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Watchman Nee: The Master of Mix-Up The Parable of the Chocolate Rabbit

by G. Richard Fisher

Many of us remember getting a chocolate rabbit for Easter and discovering that it was only a shell — not solid. People experience the same kind of letdown from some religious icons. The accolades, promotions, and testimonials for these icons have been overdone. Sometimes the promotion has been a tool to sell books. Sometimes the teachers' words and presentations are shown to be aberrational or heretical. And sometimes those who biblically scrutinize these teachings are accused of attacking good men.

Immature or undiscerning Christians often focus on the shell and never deal with what is — or isn't — inside. So the "Christian" marketing machine goes on pushing illusion with little substance. Some hollow items are even touted as "Christian Classics." The shell of mock spirituality hides the lack of content or the corrupt content. We are being sold empty accounts of religious folk heroes inside a shell of religious cliches.

WATCHMAN WHO?

Author Dana Roberts, writing on Watchman Nee, observes that Nee's



books, "*The Latent Power of the Soul* and *The Spiritual Man*, teach us a gnostic psychoanalysis."¹

Many Christians have heard of Watchman Nee. His book, *Sit, Walk and Stand* appears to be a nice presentation of Ephesians. At one time, the prevailing view was that Watchman Nee was a martyr for the faith, something like a twentieth-century Stephen, for being killed in a Chinese prison. That fact alone makes some think he was.

In 1984, Warren Wiersbe said, "I don't doubt that Watchman Nee may have had some weaknesses in some areas. I fear that all of us have them whether we recognize them or not. I do realize, however, that Watchman Nee was one of the giants of the faith."²

However, there are weaknesses and there are *weaknesses*. Weaknesses in critical areas can cripple. The word *weakness* can be used to gloss over serious problems or rationalize the
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LOW-IMPACT CHRISTIANITY

Anyone who watches television for thirty minutes or more usually will see an advertisement for exercise equipment. Such commercials promise, for a minimal time commitment, robust health and a physique to match. One ad pitches a style of *low-impact aerobics*. No laborious commitment; just an effortless glide into physical fitness.

In the past several decades, the Church has begun to serve up something similar. It's for those wanting a leisurely approach to their faith. It could be labeled *low-impact Christianity*.

A good example is the 6,000-member Riverbend Church pastored by Dr. Gerald Mann. Viewers of religious TV may be familiar with Mann through his ministry broadcasts, which bear his name. These telecasts present the Austin, Texas-based minister addressing all sorts of life's difficulties. Mann is a cross between Mr. Rogers and Dr. Phil; Mr. Rogers for his mild-mannered, grandfatherly delivery and Dr. Phil for his ability to respond to all personal problems.

Riverbend promotes itself as "a church where all the dull parts have been eliminated!" It promises that attendees won't have to endure "long, boring announcements, lengthy altar calls, guilt-inducing sermons and cryptic religious phrases." And people are not asked to

make a major time investment because services are only 45 minutes long.

Additionally, the Sunday worship service doesn't get bogged down with such things as the Lord's Supper. Those who want to partake of this observance must go to an adjacent building, where it is "offered on Sunday mornings between 10:15 and 12:15."

For those who want to make Riverbend their church home, the church offers that "You can be as involved as you want to be, or as anonymous as you want to be!" The latter group is just what every local church and its pastor needs: *anonymous Christians*.

Riverbend and its ilk foster the self-oriented mindset of a selfish breed of Christians. This concept is foreign to Scripture. First Peter 4:10 tells us, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Believers are to benefit the Church; the Church does not exist for the benefit of believers.

To paraphrase the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy (who was paraphrasing one of his college professors): "Ask not what your church can do for you; ask what you can do for your church." The Lord gives spiritual gifts to Christians for the nurturing of the Church; that is, to serve other believers. They are not to be used for one's own edification, nor are they to be sequestered. When one is allowed to become an "anonymous" church

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WATCHTOWER MAY SELL BROOKLYN BUILDING

The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society may be placing a "For Sale" sign on one of its prime waterfront properties in Brooklyn. The 1 million-square-foot building is a principal shipping point for Watchtower literature. The 12-story warehouse is at 360 Furman St., a few blocks from the organization's world headquarters.

Ongoing complaints by local residents about noise and air pollution from trucks entering and leaving the building have prompted the Watchtower to relocate the shipping facility to its Wallkill, N.Y., factory operations, known as the Watchtower Farms, and to sites outside the United States. Wallkill is about 100 miles northwest of Brooklyn. With the planned move, Watchtower spokesman Daniel Rice said the Furman Street building no longer would be needed.

According to the *New York Daily News*, the building could be sold for as much as \$120 million. Others offer a low-end estimate of \$50 million. Once sold, the structure could be converted to 400-500 condominium apartments. Some units at the top of the building would have a 180-degree view of the Manhattan skyline and might sell for as much as \$5 million each.

The structure was built in 1928. The Watchtower bought it in 1983.

—MKG

CASHING IN ON MAJOR ASSETS

The Worldwide Church of God has announced a plan to keep the denomination solvent for decades. It involves moving its headquarters from Pasadena, Calif., and selling its 55-acre Ambassador College campus to make way for 1,500 new homes. The college, which once had nearly 1,200 students, was closed in 1990.

The parcel is prime Pasadena real estate and contains elegant mansions, along with the church's Ambassador Auditorium and headquarters. While church officials would not disclose details of the transaction, *Christianity Today* magazine reported, "taking into account current home values, the sale price could exceed \$750 million."

Following the 1986 death of its founder, Herbert W. Armstrong, the church began a turning into what some

would call an evangelical denomination. Joseph Tkach, Jr. is the leader of the church. He took the reigns of the church from his father, Joseph Tkach, Sr., who died in 1995. Armstrong's death and doctrinal revisions by the elder Tkach cost the WCG both members and money. *CT* has stated the current membership is 67,000, down from 150,000 during the Armstrong era, and its annual income has fallen from \$170 million to \$25 million. The nearly vacant property in Pasadena costs the church about \$2 million annually in maintenance.

Not everyone favors the plan. The West Pasadena Neighborhood Association represents a delegation of 400 neighbors and is opposing the church's campaign. They and others say the project allows for too many homes, which would cause traffic congestion and blemish the neighborhood. Former members also are balking. "They say Tkach and company now stand to profit from the tithes of Armstrong's followers," *CT* reported.

Even if the Worldwide Church of God fails to keep solvent, it is succeeding in its historical revision. Church leaders say their migration toward Orthodoxy was the result of abandoning peculiar, non-essential doctrines. *CT* has helped in this regard, labeling the teachings as "fringe beliefs" and citing as examples the adherence of Old Testament dietary laws and festivals, Sabbath (Saturday) worship, and compulsory tithing (of up to 30% of one's income). However, the nucleus of Armstrong's doctrine went far beyond those "fringe beliefs" and included a denunciation of the Trinity, the denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the teaching that believers are not born again until the resurrection, when they will achieve godhood.

—MKG

REBECCA IN FANTASYLAND

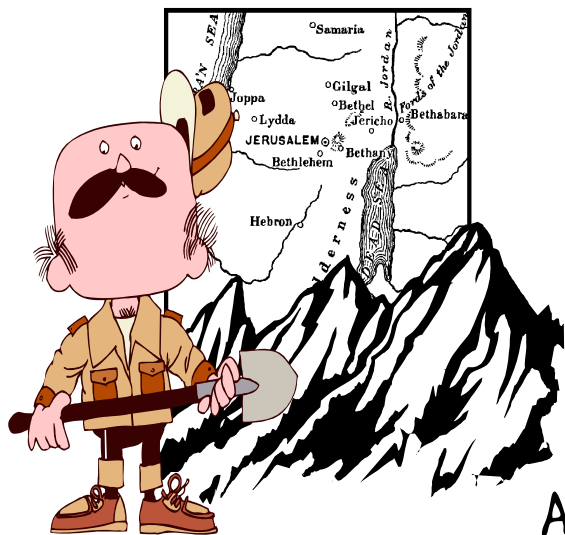
Self-proclaimed occult expert Dr. Rebecca Brown continues her defamation of Personal Freedom Outreach. For more than a decade, PFO has documented from medical officials, legal authorities, court papers, and other sources Brown's deceptive ministry (see, *Drugs, Demons and Delusions*, available from PFO). Brown has not once legitimately refuted these findings.

Brown got her start with the help of Jack Chick and Chick Publications, publisher of evangelistic tracts and comic books. At that time, Brown was associated with
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EXCAVATING A MOUNTAIN OF EVIDENCE

Bringing Archaeology into Apologetics for a Witness of Christ

by G. Richard Fisher



The Apostle Peter urges believers to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

Most students of the Bible are aware that the Greek root for the word “answer” is the word *apologetic*. This ancient word, *apologia*, meant to give “a verbal defense, a speech in defense”¹ rather than the contemporary meaning of an apology, which is expressing regret for wrongdoing or injury.

One of our greatest tools for a vigorous defense of the Christian faith is the field of Bible archaeology — especially when it comes to Jesus. Apologist Hank Hanegraaff reminds us:

“The manuscript evidence for the preservation of the biblical text is stronger than for any other manuscript of classical literature ... Archaeology affirms the historical reliability of the Bible. ... Truly, with every turn of the archaeological spade we see even more evidence for the trustworthiness of Scripture.”²

When it comes to the topic of Jesus and archaeology, the research and writings of Paul Maier are some of the most helpful and stimulating studies available to the Church today. For example, his recent article “History, Archaeology, and Jesus” is a significant and thought-provoking analysis.³ Christians should be indebted to Maier for the spiritual boost

his insights provide, along with the suggested trails we follow.

SEARCH AND DESTROY

With regard to the field of Jesus and archaeology, some have made huge errors in judgment because they lacked the historical and archaeological information that absolutely exploded in Israel after the declaration of the State in May 1948. Many skeptics were decades behind the evidence and made huge blunders based on ignorance or silence. Prior to the founding of the State of Israel, some even denied that the person of Jesus Christ actually existed. Parrotting the musty old arguments of past liberals, higher critics, and atheists, they proved themselves totally out of touch.

