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EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

To Hell and Back The Impossible 23-Minute Journey of Bill Wiese

by G. Richard Fisher

A leading purveyor of outlandish “Christian” experiences and fanaticism writes about one woman’s purported visit to hell: “Sensationalism fascinates, but it also breeds heresy. Authors who claim to have divine revelations should willingly accept close scrutiny.”¹

Yet this same publisher is responsible for the book *23 Minutes in Hell*, written by Bill Wiese.² The back cover introduces Wiese as “a dedicated Christian” and “a successful Realtor.” It also says he has taught and led worship, but says nothing about formal biblical training. The front cover says the book is “One man’s story about what he saw, heard, and felt in that place of torment.”

The book’s title itself is suspect. Any systematic theology based on Scripture will develop the teachings of Christ and the apostles, who spoke about the everlasting punishment of hell. One such work reminds us that, “they themselves also taught that doctrine in the most explicit and solemn manner. It is asserted affirma-



tively that future punishment is everlasting; in the negative form that it can never end; that there is in the future world an impassable gulf between the righteous and the wicked; and that there are sins which can never be forgiven ... Our Lord teaches that the punishment of the wicked is everlasting, in the same sense that the blessedness of the saints is everlasting.”³

GOING BEYOND WHAT IS WRITTEN

Wiese knows and understands clearly that he has no credible proof for all he is claiming. He says, “I did experience this torment, and you can choose to believe me or not.”⁴ The question is: Why should we? Wiese

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WITNESSING BY OSMOSIS?

The capacity of the fallen human imagination never ceases to amaze. The creative process can go in many directions, some of which are not so good.

Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling have written a book called *The God of Intimacy and Action*. Campolo formerly taught sociology at Eastern University, an American Baptist institution in Philadelphia. Darling is an associate professor at Spring Arbor University. Although Spring Arbor has a Methodist heritage, Darling's claim to fame is that she "has been trained in spiritual direction in the Jesuit tradition."

The book presents some new and bizarre teachings that go even beyond those of most Catholic and mystical materials.

Both Campolo and Darling claim that they — and we — can share the Gospel by means of some kind of psychic evangelism or telepathic witnessing. This is so far removed from the Bible and reasonable explanation that it sounds like science fiction. All through the book of Acts, neither Peter nor Paul used this method; they did it the hard way, with words and preaching that caused them persecution. It's a shame that Campolo does not take his own advice from the best two sentences in the whole book, "Discernment is crucial to mystical spirituality. Without it, anything goes" (pg. 11).

This book is Campolo and Darling's introduction to what they call mystical Christianity. It is what they label "authentic faith" and they view medieval mystics as "supersaints" (pg. xi). The book is largely an infomercial for Roman Catholic hagiography. It is replete with all the mystical mechanics and mystic rituals, such as the Prayer of Examen, *lectio divina*, meditation, centering prayer, and Renovaré. Pity Martin Luther and John Calvin; they must have had it all wrong.

Campolo wrote the book's first section (pages 1-56), Darling its second (pages 57-169), and they jointly wrote the third section (pages 170-210). In the introduction, it is easy to see where Campolo is going as he confesses that Francis of Assisi is his "model" and that he is "obsessed" with him (pg. xiii).

Francis is said to have bled from his hands and feet like Jesus on the cross and was, according to legend, the first stigmatic. Francis also claimed to hear from a talking crucifix. He believed that he could communicate with animals, or so the legend goes. Francis died in his early 40s, a victim to his self-imposed and unbiblical fasting and bodily mortifications. The neglect of the body for many of the mystics was a self-imposed death sentence of slow and painful suicide. Many of the females who imitated this behavior were anorexic and indulged in self-destructive cutting of themselves.

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P.O. Box 26062 • Saint Louis, Missouri 63136-0062 • (314) 921-9800

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CANADA STRIPS MINISTRIES OF TAX EXEMPTION

The Canadian government is putting the squeeze on some charities. Officials have ordered MacGregor Ministries shut down as a charitable organization. This prominent apologetic and counter-cult ministry, based in British Columbia, has operated as a registered Canadian Charity for nearly three decades. MacGregor Ministries is one of about 2,500 charities which has had its charity status recently revoked.

"We have been (unjustly, we feel) accused of not fulfilling our original statement of purpose when we became a charity in 1980," according to Lorri MacGregor. The ministry has said that the Canadian government — despite freedom of speech guaranteed under the Charter in Canada — no longer allows critiques of other faiths, even if done fairly and documented thoroughly. "We are being accused of dispensing 'hate,'" MacGregor said.

