. Geisler

Bethany House Publishers, 191 pages, \$11.99

What is God really like? There is a new movement that is questioning the doctrine of God as taught by the Church Fathers, Reformers and teachers over the last 2,000 years.

Dr. Geisler's book deals with the hard philosophical and biblical questions as it critiques the "New Theism." For someone wanting a serious, scholarly, in-depth analysis of the views of John Cobb, Richard Rice, Clark Pinnock, Gregory Boyd and others, this is the book.

The chapter on "The Practical Consequences of Neotheism" is hard-hitting and a wake-up call to a Church whose orthodox foundations are being eroded on every side. Geisler also provides a handy glossary of terms and a detailed index, which make the book very practical and usable.

This book is not for the lazy or the faint of heart but for the serious student of Bible and history. It will stretch your mind and vocabulary. However, the aforementioned glossary and index help make the volume more digestible and understandable for the lay reader.

Geisler outlines for the Christian the urgent need of this work when he states that the volume "warns of a dangerous trend within evangelical circles of creating God in man's image." Christians willingly indict cults such as the Mormons for such heretical doctrine. However, they fail to realize that neotheism borrows from pantheism and must be seen as a serious threat to true Christianity. Each of these terms with their attendant dangers are explained.

Reformer Martin Luther suggested that if we are not defending the Gospel at the point at which it is being attacked, we are not defending the Gospel at all. The classical and traditional view of God is under heavy attack and most Christians are unaware of it, let alone gathering tools to address it. Geisler's book is cutting edge and one of the few addressing this vital subject. We need it in our libraries.

—GRF

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.