A clear example of this is Albert Schweitzer. Jack Cascione called Schweitzer “the 20th century ‘Doubting Thomas’ look-a-like.”⁴ Cascione added:

“In 1906, Albert Schweitzer wrote his doubting masterpiece, ‘The Quest of the Historical Jesus.’ The brilliant young Schweitzer was the brightest rising star in the cosmos of liberal, German Lutheran theologians. After 400 years of scholarly, insightful, critical analysis, Schweitzer came to the conclusion that there wasn’t any evidence to

prove that Jesus was a historical figure. Schweitzer wasn’t questioning the miracles or the resurrection. He simply concluded that there wasn’t anyone to do them.”⁵

That was 1906. Liberalism was flying blind. The history of the old quest for Jesus (while denying the historicity of the Gospels) from George Wilhelm Hegel through David Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, Rudolf Bultmann, Schweitzer, and others is chronicled and critiqued in Robert Strimple’s fine book, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus*.⁶

Cascione also scathingly replies to Schweitzer’s pseudo-quest:

“Schweitzer’s real quest was rooted in the quest for his own personal deification. He defined truth as something that he could discover and measure by his own experience, without reliance on the words of the Bible. Was there really a Nebuchadnezzar, Abraham, Noah, or Genghis Khan? Not unless Schweitzer met them! *Was there really an Albert Schweitzer? I never met him.*”⁷

Even as late as 1975, some had not caught up with the times and the vast amount of archaeological information coming out of Israel. That year, Lloyd M. Graham wrote:

“Semienlightened Gnostic Jews created the Christ of the Gospels,

but they did not intend their Christ to be taken literally, not at least by the initiated. They were presenting an ideal, a model to be copied, but they did not reckon with the ignorant Gentile literalists who were to follow them. These seized upon the Gnostics' symbolic writings and reduced them to a literal and historic basis — the greatest error of the Piscean age."⁸

So, in Graham's view, a bunch of Gnostic neophytes invented a mythical Jesus. And wouldn't you know it, some unfortunate, uninformed, and unenlightened Gentiles took it seriously!

The only problem is that there is enough in the New Testament which directly refutes Gnosticism that we cannot take Graham seriously. The Jewish milieu, into which Jesus was born, was so far from Gnostic thought and so deeply rooted and based upon the Old Testament, it makes Graham's assertions unquestionably preposterous.

There seems to be no end to the creative, esoteric fictions about Jesus. According to Barbara Thiering, the Dead Sea Scrolls are a coded document, which she claims to have decoded. She says Jesus was born into the priestly line of the Essenes, had a trial marriage to Mary Magdalene and Lydia of Philippi, and eventually retired in southern France. She disputes the virgin birth of Christ, refashions His temptation in the wilderness, reinterprets the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead, endorses the swoon theory, and denies His literal ascension into heaven. The cryptic Scrolls have given her that and much more, she says.⁹ Randall Price says that "Thiering reinterprets history and the Christian faith."¹⁰

Another recent plot established to undermine the authenticity of the historical Jesus is known as the Jesus Seminar. In 1985, a group who regarded themselves as "New Testament scholars" began meeting twice a year to determine subjectively the validity of the words and actions of Christ. Dr. Norman Geisler outlines

the identity, procedure, and result of the Jesus Seminar:

"The Seminar is comprised of liberal Catholics and Protestants, Jews, and atheists. Most are male professors, though their number includes a pastor, a filmmaker, and three women. ... The group has used colored beads to vote on the accuracy of Jesus' sayings. A red bead means words that Jesus probably spoke. Pink indicates words that could probably be attributed to Jesus. Gray represents words probably, though not certainly, came from later sources. Black indicates words that Jesus almost certainly did not speak. ... The results of their work is the conclusion that only fifteen sayings (2 percent) can absolutely be regarded as Jesus' actual words. About 82 percent of what the canonical Gospels ascribe to Jesus are not authentic. Another 16 percent of the words are of doubtful authenticity."¹¹

There is also a New Age Jesus, which is a fabrication of those seeking support for their Eastern mysticism. Ray Yungen capsulized the overall view of the New Age movement concerning Jesus:

"A basic tenet of New Age thinking is that of the *Master Jesus*. Adherents to this idea believe during the unrecorded period of His life, Jesus traveled to various occult centers and mystery schools in such places as Tibet, India, Persia, and Egypt; at these places Jesus learned the metaphysical secrets of the ages. Therefore, they claim Jesus spent seventeen years of travel on a pilgrimage of higher consciousness. According to this viewpoint, Jesus of Nazareth became the Master Jesus, one who has gained mastery over the physical world by becoming one with his higher self."¹²

It is easy to see that once one leaves the solid foundation of the Gospels, one becomes lost in a deep thicket of imagination, speculation, guesswork, and contradictions. There are more contrived and fictional Jesus figures than we can keep up with. We can take our pick from the Muslim Jesus, the Mormon Jesus, the Watchtower Jesus, and the Unitarian Jesus. But we must never forget the fact that the only real Jesus is the Jesus of the Gospels.

Even the vast majority of non-Christians say Jesus must have ex-



A replica of the Pontius Pilate Inscription Stone uncovered in 1961 and on display at Caesarea. The original is in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

isted, although they readily reject His claims and may even think that His miracles (including His resurrection) were invented by overzealous followers. Even Jewish scholarship does not reject the fact of the person of Jesus, though they may reject His Messiahship as shown by Donald Hagner in his book, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus*.¹³ Jewish scholarship today strongly asserts the Jewishness of Jesus and His historicity.

Though never a Christian himself, the late David Flusser, former professor of Early Christianity at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, who is still revered in Israel, acknowledged:



The tomb complex on the Mount of Olives that the ossuaries of buried residents from the first century Bethany, including Martha, Mary and Lazarus, were found.

“We shall be saying nothing new if we maintain that Jesus was a Jew in every way. The Gospels have preserved his maxims and sayings, and thus it is not only the views and opinions of Jesus himself that have been preserved for us, but also details concerning the Jews of those days, especially concerning the world-view of the Sages, as well as information concerning the various streams in Judaism during the period of Jesus’ life and activities.”¹⁴

Careful examination of the biblical record and the record of the rocks (archaeology) convince us that the New Testament is not warped by exaggeration, myth, or embellishments. It is anything but Gnostic and anything but wispy. Jesus was born during the time of a historical Roman Emperor, Augustus, and a Roman puppet named Herod.

During His ministry, Jesus made His home on the edge of the historical Sea of Galilee. In this geographical area, at least 14 fishing villages and remains of docks have been uncovered and examined by archaeologists. A number of these are mentioned in

the Gospels and were visited by Jesus. We now have hard evidence for the city and dock of Magdala, Tiberias, Gennesaret, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Gergesa, Sussita (Hippos), and Gadara harbor. Magazines and standard works on archaeology have reported on these. They are well known.¹⁵

Contemporary historians outside the Bible mention Jesus. Among them are Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, Philo, Seutonius, and Pliny.¹⁶

Paul Maier pushes the objective value of so much hard historical and geographical information:

“Since reality involves a ‘time-space continuum,’ geographical considerations are also important in weighing the historicity of Jesus. Legends and mythologies have settings in Shangri-La, Nirvana, Never-Never lands, Oz, Valhalla or other illusory places, while the holy books of some ‘made-in-America’ religious systems supply dubious names of imaginary locations that have never been discovered or referred to anywhere else. The Old and New Testaments, on the other hand, are studded with authentic place names: names of countries, provinces, regions, cities, and villages; names of seas, lakes, rivers, brooks, and streams; names of mountains, hills, plateaus, plains, and valleys. Such proper names fill our Bible dictionaries, and all of them are standing challenges to any who doubt that the stage for the many divine-human encounters in Scripture is rock solid.”¹⁷

So we welcome investigation, as well as “why” and “where” questions about Jesus because they can be so easily answered.

As stated, we place Jesus’ birth with Herod the Great (Matthew 2:1), who was responsible for building identifiable, datable buildings all over Israel, including Jerusalem.¹⁸

Herod had a massive fortress palace in West Jerusalem. One can stand on the massive foundation of one of its principal towers. Archaeologists recently have discovered the foundations of Herod’s fortress palace, which spread into the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. The walls were constructed of readily identifiable Herodian blocks. Jacqueline Schaalje’s report calls the discovery “an archaeologist’s dream.”¹⁹

Consider the Rabbi Leibel Reznick’s description of that western palace in Jerusalem as he paraphrases Josephus:

“To the south of the three towers was Herod’s palace. The palace grounds were 1,000 feet long and 200 feet wide and were built atop a 12-foot-high artificially con-

structed hill. Fifty-foot-high walls surrounded the palace complex. Ornamental towers were mounted on the wall all around. The royal residence was divided into two main sections, one to the north and one to the south. Between them was a park-like mall, with ponds and fountains with bronze figures from which water flowed. There were paths and springs, and tame pigeons hovering about. There were huge banquet halls with high, ornate ceilings and mosaic floors. One hundred guest rooms ornamented with gold and silver objects served to accommodate visiting dignitaries and Herod's entourage. Today the remains of the palace foundations can be found in the Armenian section of the Old City."²⁰

Herod built massive projects all over Israel and far beyond its borders. In Israel, we know of his palace complexes at Jericho, Masada, and Herodium (near Bethlehem). Herod's Mediterranean Seaport city of Caesarea, with its theater and aqueduct, has been uncovered. The additions to the Temple in Jerusalem with bridge and overpass entries are now well known. More than 80 building projects throughout the ancient world have been chronicled and detailed by historian Peter Richardson in his definitive biography of Herod the Great.²¹

We are virtually "touching" many of the key figures around Jesus. One of Herod's sons, Herod Antipas, became ruler of Galilee during the time of Jesus. We can absolutely date Herod Antipas and his Galilee capitol of Sepphoris. Remains of the city have been unearthed for all to study and examine.²²

Coins of Herod, Herod Antipas, and Pontius Pilate, are plentiful on the antiquities market. These and other ancient Judean coins are commonplace.²³

Tourists to the Holy Land can visit Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida.²⁴ One can also look across the Sea of Galilee at the sloping Golan Heights and envision the pagan Deca-

polis and the swine plunging down into the Sea of Galilee as the Gospels record. The low mountain rise north of the Sea brings to mind the Mount of Beatitudes and the activities of Jesus.

In Jerusalem, in the Peace Forest south of the old city, a dramatic unexpected find in 1990 brought Jesus' trial back into the headlines. Workers in the area accidentally uncovered the ossuary and bones of the 60-year-old High Priest Caiaphas (the man to whom Jesus was taken after His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane).²⁵ Josephus gave his name as Joseph Caiaphas. The ornate bone box which was uncovered said *Qafa* and *Yehosef bar Qayafa* ("Caiaphas" and "Joseph, son of Caiaphas").²⁶

Paul Maier reminds us that Buddha, Zoroaster and other religious figures have "hazy chronologies."²⁷ Jesus and the people and places around Him are indeed set in stone.

John 11:1 mentions Bethany. Bethany is still on the southern part of the Mount of Olives and today is called El Azaria, commemorating Lazarus. Harold Mare informs us that:

"Excavations in 1951-53 uncovered pits, caves, cisterns, tombs, and grave objects which pointed to site occupation from the sixth century B.C. to the fourteenth century A.D. Clay lamps, other vessels, and coins of the first century A.D. were found, artifacts that are to be dated to the time when Jesus frequented Bethany."²⁸

This writer has had the opportunity to visit Bethany on the Mount of Olives on numerous occasions. I also have witnessed, just outside of Bethany and over the west slope of the Mount of Olives on the grounds of the Dominus Flevit Chapel, the dramatic, now-famous, discovery of the 1950s. It was here, in a tomb complex, that the ossuaries of buried residents from the first century Bethany community were found. The apologetic value in this well-documented archaeological find is that three of the ossuaries discovered in Tomb 79 are those of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.