Initially, the ministry moved to accommodate government regulations by agreeing to shift the analysis of cultic and aberrational groups found on its website and in its publications to a non-charitable entity, teaching only Christian doctrine under the charitable heading. This proposal has been rejected by the government. "We now cannot present Christianity as better than any other religion. We cannot be 'persuasive' when presenting Christianity," a ministry statement reported.

MacGregor Ministries, as a registered Canadian charity, will dissolve and its assets will need to be transferred to a government-approved charity or taxed by the government. The organization has been forced to restructure itself, starting from scratch, and now operates under MM Outreach, a ministry corporation that is no longer allowed to provide tax-deductible receipts for the support it receives.

—MKG

YOU CAN BE A PROPHET

Saying he wants to "comfort and strengthen his church after two years of traumas," Brady Boyd, pastor at New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., is teaching his 10,000-member congregation "how to become modern prophets in their own lives."

Boyd replaced Ted Haggard, who resigned after a sex scandal in 2006. In December 2007, New Life was the

scene of a shooting that left two members — and the assailant — dead after a Sunday morning service.

In late April, Boyd told his flock, "I want all of us here tonight to hear God's voice. You've all been uniquely hard-wired to hear the voice of God," according to a news article in the *Denver Post*. What is being labeled as "comprehensive instruction on prophecy," Boyd wants all of his members to be able to "hear God and foresee their future plans." Boyd alleges that as pastor, prophecy is one of his chief abilities, but he desires his entire congregation to be able to operate with this spiritual gift rather than to depend upon him.

Boyd is enlisting the help of others from the New Life ministerial staff, as well as "prophetic ministers" from his former church in Texas, to promulgate his revelation precepts. Jeff Drott, another minister at New Life, explained that "God rarely speaks to people in an audible voice, often sending a thought, vision, dream, image or scriptural insight," the *Post* reported.

The direction in which Boyd is trying to take his congregation is not new as the membership of his megachurch has long been exposed to such unbiblical teaching. Haggard was part of the National School of the Prophets conference, where he and other leaders would "minister and release you into a new level of prophetic anointing" — all for just \$175. Haggard had also repeatedly claimed to have powerful visions from the Lord — many of which were vague or proven false.