Jack Finnegan wrote extensively on the Bethany ossuaries and others in his 1969 work, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*.²⁹ Likewise, two issues of the *Jerusalem Christian Review* ran articles on the Bethany ossuaries complete with photos. Jean Gilman entitled her first article, "Jerusalem Burial Caves Reveal Names, Testimonies of First Christians."³⁰ Her second front-page article was titled "Priestly Artifact, Cross Marks Discovered in Tomb of Lazarus, Martha, Mary."³¹ For a complete history of Bethany, one can read *Children of Bethany* by Said K. Aburish.³²

Then there was Pontius Pilate. Coins of Pilate are plentiful, but archaeology has given us more. Editor Kenneth Holum recounts the dramatic discovery of Pilate's name on a memorial stone discovered at the coastal city of Caesarea:

"One of the most sensational archaeological discoveries at Caesarea was made in 1961 by the Italian Mission. They were excavating the theater, which had been extensively remodeled in the fourth century C.E., when they found a stone in reuse in a small stairway. A brief Latin inscription on the stone identified a small temple that had stood on the site centuries earlier and named the temple's builder. The text of the inscription, with appropriate restoration, reads. ... [Po]ntius Pilatus [praef]ectus Iud[ae]e ... The inscription confirms that a man named Pilate once served as governor of Judaea and could indeed have presided over the trial, as the New Testament declares."³³

The well-preserved "Pilate stone" has been moved to The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, but a full-size replica is on display at Caesarea and is a favorite of pilgrim picture takers.³⁴

As one walks the Old City of Jerusalem, the ruins and remains of the Pool of Bethesda (John 5) are located just inside the eastern Sheep's Gate. A walk south down the Kidron Valley takes one to David's City, the Gihon Spring, and the Siloam Pool (John 9).

The pedestrian stairway into the southern entrances of the Temple is now uncovered and in plain view — truly we can walk in the footsteps of Jesus and His Apostles.

SO MUCH IS VERIFIABLE

So many of the cities and sites visited by Jesus are identifiable today. Samaria, Bethlehem, and Caesarea Philippi are easy to locate and visit, making the stage of biblical events solid. The digs at Jesus' boyhood hometown take Nazareth back into the first century and show it to be a humble Jewish village, as stated by the Gospels.³⁵ The hard evidence is spectacular.

Time and place references show us an authentic personality — a man named Jesus. He lived in a definite time in history and moved around between specific locations that can be visited, identified, and examined nearly 2,000 years later. Roman census-taking, as in the birth story of Jesus, was a proven practice, showing up in census papyri in Egypt.³⁶

As Jesus walked with His disciples near the Temple in Jerusalem, they marveled and said, "Look, what massive stones" (Mark 13:1). Today we know, without a shadow of doubt, that the Temple stones weighed many tons. These bear testimony to Jesus and the accuracy of the Gospels. Rabbi Reznick describes these massive stones that are there for all to see, either in the lower courses of the western retaining wall or in the debris thrown down by the Romans and discovered along the southwest corner:

"The stones used in the great Herodian Temple walls were huge rocks carved into blocks, called ashlar. Most weighed between 2 and 5 tons. However, many weighed 10 tons, some 50, and one in particular weighed almost 400 tons."³⁷

In what is called the Western Wall Tunnel (or the "Rabbinical Tunnel"), there is one continuous stone which is "estimated to be about 15 feet high, 42 feet long, and 14 feet deep, and weighs about 1,200,000 pounds!"³⁸

In 1986, Israel suffered a severe drought and the Sea of Galilee exposed its bank for the first time in centuries. In the mud of the exposed shoreline, Moshe and Yuval Lufan from Kibbutz Ginosar discovered the remains of a 2,000-year-old fishing boat near the city of Magdala. *Biblical Archaeology Review* covered the tedious and cautious extraction of the two-millennium-old "buried treasure" which was dubbed "The Jesus Boat," obviously because it was a craft much like that used by Christ and His Apostles.³⁹

The boat has been preserved and now is on display at the specially constructed museum in Kibbutz Ginosar. The craft mentioned in Mark 4 fits exactly with the archaeological remains. Additionally, the fishing practices mentioned in the Gospels exactly parallel everything we know about first-century fishing on the Sea of Galilee.⁴⁰

Josephus and other early Jewish writers, as well as secular historians, all attest to Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and local rulers including Roman Governors, Roman Emperors, and High Priests; all of which are prominent figures within the pages of the New Testament. Paul Maier observes:

"Accordingly, the sum total of the geographical, archaeological, and historical-literary evidence from the ancient world dramatically supports the New Testament record not only on the absolute historicity of Jesus, but also on crucial aspects of His extraordinary ministry. The many points of tangency between the Biblical and non-Biblical evidence show corroborative correlation in nearly every instance, the secular facts from the ancient world easily supporting the sacred records. Those who claim otherwise are sadly misinformed, tragically closed-minded, or dishonest."⁴¹

Christians have absolute reason to believe that Christ and Christianity are the most well-attested facts in human history. Jesus, His life and His

times are more well known to us than some events in American history.

Roman writers give vivid details about crucifixion that fit the Bible record exactly. Absolute evidence of crucifixion was brought to light in 1968 when the heel bone of one, Yohanan ben Ha'galgol was discovered in his tomb in Giv'at ha-Mivtar (north of Jerusalem) with the 7 inch Roman nail still embedded in the bones.⁴² Even the secular media took note of this important archaeological discovery.⁴³

Historian Martin Hengel has done extensive research into the history of crucifixion. He says:

"Crucifixion was and remained a political and military punishment. While among the Persians and the Carthaginians it was imposed primarily on high officials and commanders, as on rebels, among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e. slaves, violent criminals and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least in Judaea."⁴⁴

In both Matthew 27:32 and Luke 23:26 we are told that Simon, a man from Cyrene, assisted Jesus in carrying His cross. Who could have ever thought that almost 2,000 years later we would meet up again with strong evidence for this crossbearer, but we may well have, as Alan Millard explains:

"In 1941 a tomb was opened in the Kidron Valley which held eleven ossuaries. ... In fact, the tomb was a burial place for Jewish people from Cyrenaica. Their presence in Jerusalem is mentioned both in Acts 2:10 and in Acts 6:9. One ossuary was marked explicitly in Aramaic 'Alexander of Cyrene' on the same ossuary is a notice in Greek, giving his father's name — 'Alexander, son of Simon'. ... Mark adds that Simon was 'the father of Alexander and Rufus' (Mark 15:21). Was the Alexander of Cyrene, son of Simon, whose bones lay in that ossuary, the man whose father carried the

cross? It may, of course, be a coincidence, yet the identification does seem very likely."⁴⁵

Even the time of the death of Jesus was sovereignly chosen by the Father and marked in Scripture. Mark 15:33-37 tells us that He died precisely at the ninth hour. According to Jewish reckoning that was at 3 p.m. Why 3 p.m. and why the emphasis on that hour? Roland de Vaux informs us:

"...in New Testament times, the lamb was sacrificed in the

Perhaps we could loosely apply Luke 19:40 where the Savior rebuked the Pharisees with: "I tell you that, if these [His disciples] should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." And we can affirm: "They are!"

So we are to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts and be ready to give a defense of any who asks for a reason for the hope that is within us. That becomes much easier for us as the days wear on and God providentially



One of the many flat circular rolling stones found on tombs at burial caves in Israel. The above is on display at the Garden Tomb site in Jerusalem.

middle of the afternoon, about three o'clock (according to Josephus and the Mishnah), the hour at which Jesus died on the cross (Mt 27:46-50 and parallels)."⁴⁶

Furthermore, the flat circular rolling stones are found on tombs all over burial caves in Israel. These were common for Jesus' day.

The evidence for Jesus is massive, overwhelming, breath-taking, even mind-boggling. We have a defense — we have an answer. And better than that, we have a living Savior who left behind an empty tomb. The evidence was so overwhelming that early Christians gave their lives for the Savior.

allows to come to light so much contributing evidence to Jesus and the Bible record.

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WATCHMAN NEE

(continued from page 1)

endorsement of a questionable teacher.

NOT ALL THAT GLITTERS

Not all the reviews in 1984 were as glowing as Wiersbe's. A report came from mainland China that churches there had split and joined Nee's assembly, believing that his was the one way to please God. Many in China did not see him as "one of the giants of the faith," but as sectarian and rigid.

The report stated that Nee's early endeavors seemed like a real work of God:

"Later however, he sees pride coming in, with strong denunciation of denominational churches, and an unhealthy authoritarianism."³

Along the way, this writer began to notice that people who were really enamored with Nee's teachings were very pushy and insistent that his was

the last word on everything. Followers asked others questions simply to see how their answers stacked up against Nee's teachings. These people also seemed off-balance and tended toward a mystical and elitist position. But it was brushed aside and reckoned as a few unbalanced people who took Nee's writings too far or were off-center.

Further research into Nee's teachings brought a surprise. This led to a brief article, "Watching Out For Watchman Nee," which appeared in PFO's newsletter nearly two decades ago. Since then, the influence of Nee's teachings has grown. A deeper and broader look at this religious icon and presumed hero of the faith seemed necessary. No one wants to be overly critical of a giant with a few flaws unless the classification of giant itself is flawed.

A CUT ABOVE

Avid Nee followers are the poorest advertisements for his teachings. Their mentality can be cultlike. Judging Nee leaves one in the position of

being judged by his followers as judgmental. Ardent Nee disciples often display one or more of the following characteristics:

1. They often assume that everything — including the Bible — is judged by Nee's writings. They appear to be unaware that they are quoting what Nee *said* the Bible says. This mind set may not characterize all Nee devotees, but it is prevalent in many. Those who disagree with Nee may be considered sub-spiritual and a dwarf challenging a giant. Whole churches have been summarily judged with Nee's teachings as the ultimate test.

2. When clear statements by Nee point toward error or even heresy, Nee's followers tell those who express doubt that they misunderstand Nee. Pressing for a clearer interpretation is futile.

3. Nee's followers say his writings had to be translated from Chinese and therefore may not be precisely rendered in English. If this is true, then no one can know for sure what he wrote.

Nee's books come to us from a number of sources, which include the books he himself wrote, his articles and editorials from his magazines, and English and Mandarin shorthand taken during his lectures. These writings reflect his chronological transition and developing views from a handful of teachers who introduced him to their extremes, which then became Nee's new emphasis. Very little of his work can be considered biblical exposition.

Because the books are sold as Nee's writings and there are no disclaimers, sidenotes, or corrective and critical apparatus, we have only these translations to go on. Errors of doctrine cannot be blamed on editors or publishers because Nee's doctrinal blemishes are repeated in different books and establish a pattern of questionable teaching.

4. There is further confusion with Nee's followers because Nee, like nearly every other mystic, confused illumination with revelation. General revelation is God showing Himself in creation. Special revelation is God communicating directly with prophets, apostles, through angels, and finally in and through Jesus Christ. It is information given directly by God that could be known in no other way. By inspiration the special revelation was recorded in the Bible for all generations.

Now as the Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible, He gives believers *illumination* of the text. Because Nee called illumination "revelation," his followers are misled and misleading as they talk of their latest revelations. That confusion is taught by Nee in his book, *The Ministry of God's Word*:

"By revelation we mean that today God again breathes on His word, the Holy Spirit imparts light to me; the anointing of the Holy Spirit is upon this word so that once again I see what Paul saw in his day."⁴

Technically, Nee did not have or offer a systematic theology. His teachings are scattered through nearly 100 books, which makes it difficult to

arrange and systematize his views. Living Stream Ministry has collected and published *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee* in 62 volumes, which includes previously untranslated and unpublished material.

NEE'S HISTORY

Watchman Nee was a collector of religious ideas who tried to build a consistent system out of a hodgepodge of theological extremes and distinctives. He ended up with a patchwork quilt of the prevailing ideas of the early twentieth century, based on the ideas of four diverse teachers. Nee borrowed extensively and uncritically, but gave the appearance of having unique insight into spiritual things.

Capitalizing on Luke 12:32, he called his movement the "Little Flock." It was formed in Fujian in the early 1920s.⁵ The Little Flock Movement disrupted and divided churches in China.

Nee believed that early Church truth had been lost and needed to be recovered. He saw some of the recovery occurring through the mystics of the Middle Ages. A historical sketch, provided by one researcher, reveals:

"*The Lord's Recovery* began when the Lord raised up Martin Luther and the reformers, and continued in recovering lost biblical truths through others such as Madame Guyon, Father Fenelon, Brother Lawrence, Count Zinzendorf, the Moravian Brethren, John Darby, the Brethren, Watchman Nee, and today with Brother Witness Lee. Doctrinal conflicts arose between Lee and other leaders and members of the existing movement. Controversy brought about a split of the movement."⁶

In other words, Nee opened himself up to mystical and Gnostic strains. Nee mixed and merged things from the Reformed camp, mystical thought, dispensational ideas, and Roman Catholicism. Nee seemed to come up with very few original ideas while pushing these borrowed ideas with intemperate language. One of those

fringe ideas has been denounced by Dave Hunt. In an analysis of Nee's 1933 book, *The Latent Power of the Soul*, Hunt writes:

"Its basic premise (much like Benny Hinn's teaching) is that Adam was a superman with abilities at least 'a million times' greater than ours (p. 15) and 'possessed [of] a hidden ability which made it possible for him to become like God. He was already like him in outward appearance."⁷

These kinds of statements by Nee may seem inconsequential and even silly to some, but it is dangerous to speak of Adam as being like God outwardly and inwardly without, at the very least, careful explanation and qualifiers. Adam, in many ways, was really as unlike God as anything could be. But there is more going on with Nee than just a few ill-stated religious ideas about Adam. We must go back to his formation in his early days.

Pentecostals, Holiness groups, and even evangelicals appeal to Nee. Regrettably, someone as prestigious and orthodox as Adrian Rogers, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote his latest book, *Kingdom Authority*, claiming he first learned the principles for his new book from Nee's *Spiritual Authority*. Rogers floated the oft-reported idea that Nee "was imprisoned for his faith for 20 years."⁸ Some have gone so far as to describe Nee's writings as "new light" for "end-time ministry."⁹

In 1980, Dana Roberts' book *Understanding Watchman Nee* was published by Haven Press, a division of Logos International. It was the first definitive work on Nee and his writings. However, because Haven Press was a small company that eventually ceased publishing, Roberts' book fell into obscurity. Though Roberts was not completely critical of Nee at every point, he was objective and brutally honest where he had to be.

Roberts gives the details of Nee's birth and naming by his mother:

"...Ho-P'ing promised that if the Lord gave her a boy, she would

return him back for His service. On November 4, 1903, in Swatow, a male child, Nee Shu-Tsu, was born. His name means 'he who proclaims his ancestors' merits.' Years later, after the boy's mission in life became more evident, she proposed a new name, To-Sheng, 'the sound of a gong.' The name would remind both mother and son that he would be a 'bell ringer' (or Watchman) who would raise the people of God for service."¹⁰

Nee was molded in his early days by the teachings and ideas of three influential women. He attended the Bible school of Miss Dora Yu, where he became dissatisfied with his Christian life and growth. Yu encouraged him to submit to the tutelage of Miss M.E. Barber, a Keswick higher-life teacher.¹¹ With Barber's help, Nee experienced what he called the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and followed Barber's victorious life principles.¹²

Through Barber's encouragement, Nee's mind was profoundly shaped and influenced by the mystical and demon-obsessed Jessie Penn-Lewis. Penn-Lewis divided soul and spirit so radically that she ended up dominated by psychic-warfare struggles that took her out of the realm of reality. She became the basis for the formulations of Nee's anthropological struggles and convoluted sanctification ideas. Penn-Lewis believed and taught that Christians could be indwelt by demons.¹³ Nee adopted this unbiblical teaching as well.¹⁴

Barber also introduced Nee to the theory of a partial Rapture. This view, still held by many Pentecostals, assigns carnal and unsanctified believers to a kind of Protestant purgatory in which they suffer the horrors of the tribulation to be purged and made more ready for the Kingdom. This teaching came from the bookshelves of Barber through the writings of Robert Govett. Govett's *The Apocalypse Expounded* especially influenced Nee. Nee taught two levels of Christians: overcomers and "Christians living in sin according to works who must be refined through a limited period of punishment."¹⁵ Nee's carnal/spiritual

division of Christians carried over into his prophetic views.

CHURCH OR CHURCHES?

Nee's ideas on ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) came almost entirely from the collected writings of J. Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren. Like the early Brethren, Nee was quick to point out "the sin of denominations."¹⁶ Yet, despite his contempt, many denominations love him. Many Plymouth Brethren today do fellowship across denominational lines. Darby's strong reaction to both the Anglican denomination and Roman Catholicism caused him to use intemperate, sweeping generalizations regarding all churches.

So it is clear that Nee's formation took place in the seedbed of Brethren and Keswick teachings, though he took notice of other teachers of that day. Nee took some of the current strains of current Keswick teaching a few steps further because he often decided things by way of inner promptings and leadings and by what he determined subjectively was God's way. His well-known statement was: "God's way for us is not known by external indications but by internal registrations."¹⁷ It is apparent that Nee got stuck in the theory and theology of the mid-to-late 1800s. He is in every way a product of his time and his writings are a mirror of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In 1935, Nee came under the influence and instruction of a Pentecostal named Elizabeth Fischbacher, who introduced him to speaking in tongues. Though Nee never spoke in tongues, he did not regard the practice as unbiblical. In some writings, he did warn about false tongues or tongues out of the human psyche or soul power.

MARTYR OR MANAGER?

The question of whether Nee was a martyr for the faith has to be raised. Early in Nee's leadership over the "Little Flock," he exhibited a humble lifestyle as he and his church disassociated from business and commerce. Nee opposed a salary and any system of wealth demonstrated in so many

Catholic and Protestant denominations and missions.¹⁸ Nee thought church workers could do outside work only in special circumstances, but saw trusting God as the ideal method of support and income.

However, something changed as one report points out that "Nee [became] involved in [a] pharmaceutical company and is criticized for withdrawing from full time Christian work."¹⁹ Nee left full-time ministry for a number of years.

One can speculate about all the reasons that Nee decided in 1942 to accept an invitation to work in the administration of his brother George's chemical factory. The commercial trade problems of China at that time, along with diminishing finances, had to play a large part.

Eventually, as the factory was in effect turned over to the church and staffed by the members of the Little Flock, the communist authorities became angered at the commercialism. One source says, "Nee was later successful in business, but turned his successes over to his church."²⁰

During this time, Nee changed many of his principles and earlier teachings. This led to disaffection with people vying for work-related status.²¹

Mao Tse-tung declared and established the People's Republic of China on Oct. 1, 1949, and Nee and his factory-owning Flock were seen as imperialists and people of wealth who had to be confronted and stopped. On April 10, 1952, Nee was arrested, jailed, and charged with corruption. So, technically, he went to jail, not for the Gospel, but for being a business owner and having some wealth. His biographers say he tried at the last minute to disassociate the assemblies from business, but it was too late.

Another brief biography confirms this scenario:

"This business venture caused him much suffering because his fellow workers misunderstood his intentions; this resulted in Nee's withdrawal from active ministry for several years. Later

it provided an excuse for his arrest by the Communists."²²

Nee's biographer, Angus Kinnear, fills in the details of the arrest:

"In his fiftieth year he was arrested in Manchuria by the Department of Public Safety on 10 April 1952, and at his first inquiry, either at Harbin or in Peking, he was charged as a lawless capitalist 'tiger' who had committed all the five crimes specified in the *Wu-Fan* campaign against corrupt business practices. He was warned that the Sheng Hua Company would be required to pay a fine of 17,200 million yuan in old currency (equivalent to 1½ million U.S. dollars). He neither accepted this unfair accusation, nor did he have the funds to pay such a fine. So he remained in prison, and the Company was in due course confiscated by the State."²³

It could be argued that Nee eventually would have been arrested anyway because he was a Christian leader, but no one knows for sure. Kinnear also documents that many of the Little Flock defected and joined the Three Self Movement, a pro-State Political/Religious organization.²⁴ Later suppression by the Government shrunk the numbers of the Little Flock even more. By 1967, after Nee had served 15 years, all churches were closed.

The Three Self Movement was committed to control by the State, financial dependence on the State, and propagation of the various party lines of the State.²⁵

No one would suggest that prison life is less than austere and rigorous, but contrary to all the reports of extreme suffering, mutilation, or torture, Roberts relates that while in jail, "Nee was given a sufficient diet to serve the state as a translator of English chemical journals."²⁶ Kinnear reports that when suffering from coronary problems, he was relieved of manual labor and proper drugs were purchased from a pharmacy and given to him.²⁷ On June 1, 1972, at the age of 68, Nee died.²⁸

NEE'S HERESIES

With such reverence to Nee by his devotees, a charge of heresy brings a familiar hostility. Therefore, proper recognition of the use of *heresy* is in order. This article uses heresy in its normally defined and normally understood way. The Greek word *haire-sis* is defined as:

"denotes (a) choosing, choice, (from *haireomai*, to choose); then, that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects."²⁹

It is clear that Nee in many places chose to stray from the clear teachings of Scripture and imposed his opinions and artificial interpretations on certain Bible portions, leading to an elitism and sectarianism among his followers. Nee himself warned that "History is strewn with innumerable cases of sanctified saints who propagated heresies!"³⁰

Nee taught that spiritual growth, or sanctification, is reduced to an agonizing internal struggle between soul and spirit. Scripture is clear that our struggle is a battle on three fronts: the world, the flesh and the devil. Nee mistakenly created a sharp dichotomy between soul and spirit. This false division permeates most of his writings.

The internal struggle is against our sin nature, our baser drives and sinful desires. That in itself is difficult enough without getting tangled up in a theoretical and mystical campaign to separate the soul from the spirit. Nee's dichotomy was artificial. Biblically speaking, those two words can be interchangeable.³¹ Nee promoted the concept that the soul is always the evil part that we must reject. However, this is likewise unbiblical. David spoke of God restoring his soul in Psalm 23:3; of his soul thirsting and hoping for God in Psalm 42:2, 5; and of God's comforts delighting his soul in Psalm 94:19. Nee's view was really more in league with metaphysics,

rather than good exegesis. Jesus spoke of loving God with "all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Nee fabricated the concept of a spirit trapped in the soul, having to break free.

ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND

Nee did not see sanctification as practical character change in accordance with the Word and motivated by grace and the Holy Spirit as much as subjective scraping of one's insides while struggling to understand "brokenness" and "the release of the spirit." Nee states that "revival, zeal, pleading and activity are but a waste of time."³² To be of help or blessing to anyone else there must be "brokenness," Nee said. Somehow the spirit must break through the soul and body in some significant way.

Brokenness is not just repentance or being broken by sin. Neither is it the expected sufferings that drive us to our knees throughout life. It is not just the hard experiences we face. How does one, to use Nee's depiction, "break our alabaster box"?³³ Nee proposed that it must be the destruction of "our opinions, our ways, our cleverness, our self-love, our all."³⁴ Our cleverness and self-love may be a problem for us and should be dealt with biblically, but to have no opinion and to question all our ways — even good ones — could reduce one to an introspective muddle.

Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs express their objection:

"Nee's stress on not putting confidence in one's own ideas is excellent, but it seems to us he goes beyond this, in suggesting that doctrine and its exposition are not helpful even if they seem to be helpful. He is, we suggest, bound to reach such a conclusion because his view of the self is so negative and because he sees the Holy Spirit working only in the spirit, not into the whole of the believer's experience."³⁵

Nee offered a crisis prayer of consecration for "our brokenness,"³⁶ but that is just a beginning. Later he took

that back when he wrote, "It is according to His law of accomplishing a brokenness and release in us; all our praying will not alter this law."³⁷ Nee turned clearly mystical and said that brokenness can come through direct revelation by soliciting: "May He truly reveal to us what is meant by the destroying of the outward man."³⁸ Nee went on to say that we cannot serve effectively without this brokenness. Still later, his formula seemed to be that "God wants to divide our spirit and soul. ... How rare it is these days to find a pure spirit."³⁹ This is just a small sampling of how obscure, metaphysical, and confusing Nee could be.

In the end, brokenness seems to be an experience of unmediated, undisturbed communion with God. Nee's somewhat gnostic formula is:

"THE OUTWARD MAN IS BROKEN THROUGH THE DISCIPLINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT; IT IS DIVIDED FROM THE INWARD MAN BY THE REVELATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."⁴⁰

HOUSE OF CARDS

Nee based his entire anthropological/psychological view of man on his misuse of Hebrews 4:12, which states: "For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Nee's book, *The Release of the Spirit*, is based on his misunderstanding of the Hebrews' passage as he stated:

"...that the ability to use our spirit depends upon the two fold work of God: the breaking of the outward man and the dividing of spirit and soul, i.e., the separating of our inward man from the outward. Only after God has carried out both of these processes in our lives are we able to exercise our spirit."⁴¹

Note his words, "the dividing of spirit and soul," after which he references Hebrews 4:12. Nee went on to say that "our spirit and our soul are

divided" and then has God saying that His Word "is able to divide the soul and spirit."⁴²

Nee read the verse as if it means that God divides *two* things, *soul* from *spirit* and *joints* from *marrow*. Herein was his crucial mistake. His premise, upon examination, falls apart since there is no marrow in joints, but there is in bones. What Nee missed is the plain meaning of the word "and." Hebrews 4:12 uses *four* separate things to declare what God can divide. He can divide a soul as well as a spirit, and joints as well as marrow. The point being that God can divide what no human sword can ever divide no matter how sharp. God's Word is sharper than the sharpest sword on earth and can slice into areas of our inner being that nothing else could.

F.F. Bruce was a Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis in the University of Manchester. He said that the dividing of both soul and spirit and both joints and marrow:

"...are to be understood as a 'rhetorical accumulation of terms to express the whole mental nature of man on all its sides'; so A.B. Davidson, who further points out that since 'the idea of dividing the soul and spirit suggests the division of a body into its members, hence joints and marrow are attributed to them, expressing the subtle articulations of the spiritual being and the innermost nature and substance of it'. It would indeed be precarious to draw any conclusions from these words about our author's psychology, nor is it necessary to understand them in the sense of the Pauline distinction between soul and spirit. That the word of God probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and brings the subconscious motives to light is what is meant; we may compare Paul's language about the coming day when the Lord 'will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts' (I Cor. 4:5). It is not surprising, accordingly, that a judicial function is

here attributed to the word of God. It is 'discriminative of the heart's thoughts and intents.'⁴³

The focus of Hebrews 4:12 is not the psychology of man, but the power of the Word. Jerry Vines concurs:

"The Bible *explores* our lives... It penetrates to the depths of our experiences. The Word of God reaches areas no human being is able to see. It gets under our skins. The Bible divides soul and spirit. That means it *examines* our lives. ... Other people see what we do, but God's Word examines why we do what we do. It deals not only with our thoughts, but also with the intents behind the thoughts. ... The Bible also *exposes* our lives."⁴⁴

Jay Adams believes that people are misled at times because of slight inaccuracies in the King James Version and he states:

"The point is not that the soul is *divided from* spirit, or joint *from* marrow. Rather, what is said is that God's Word splits the spirit and also the soul, the joints and also the marrow. Many who misunderstand have always wondered why the joints are to be divided from the marrow when they are not in close contiguity. The word *between* has been imported into our thinking about the passage... The true idea is that God's Word penetrates deeply enough into man's innermost being to cut open and lay bare his desires and thoughts."⁴⁵

Dana Roberts homes in on the real issue with Nee:

"The local churches had invested him with the job of metaphysician, and, using the historic tools of the 'inspired' Scripture in conjunction with personal revelation, Nee felt confident enough in the position to propose a practical metaphysical map of the soul and the spirit."⁴⁶

At the very least Nee was unclear, contradictory, and misleading. Brokenness teaching is an example of the mystical and fuzzy extremes that mark Nee's teachings throughout.

One can easily make that judgment, even at the expense of being evaluated as unspiritual by Nee's followers.

REVELATION

Perhaps even Nee realized that his readers were mentally exhausted by his verbal gymnastics when he wrote:

"...it is extremely difficult to explain this matter of dividing the natural from the spiritual, the outward from the inward. Only as there is revelation, is the problem solved. Whenever you are enabled to discern the thoughts and intents of your heart, you can be sure your soul and spirit are being divided."⁴⁷

In the end, it is something supernaturally revealed and discovered within the believer. Just as with Mormonism, it is an inner assurance. The rub is if we are not quite sure what it is, we cannot be sure that we have it.

BECOMING LORD JESUS

Another troubling aspect of Nee's teaching is his view of Jesus. He is off the mark in so many ways with regard to the person of Christ. A defective Christology is no small matter. From the days of the early Church there were struggles because of attacks regarding who Jesus is, as well as His work on earth. One writer suggests that the question of who Jesus is happens to be hugely important:

"This is the most important question that any person will ever face. The deepest joys we will ever know in this life and our very hope of eternal life depend on the proper answer to that question. Because this is true, we may be sure that the primary activity of Satan will be to obscure as much as possible the true nature of the person of our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus."⁴⁸

Heresy hardly ever begins as a quick U-turn, but rather as a slight curving away. Nee taught clearly that Jesus was not always inherently Lord. Lordship was something that Christ had to gain or earn. Nee stated it this way:

"As regards the Godhead, the Son and the Father are co-equal; but His being the Lord is rewarded Him by God. The Lord Jesus Christ was made Lord only after He emptied Himself. His deity derives from who He is, for His being God is His inherent nature. His being Lord, though, issues out of what He has done. He was exalted and rewarded by God to be Lord only after He forsook His glory and maintained the perfect role of obedience. As regards Himself, He is God; as regards reward, He is Lord. His Lordship did not exist originally in the Godhead."⁴⁹

This is a shocking paragraph. Nee said Christ had to work for His Lordship. He suggested that something was added to the Godhead that was not already there. This undermines Christ's eternal Lordship, and the doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of God. Lordship comes from the Greek word *kurios* and signifies power and authority (as an adjective) and can be translated as Master, owner, and Lord (as a noun). It is the equivalent (when used of Jesus) of the Old Testament names Yahweh and Adonai. The Lord Jesus did not have to wait until after He was exalted to become Lord, but was addressed as Lord all through His earthly ministry. Though its full significance was only realized after the resurrection (Acts 2:36), He was called Lord at birth (Luke 2:11), and even in His pre-incarnate existence (Psalm 110:1). Jesus Himself affirmed that even David called the Messiah his Lord (Matthew 22:42-45). The Messiah was both son of David and Lord of David.

Nee missed the fact that we cannot ever disconnect Christ's deity from His Lordship. Jesus is eternal deity. Therefore He must be eternal Lord, as one writer affirms:

"Jesus Christ, therefore, is Lord to Christians in the same sense that Jehovah was Lord to the Hebrews. The usage referred to is altogether peculiar; no man — not Moses, nor Abraham, nor David, nor any of the prophets or Apostles, is ever thus prevail-

ingly addressed or invoked as Lord. We have but one Lord; and Jesus Christ is Lord. ... Every believer knows in what sense he calls Jesus Lord... He knows that it is from the New Testament he has been taught to worship Christ in calling him Lord."⁵⁰

To say that Jesus was lacking something, or that He became something He was not already, or that the Godhead had something added to it along the way, is a total distortion. Probably not realizing it, Nee put forth a form of open theism (or finite godism). If followers of Nee want to argue for Nee's position and accept a limited and diminished Christ or even a developing Christ, that is up to them. Clinging to Nee and his teachings gives one no choice.

The exact nature of the union of Christ's deity and humanity pushes us into a study in which we must walk a fine line. Helpful biblical explanations and guidelines can be found in most systematic theologies or in books like *Thiessen's Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*.⁵¹

Though no one can give a precise psychological analysis or detailed explanation of the personality of Christ and the union of His two natures in one person, there are things in Scripture that are evident or may be inferred that keep us from the mistakes being made by Nee. Hebrews 13:8 is clear: "Jesus Christ, the same, yesterday, today and forever." He was fully Lord in the past, is Lord in the present, and will ever remain Lord in the future.

Nee then promoted an incredible scenario by suggesting that Jesus could have ascended to heaven devoid of His glory:

"He braved the possible peril of not being able to return with glory. Should He have become disobedient on earth as a man, He would have still been able to reclaim His place in the Godhead by asserting His original authority; but if so, He would have forever broken down the principle of obedience."⁵²

It is hard to understand why Nee did not understand that a "disobedient" Jesus would have been a sinner. A sinner could not be a Savior.

Even worse is the use of the words "reclaim His place in the Godhead." Here Nee argued for the possibility of a time when Jesus would be excluded from the Godhead, thereby again diminishing His deity and the very expressed nature of the Trinity. It seems that Nee had "glory" confused with "Lordship" and "Godhead" and was using "glory" as if it were the other words. "Glory," which is *doxa* in Greek, is used of "honor," at times of God's nature or acts as exhibited in the person and work of Christ, and of the power of God. It is even used of the believer's future.⁵³

It is hard to understand how Nee was even using the word glory, let alone propose that Christ might have returned to heaven without it. John 17:4, 5, and 22 speak against Nee's idea of Jesus Christ minus His glory. Vine informs us that "When *doxazo* is predicated of Christ..., it means that His innate glory is brought to light, is made manifest."⁵⁴ Christ's glory being innate could never be forfeited or taken away, but either manifested or not manifested.

John MacArthur emphasizes why we could not even suggest that Christ would be divested of glory:

"Believing God means we acknowledge His glory, which is the sum of all His attributes and the fullness of all His majesty."⁵⁵

COULD JESUS HAVE SINNED?

The other issue raised is the question of whether Jesus could sin or be disobedient.

Respected theologians insist that Jesus was impeccable — that He could not have sinned:

"Christ's deity overruled any susceptibility to sin that may have been in the human nature. Christ's deity made it impossible for Him to sin as a person. Thus, as a person, Jesus Christ was not susceptible to sinning. ... The very fact that God's sovereign

decrees are *certain* to be fulfilled required the impossibility of Christ's sinning."⁵⁶

The late John F. Walvoord concluded:

"In the person of Christ, however, the human will was always subservient to the divine will and could never act independently. Inasmuch as all agree that the divine will of God could not sin, this quality then becomes the quality of the person and Christ becomes impeccable. ... The concept of peccability in the person of Christ is contradicted principally by the attributes of immutability, omnipotence and omniscience. The fact of the immutability of Christ is the first determining factor of His impeccability."⁵⁷

Professor of Systematic Theology, Bruce Demarest, summarized:

"In some mysterious way the divine nature of the God-man shielded His human nature against the possibility of sin."⁵⁸

Some may argue, "What does it matter anyway since Jesus didn't sin and everything worked according to God's plan and purpose in the end?" What matters is that if we take that approach to the Bible, it demonstrates a carelessness in how we handle truth. A metamorphosed biography of Jesus is a false one.

Saddam Hussein is known to have said, "Don't tell me about the law. The law is anything I write on a scrap of paper."⁵⁹ We need to be very careful about taking anything that anyone writes on paper and making it our law. The Bible is our only safe and consistent guide.

MYSTICS AND FUSION

Nee's view of the Holy Spirit is also troubling and it reflects a mystical move toward what is known as fusion or mingling. The medieval mystics, at times, confused God with their inner man, believing that there could be a total fusing or mingling of God with their spirit to the degree that their identity was lost in the divine pres-

ence. These have been called pantheistic mystics. Nee seems to have borrowed from the evangelical strain of mystics, as well as the pantheistic strain.⁶⁰

Consider some of Nee's statements with regard to the Holy Spirit:

"Of the whole Bible, Romans eight may well be the chapter where the word 'spirit' is used most frequently. Who can discern how many times the word 'spirit' in this chapter refers to the human spirit and how many times to God's Spirit?"⁶¹

Here Nee clouded the issue by suggesting that no one can know whose spirit is being spoken about in Romans 8. What he said initially does not sound like a huge problem. What he went on to propose pushed far beyond this and suggested a reason why we cannot sort the "spirits" out in that chapter. Besides, many would disagree with his initial premise anyway, but we will proceed to his conclusions.

Nee built on the earlier theory:

"...we find it hard to discern which is the Holy Spirit and which is our own spirit. The Holy Spirit and our spirit have become so mingled; while each is distinctive, they are not easily distinguished."⁶²

The word "mingle" means "to mix" so Nee suggested that our spirits get mixed in with the Holy Spirit. We may at this point say he is wrong and even confused, but he has at least held that the two spirits are "distinctive." However, Nee pushed his premise further:

"Since the Holy Spirit and our spirit are joined into one, they can be distinguished only in name, *not in fact*. And since the release of one means the release of both, others can touch the Holy Spirit whenever they touch our spirit. Thank God that inasmuch as you allow people to contact your spirit, *you allow them to contact God*. Your spirit has brought the Holy Spirit to man. When the Holy Spirit is working,

He needs to be carried by the human spirit."⁶³

Here Nee taught mingling or fusion and is close to, if not fully teaching, pantheism.

Macaulay and Barrs address this flaw:

"He seems to suggest here that there is a union of being between the Holy Spirit and man's spirit so that the two become one being. This is contrary to the biblical teaching that God is never confused with man."⁶⁴

MAJOR ON MINORS

Another mark of a cultic or aberrational group, according to Dave Breese, is what he calls "segmented biblical attention," or overemphasis on one portion of Scripture at the expense of others that might bring balance and moderation. If one minor or debatable area of the Bible is overemphasized, strangeness and divisiveness can result.⁶⁵

When special emphases become all-important points and defining doctrines for fellowship, heresies and divisions occur. Enslaving organizational structures often follow. Breese observes:

"Human dispositions, responding to the portions of Scripture to which they have given attention, have made of this amorphous thing called 'Christianity' a crazy quilt of groups whose resemblance is obscure indeed."⁶⁶

Nee was willing to divide over the issue of localism. In his early teaching, he was against denominational names and taught that believers should gather in only one church in any given locality. The Bible nowhere commands or condemns local church names. It seems to be unimportant to God or it surely would be regulated or forbidden. Since the Bible does not make it an issue, it is not an issue.

Nee advocated his form of localism. Local can mean a town, a borough, or a large city. So, according to Nee, there was to be only one church in any locality. It was an expansion of

the Plymouth Brethren teaching and led to sectarianism. Dana Roberts writes:

"Nee castigates Roman Catholics as the church of Thyatira, Protestants as Sardis and many of the Brethren as Laodicea. Nee's arguments are based on interpreting church history as a progressive recovery of the original truths of the Ephesus and Smyrna churches. While Nee always regarded other denominations with disfavor, Nee here brings eschatological judgment upon all other churches."⁶⁷

Any of the above churches that find solace in Nee surely have no idea what he taught.

Later, however, Nee received "new light," which is expressed in his book *Spiritual Authority*. He established regional centers over local churches at least partially negating the autonomy of those churches. Nee, with his localism, overemphasized one portion of Scripture while ignoring others. The Apostle Paul himself, in addressing the locality and region of Galatia greeted them with "To the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2).

FIRST YOU SAY YOU DO, THEN YOU SAY YOU DON'T

Initially, Nee was the main teacher in the regional center, periodically training workers and elders. It is chilling to realize what Nee taught about absolute authority:

"People will perhaps argue, 'What if the authority is wrong?' The answer is, If God dares to entrust His authority to men, then we can dare to obey. Whether the one in authority is right or wrong does not concern us, since he has to be responsible directly to God. The obedient needs only to obey; the Lord will not hold us responsible for any mistaken obedience, rather will He hold the delegated authority responsible for his erroneous act. Insubordination, however, is rebellion, and for this the one under authority must answer to God."⁶⁸

Nee could not have been more wrong. Saying "no" to sin or error, no matter who commands it, is never wrong, always right. It certainly is not rebellion. A leader directing a follower toward an unbiblical course has exceeded his or her biblical authority. When the Apostles were commanded toward something unscriptural, they replied: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). New Testament leadership is servant leadership. A servant leader never asks anything he will not do himself. Loyalty to the point of obeying wrong is perverted loyalty and another cultic mark that Dave Breese calls "enslaving organizational structure."⁶⁹ Unquestioned authority can only produce monarchs or princes. True leaders feed the sheep as they model Christ (Hebrews 13:7).

Nee said even God is restricted by delegated authority:

"Having delegated His authority to men, God Himself will not supersede delegated authority; rather is He restrained by the authority He has delegated. He confirms what delegated authority has confirmed and voids what it has also voided."⁷⁰

Here Nee had God under man and "restrained." This is a frontal assault on God's omnipotence and a challenge to other attributes.

However, later in the book Nee said leaders should be humble servants — but what he offered was too little, too late. Then, in a mind-boggling reversal, Nee stated:

"Should the delegated authority issue an order clearly contradicting God's command, he will be given submission but not obedience. We should submit to the person who has received delegated authority from God, but we should disobey the order which offends God."⁷¹

Nee's confusion stems partially from his making submission something internal and subjective, but obedience external. Submission, he said, is a "heart attitude" and obedience is "related to conduct."⁷² In other

words, we can be submissive while not obeying. That division will not hold up since submission means to be under someone and yielded to them, making obedience just an outward expression of submission. Nee promoted a false distinction because submission and obedience come from the same root word. Obedience is the fulfillment of submission. At times, they are almost interchangeable. Submit (or submission) is *hupeiko*,⁷³ and obedience is *hupakoe*.⁷⁴ Both convey being under someone or something and responding positively to orders. We could in no way say we were submitted to God if we did not obey Him.

Nee would have made believers unquestioning robots had the following been true:

“God puts above you the brothers and sisters in the church who are more advanced spiritually so that you may accept their judgment as your judgment. This will then enable you to possess their wealth without you yourself having to go through their painful experiences.”⁷⁵

With this criteria we would have to judge the Bereans as rebellious and carnal since they questioned a spiritual authority and checked him against Scripture (Acts 17:11). So much of Nee’s parallel teaching points to unrestrained authoritarianism.

With all the above teaching on authority, Nee weakened the concept of individual responsibility. We may ask others for their opinion, which is wisdom, but we do not have to accept their judgment as final.

Nee said individual Christians cannot put on the armor of God. He saw leadership and the body (the Church) as protection and as a “covering” without which we are mincemeat for Satan.⁷⁶ While fellowship is good and right, Nee pushed this truth beyond proper boundaries when he suggested that only under the “covering” can we have the armor of Ephesians 6. Nee wrote:

“We should understand that spiritual warfare belongs to the

church, not to an individual. ... In view of this fact, let us not forget that this spiritual armor is given to the church and not to anyone individually. You as an individual cannot cope with Satan. It requires the church to deal with the enemy. ... Satan is not afraid of your personal prayer... Satan looks for such solitary and uncovered persons to attack.”⁷⁷

No one would think for a moment that Paul was addressing anyone other than individual believers in Ephesians 6. Early in the chapter, specific commands are addressed to certain believers (children, fathers, masters) and then specific directions are given to all believers. The “we” and “you” are each of us. A parallel passage Romans 13:12 (“put on the armor of light”), and its context shows it is addressed to individuals.

Kenneth Wuest’s *Expanded Translation* shows how intensely personal Ephesians 6 is when it translates the literal Greek of “put on,” as “clothe yourselves” and “having clothed yourself.” Paul’s point in the imagery of a Roman soldier and his armor is that the soldier alone can don his armor. The Roman government could not dress him. He was responsible to dress himself so that he would be protected.

It would be silly to think that Satan only attacks in Church or when one is with other believers. In Nee’s view, it would follow that a shut-in or one cut off from fellowship and the Church would be defenseless.

Church fellowship must always be held in balance with personal responsibility, but it seems Nee goes to extremes by so emphasizing one he almost excludes the other. While individualism is wrong, covering — really smothering — can produce passive, immature, unthinking believers. Good leadership and accountability go along with personal responsibility. Growing along with while serving others gives liberty and balance in the local church.

No wonder Nee’s followers are confused and ready to defend him, because he did not always teach the

unavailability of armor to individual Christians. In another publication on Ephesians 6 where Nee annotates the phrase “stand therefore,” he says without qualifiers that, “Every Christian must learn to stand.” He then speaks of warfare “in relation to our personal Christian lives.”⁷⁸ One wishes the real Watchman Nee would have stood up.

BEYOND ALL REASON

Nee denigrated reason. He believed that it was forever disqualified at the Fall, but produced no adequate scriptural basis for his theory. The Bible picture is that although human reason is tainted by the Fall, it can be enlightened, aided, instructed, and guided by the Scripture. Redeemed reason, guided by the Word of God, is part of discernment. The Lord calls us to “come reason together” (Isaiah 1:18) and Paul said our Christian service was “reasonable” (Romans 12:1). Here Nee was into his simplistic reductionism and polarization again. The Bible instructs us that reason can be used for or against God. Paul constantly “reasoned” with others regarding the faith (Acts 17:2; 18:4, 19; 24:25).

Nee railed against reason, spending seven pages in *Spiritual Authority* knocking it. Samples of his thoughts include:

“One who is subject to authority, however, lives under authority and not in reason.”⁷⁹

“Reason cannot bear thinking.”⁸⁰

“It is very true that we need to have the eyes of our reason put out in order to follow the Lord.”⁸¹

“The servants of God must be delivered from the life of reason.”⁸²

“Hence there are two classes of Christians: those who live on the level of reason, and those who live on the level of authority.”⁸³

“...there is no possibility of mixing up reason with obedience... it is absolutely impossible to live by both.”⁸⁴

“He who knows God knows himself and therefore is delivered from reason.”⁸⁵

“All who still live in their reasonings have not known Him.”⁸⁶

BY WHAT STANDARD?

When we compare them with Scripture, we can see why many of Nee’s teachings are in error. Nee often cavalierly and subjectively assigns meanings to Scripture that do not do justice to the verses or context. If Nee had any consistent hermeneutic at all, it can only be defined as quasi-devotional and, at times, almost gnostic. It can create in some a completely introspective life.

Dana Roberts is not convinced that discovering the fine details and intricacies of our psyche is all that necessary or important:

“Whether one understands the characteristics of the soul and the ‘human spirit’ is irrelevant. Once sin is made known, continuing growth is conditioned upon repentance and surrendering ourselves more to the work of the Holy Spirit. ... Indeed, sanctification preconditioned upon our comprehension of the hidden mechanics of the spiritual man may lead to a spirit of pride rather than to a humble and contrite heart.”⁸⁷

No one would believe that if they had only the Bible and had never read Watchman Nee they would be spiritually impoverished. No one would suggest that Nee was not a Christian. The larger questions are whether he should have been a teacher and leader. Mixed-up teachers produce mixed-up students.

THE RETURN OF THE RABBIT

In closing, let’s return to the chocolate rabbit and add to it the following parable:

There was a man who lived next to the Hershey’s chocolate factory and was friends with the Hershey family. The son of the owner invited the man to come to the factory at any time and enjoy free of charge anything they


made. This was an open invitation with no time limits or barriers. The man, a chocolate lover, rejoiced as he thought of all those treats, so available and there in both quality and quantity everyday. What a gracious gift.

The parallel to the Bible and the riches of Scripture should be clear. In the end, people might still want the chocolate bunny. It is really up to them. However, they need to know what they are getting and not expect anything more.

Endnotes:

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4. Watchman Nee, *The Ministry of God’s Word*. New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1971, pg. 87.
5. “A Short History of The Little Flock,” op. cit., pg. 4.
6. Jim Moran, “A Brief History of the Local Church.” Moran published critiques of the Local Church on his web site, Light of Truth Ministries (www.ltm.org). On January 17, 2003, Moran died and in April 2003, the Local Church (The Church in Fullerton Corporation) purchased from Moran’s estate his web site including all files and postings. They have now removed these documents from the Internet and are notifying any other web sites which have these documents posted also to remove them.
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11. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
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27. *Against the Tide*, op. cit., pg. 226.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 237.
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30. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 103.
31. See, for example, John 12:27 and 13:21; Hebrews 12:23 and Revelation 6:9; Matthew 10:28 and 1 Corinthians 5:5. Also see standard works on systematic theology such as James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. Escondido, Calif.: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1887, pp. 194-212; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 2, pp. 44-51, (Hodge labels trichotomy as “anti-Scriptural”); and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, pp. 472-489.
32. Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*. Indianapolis: Sure Foundation, 1965, pg. 10.
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36. *The Release of the Spirit*, op. cit., pg. 14.
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60. See further, Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 76-81.
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62. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
63. *Ibid.*, pg. 21, emphasis added.
64. *Being Human*, op. cit., pg. 200.
65. A classic example of this trait is the Latter-day Saint (Mormon) interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("why are they baptized for the dead") in which they have built an elaborate theology and temple ceremony.
66. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 87.
67. *Understanding Watchman Nee*, op. cit., pg. 135.
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69. *Know the Marks of Cults*, op. cit., pg. 95.
70. *Spiritual Authority*, op. cit., pg. 73.
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EDITORIALS

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member, there is little — if any — encouragement or discipline to obey the command of 1 Peter 4:10. The demands (or lack thereof) of Riverbend and similar churches allow for a brand of Christians who are salt that has lost its flavor and lamps hidden under a basket (Matthew 5:13-16).

In the first chapter of 1 John, the apostle spells out that we have been brought into fellowship with God *and each other*. Christians are not to be isolated from one another, but rather they are to be team players. A number of years ago, *Christianity Today* ran a brief sidebar entitled, "The Team Player." The article provided some helpful observations:

- Team members *supplement* one another and they build one another's strengths.
- Team members *encourage* one another and motivate each other to develop and use their abilities.
- Team members are *accountable* to one another.

The article also reminded us, "Shared work means shared responsibility." Local churches that allow members the option of being anonymous allow them the option of dodging work and responsibility.

No doubt, Riverbend Church (and other low-impact Christianity churches) would protest and claim that they are reaching those who would never darken the doorstep

of some other church. Pastor and author Gary E. Gilley repeatedly defuses such an argument and shows its unbiblical premise in his insightful volume, *This Little Church Went to Market*. Gilley demonstrates the flaw in this logic when he writes:

"The seeker-sensitive experts would defend marketing as a tool they use to attract more unchurched Harrys to hear the gospel. 'Methods change, the message stays the same,' is the cliché. What they do not seem to understand is that the message will ultimately be shaped by the method. ... In the seeker-sensitive church, 'needs' reign supreme; God exists to meet Harry's needs. Harry comes to Christ, not to glorify Him, but to find the promised fulfillment and happiness in this life" (pp. 81-82).

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Southern Baptist Seminary president, is right on target when he states, "Americans are now fanatic devotees of the cult of self-fulfillment and personal autonomy."

Mann's desire not to expose his flock to "guilt-inducing sermons" may well impede the work of the Holy Spirit. In the hours before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that the work of the coming Spirit would be to point to Christ and to convict the world of sin:

"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me" (John 16:8-9).

Christians assemble under the preaching of the Word, not to *feel* better, but to *be* better. Scripture demands that

we develop our character, not our comfort. Remember, God is more interested in our holiness than our happiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). Happiness and solace can be by-products of our faith, but they should not be the driving force.

Riverbend Church's concept of worship may well play to the masses, but it is merely a repackaging of the unbiblical self-esteem concept. PFO director David Tyler, in his rebuttal of the self-esteem doctrine, expounds on the Beatitudes given by Jesus during His Sermon on the Mount:

"No man can put into practice what the Lord said in these verses unless he becomes dead to self. This means that he is not concerned about personal 'rights of self.' It is the absence of this tendency of constantly 'watching out for self,' of having 'sensitivity about self,' that is so delicate that the slightest disturbance can upset its equilibrium and devastate the individual. The Lord wants to produce in the believer an *indifference to self...*" (*Jesus Christ: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?*, pp. 23-24, emphasis in original).

Market-driven churches, with their offer of low-impact Christianity, are the antithesis of the scriptural mandate and standard for believers. Weekly installments of a forty-five minute, cotton candy service just won't produce discipline in the life of a Christian. It will not produce sanctification. It will not produce growth.

True believers will experience the abundant life only when they give heed to the words of Christ: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24) and "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38). Low-impact Christianity may appeal to our fleshly desires and selfishness, but it will never produce the men and women which God desires for Himself.

—MKG

BENNY HINN IS RIGHT!

Like a broken clock that is right at least twice a day, Benny Hinn occasionally, but rarely, says something that is true.

On the June 26 broadcast of his *This Is Your Day* program, Hinn aired highlights from his recent "Partners Conference" in Anaheim. During the conference, Hinn warned his followers to be careful what teachers they place themselves under since there would be a "transfer of spirits" from the preacher to his disciples. He explained that if a teacher taught falsehood, heresy, or unwitting error, his listeners would have that kind of spirit transferred to them and influence them. On this count, Hinn is right and our experience bears that out.

Hinn, of course, subtly leads his followers to believe that they could listen to him and not be affected in an evil way. Hinn, who has often cursed and castigated his critics, gives his devotees a regular diet of negative evil. For example, he growled at his 1999 Denver crusade: "Yes Lord, I'll do it. I place a curse on every man and every woman that will stretch his hand against this anointing. I curse that man who dares to speak against this ministry."

Hinn's devotees are picking up the "spirit" of their mentor and his harsh, condemning spirit is being transferred left and right. It seems to give some the idea that they can throw around curses and pronounce an awful future for any who do not come into line with Hinn. They are learning well.

The following is a telephone message left on PFO's voice mail by one of Hinn's supporters. It was from a cellular phone caller based in Columbus, Ohio, and was made to PFO "under the cover of darkness" (that is, the call was made at 1:29 A.M.):

"I have something to tell you guys. I was going through your Internet site and saw that you guys criticize Pastor Benny Hinn, man of God. And I just have to say, be careful, you are in danger of hell. You do not want to mess with the man of God. You can — serious things can happen to you. This is not something to play with. You are making fun of God. You are not making fun of a man. Because Pastor Benny Hinn is a servant of God. And be careful by speaking bad about the servant of God, you're speaking bad about the Lord and the Holy Spirit, and danger may await you. Be careful, do not mess with Jesus. Jesus is God, He is Savior, He still heals the sick, whether you believe it or not — you friggin' skeptic. You need to repent, get on your knees and pray. Because the Lord will forgive you, if you repent now."

So it is true: Like teacher, like student. Sadly, Hinn's blind followers do not realize the negative, judgmental attitudes they have acquired by listening to Hinn on a regular basis. We can only pray for those who condemn and curse us.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Elaine Moses, who claimed to be a former high-ranking witch, occultic diplomat to world leaders, and the wife of Satan. In late 1989, Moses disappeared from the scene when Brown married Daniel Yoder, who claims to be "powerfully anointed as a prophet, healer, and evangelist." Together they operate out of Clinton, Ark., under the banner "Harvest Warriors."

Last year, Brown and Yoder called PFO a major adversary of the Christian Church, lumping it with Islam, Freemasonry, and witchcraft. (PFO answered these charges in the January-March 2003 issue of *The Quarterly Journal*.)

Later in 2002, Brown and Yoder wrote in their November issue of the "Harvest Warriors - News":

"There is a group of men, agents of Satan, who call themselves the PFO, which stands for the Personal Freedom Outreach organization. They have a 'form of godliness,' by proclaiming themselves to be Christians with superior knowledge. They claim to have the ability from God to judge others and decide if they are Christians or not. In actual fact, they are slanders [sic], and they deny the power of God by coming against every ministry that is doing something in God's kingdom! They have web sites and send out information with all sorts of slanderous and false accusations against men and women of God. They deny the fact that we serve a God who is both able and willing to work in a miraculous or powerful way these days. They have published the most incredible false and slanderous accusations against us for years now. Other ministries have tried suing them, but have so far been unsuccessful because of the lack of any legislation to control the internet."

Relating a series of meetings they were leading in New York, they wrote:

"Everything was going well, and God was blessing and people's lives were being changed. Then, on the fourth day, an agent of the PFO went to the church building during the morning and accosted the pastor who owned the building. He told him that he was an FBI agent who had been sent to close down the meetings and arrest Daniel and I [sic]. He told the pastor that if he allowed the meetings to continue, that many FBI agents would come to the meeting that night and arrest everyone in attendance!"

According to Brown and Yoder, the "agent of the PFO, sent by Satan" was "loud, belligerent, and demanded that the meetings be shut down immediately!" The couple claims that by tracing the license plate number of the man's automobile, they discovered that he was not an FBI agent, but merely a PFO agent. "After we returned home, this man mailed us some of the documents he had been waving around, with all sorts of foul language against us hand written across them. The documents were supposed to be police reports, but they were blatantly false, and had such inaccurate information on them, that they were laughable to someone who knew anything about us," Brown wrote.

Brown contends that PFO is "anointed by Satan" and argues that, "If they are allowed to continue, the charismatic movement will be in such division that God's miracles will cease to flow."

Brown's alliance with Charismatics demonstrates just how erratic she is in trying to denounce PFO. Charismatics openly embrace Roman Catholicism, overlooking its false and debilitating gospel. However, Brown calls Roman Catholicism witchcraft and charges that anyone who does not stand against "the evil of the idolatrous system of Roman Catholicism ... [is] practicing witchcraft" (*Prepare for War*, pg. 166).

But Brown's inconsistency extends beyond her outbursts against PFO. In her May 2003 "Harvest Warriors - Newsletter," she details events surrounding her mother's death in 1982. Her current narration offers a diverse retelling of the description she related in her 1987 book, *Prepare for War*. While still listing an incorrect age of her mother at death, Brown now describes a divine encounter her mother allegedly had with Jesus after she suffered a heart attack. Brown summarizes:

"When my father and I came to her bedside, she spoke to us and said, 'A short while ago Jesus appeared here at my bed. He spoke to me and told me that He was giving me a choice. Either He would heal me, or I could go home to be in heaven with Him. I asked Him if I could talk with you two before I made my choice.'"

After discussing the matter, receiving the encouragement of her husband and daughter, Brown's mother made her decision "to go with Jesus." "Later that night, Jesus came and took my mother home quietly," Brown writes.

Sixteen years earlier, Brown described the events with:

"In His perfect will, the Lord allowed the satanists to be the instrument of my mother's death. ... She died suddenly one Christmas" (*Prepare for War*, pg. 224).

However, what should be most alarming for Christians is not the conflicting details of her mother's passing, but what Brown relates next in her May narration. She describes for her readers an event that took place at the funeral home as she and her sister-in-law went to prepare her mother's hair prior to the wake:

"Interestingly, I was to have another experience that would forever stay in my mind and heart. ... As we were walking out of the room, suddenly the veil between the spirit realm and the physical realm was opened up for me. I stopped and looked up in astonishment because suddenly I heard my mother's voice clearly and audibly. I would recognize that voice anywhere! She said, 'Oh honey, thank you so much for going to all that trouble over my old body. But just look at the wonderful new body I have now!' I looked up and saw her standing there, hand in hand with Jesus. She was so excited that she was dancing on tip toe, and it was as if Jesus was holding her down for a moment so she could speak to me. She was young and beautiful. Dressed all in white. I recognized her instantly, even though she

did not look anything like she had looked in her earthly physical body. As soon as she said that to me, she went dancing and whirling away. The whole thing lasted only a few seconds. But I KNEW that what I [had] seen and heard was REAL. God, in His great mercy, had given me a brief glimpse of my mother in her glorified body. ... Interestingly, my sister-in-law did not hear or see anything."

First, Brown shows the fallacy of her tale by saying that her mother possessed a "wonderful new body ... her glorified body." The receiving of a glorified body is the final act in a believer's redemption. It does not occur at death, but will transpire at the return of Jesus Christ when those who have died in Him (and those alive on earth at His coming) will receive a perfect resurrection body like His. Scripture couldn't be more clear on this matter (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; Romans 8:17, 23). Brown exhibits her ignorance of Scripture.

Secondly, Brown's purported episode with her mother is nothing short of outright necromancy. At the very heart of spiritism is the notion that the dead are able to communicate with the living here on earth. This is firmly condemned in Scripture (Leviticus 19:26,31; Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Isaiah 8:19). Yet Brown, who claims the mantle of being a foremost expert on spiritual warfare, tantalizes her followers with the very practices which Scripture denounces.

Brown and Yoder continue to operate in a world of fantasy and occultism. They are unable to refute the

evidence against them, and therefore respond with defamation. They continue to condemn themselves with their own words. While their susceptible followers may swallow these hollow tales, those willing to examine the facts will find plenty of proof of the couple's sordid doctrines and practices.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 24)

oneself for injury or wrong that is done to us" (pg. 24), speaks to the very heart of the issue. His conclusions that "self-love was responsible for the fall" and "Self-esteem is always in defiance of God" (pg. 25) should make any grounded Christian vigorously oppose the self-esteem teaching.

Moreover, Tyler notes that self-denial doesn't come at the expense of an abundant life — rather just the opposite. "The believer's satisfaction, joy, and peace come as by-products of faithful and fruitful Christian living," he writes (pg. 106).

This volume is a quick read and to the point. It is loaded with biblical wisdom and solid exegesis. It is a great work to encourage believers to understand and imitate the self-denial of Jesus Christ.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

THE MANY FACES OF BENNY HINN, VERSION 2.0

by The Door Magazine

4½-hour, 2-DVD set, \$29.95

It's not the sequel, but the original made much better. Its forerunner, a three-hour videotape version released in 2000, has been updated, expanded, and enhanced as a set of digital video discs.

For many years, the folks at the Trinity Foundation (publishers of *The Door Magazine*) have picked up the debris of wrecked lives of people who have been financially, emotionally, and spiritually abused by televangelists. Atop their list of abusers during the past decade has been faith healer Benny Hinn. This Dallas-based watchdog group has worked with news organizations to expose the corruption of various television ministers, including Hinn.

For more than a decade, Hinn has been dogged by investigations by *Inside Edition*, *60 Minutes* (Australia), *Dateline*, HBO, and others. These reports — many spearheaded by the Trinity Foundation — make up the bulk of this DVD set and show Hinn at his worst, including his power-wielding control, opulent lifestyle, bogus healings, lies and deception, heretical theology, and much more. A single report should make anyone question the integrity of this man; viewing several hours of investigations should leave no doubt.

The presentation also includes segments from Hinn's broadcasts that have not been shown in news reports. These include his stage antics, absurd theological statements, and false prophecies. Wife Suzanne's infamous "Holy Ghost enema" diatribe is also included.

The discs' interactive menu enhances use and study of the reports. Users can locate and view specific segments at the touch of the DVD player's remote control. All of the material has been digitally remastered, providing the highest quality of video images.

This work reveals things Hinn doesn't want his flock to know. Reading Hinn's statements in a book like *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn* causes alarm. Seeing him in "living color" making these statements — in his

arrogant and conceited temperament — brings that emotion to another level. *The Many Faces of Benny Hinn, Version 2.0* is one of the best resources to expose the false, self-serving ministry of today's most popular faith healer.

—MKG

JESUS CHRIST: SELF-DENIAL OR SELF-ESTEEM?

by David M. Tyler

Timeless Texts, \$9.95, 114 pages

Like a bad penny that just keeps turning up, so too the dynamics of self-esteem theology continue to plague an already undiscerning Church in various forms. With the publications of self-esteem and self-love advocates abounding in one fashion or another, it is disheartening to see just how few biblical responses have been made against this persuasive and selfish philosophy. In the past two decades, books such as Paul Brownback's *The Danger of Self-Love* and Jay Adams' *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, and Self-Image* are too few and too far between.

Christians are now able to add to this scarce reserve a volume by PFO director David Tyler. *Jesus Christ: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?* takes on the unbiblical notion of the worthiness of man by examining "The Words of Jesus Christ," "The Miracles of Jesus Christ," and "The Parables of Jesus Christ." His study unequivocally shows "that the claims made by Christian self-theorists are incompatible with the teachings of Jesus" (pg. 9). The life and teachings of Christ always demonstrate an "other-oriented way of life," as opposed to the self-oriented leanings of sinful man.

Tyler, in his Introduction, names names. The roster of secular theorists (such as Carl Rogers, Erich Fromm, and Thomas Harris), along with the established "Christian" self-esteem authors (such as Norman Vincent Peale, Robert Schuller, and James Dobson) are provided. However, a name or two, such as apologist Josh McDowell, might surprise some.

Tyler's argument that "The Lord wants to produce in the believer an *indifference to self*, a spirit and attitude that does not take offense easily, retaliate, defend, or avenge

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Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.00 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.