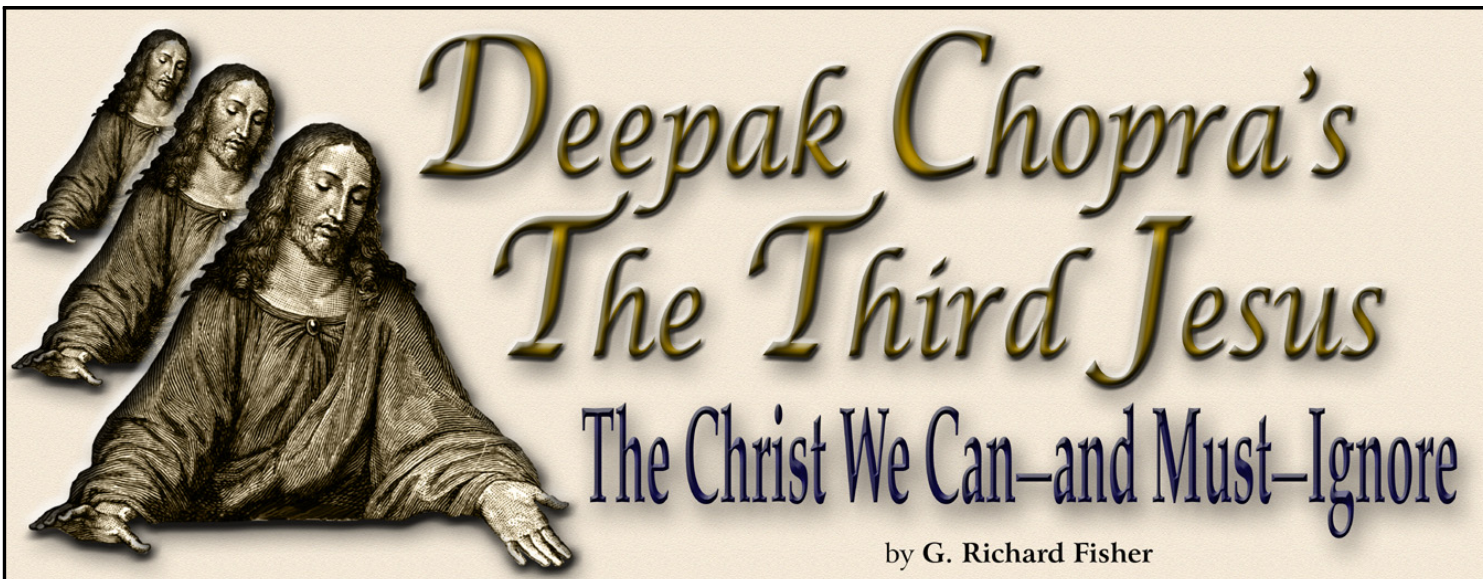
—MKG

BYNUM APPEARS ON DIVORCE COURT

In 2003, Juanita Bynum allowed her million-dollar wedding to Bishop Thomas W. Weeks III to be televised, so it only seemed fitting that she likewise use the same media to discuss her pending divorce. On April 25-26, Bynum appeared in a two-part episode of "Divorce Court," a nationally syndicated reality program. During the broadcast, she confirmed that she is "done" with her marriage and spoke about domestic violence. "I said to myself, I love him, but I love me more," Bynum told "Divorce Court" Judge Lynn Toler during the interview.

Weeks was convicted of aggravated assault after attacking Bynum in August 2007 outside an Atlanta hotel. He was sentenced to three years probation, 200 hours of community service, and must undergo counseling.

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In his new book, *The Third Jesus, The Christ We Cannot Ignore*, New Age guru Deepak Chopra advises, "I have written what I think the New Testament actually means"¹ and further warns his readers that, "Jesus is in trouble. ... Most troubling of all, his teachings have been hijacked."²

The idea of tacking the name of Jesus onto offbeat and aberrational ideas and practices is nothing new. It is as old as Acts 19:11-16 and the failed Jewish exorcists.

YET ANOTHER JESUS

Now Chopra has entered the fray. His new book gives a unique twist on re-creating Jesus for our already confused age. Chopra's "Third Jesus" is his own fabrication and created in his own image. Chopra tries to squeeze Jesus into a Hindu hermeneutic until the Savior bears no resemblance to the biblical Christ.

Chopra was born in 1946. He is a physician and prolific author. Probably his best-known book is *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, which was written in 1993. His father was a cardiologist in India, while his grandfather followed Ayurvedic practice. The Ayurvedic way depends on herbal remedies and speculation about energy flows in the body. It also relies on meditation and sometimes Yoga. Chopra was influenced by a major Ayurvedic physician and himself be-

came prominent in the Transcendental Meditation movement. On the dust jacket of Chopra's latest book he is called, "the poet-prophet of alternative medicine."

OFF TO A REALLY BAD START

The opening statement of Chopra's book sets the stage for the volume and is a paradigm completely fabricated by Chopra:

"Jesus Christ left behind a riddle that two thousand years of worship haven't solved."³

Chopra's premise is that to really understand Jesus we have to understand that He cannot be understood unless Chopra gives us the key to understanding. Chopra is suggesting that he alone has discovered what Bible scholars have been missing for two thousand years. A riddle is a puzzling question that has to be answered by guessing. It also can be a puzzling person or situation. Is that who Jesus is? This may be a ploy to persuade readers to accept a Jesus that is a figment of his imagination.

Chopra goes on to say that the riddle is that no one can really live up to the teachings of Jesus. This is because we have not understood what Jesus was really saying and teaching. We have taken Jesus too literally, he says, and thus are trying to live up to impossible commands. Chopra's analysis is:

"What Jesus actually taught is much more radical and at the same time mystical."⁴

In the end, Chopra does not help us to live up to the teachings of Jesus, but rather twists them so we will understand them in a mystical way.

The question Chopra is not asking is, Why would Jesus be so obscure and not be clear about what He meant? Or maybe He was and it is only Chopra claiming the underlying mystical and esoteric meaning of Jesus' teachings. Perhaps Chopra is simply making the simple terribly complex. Chopra alleges that we have misunderstood Jesus, but it is clear that he is the one mired in misunderstanding. Jesus Himself disavowed riddles and secrets and Gnostic mystical meanings when He said, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing" (John 18:20).

Chopra is not a Gnostic in the official sense as he disavows the historical Gnostics of the third and fourth centuries.⁵ That being said, he is, however, Gnostic-like in his approach claiming insights into mystical meanings in Jesus' teachings. At times, he is not quite sure he dislikes the Gnostics completely. For example, he does concur with some of their myths about Mary Magdalene.⁶

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The Search for the Real Dr. Ron Charles



by Richard Peck with G. Richard Fisher

Hardly a year goes by that there is not some reinvention of Jesus. We've endured the mythical Jesus of the Jesus Seminar, the cynic-philosopher Jesus of John Dominick Crossan, Jesus as a prophet of social change created by Gerd Theissen and Richard Horsley and many others, Dan Brown's Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code*, and now the Jesus of Dr. Ron Charles.

In 2007, Charles revised and reprinted his self-published 600-page book, *The Search: A Historian's Search for Historical Jesus*. It is evident from the first few pages that this book has some serious problems as Charles states, "However, as I plunged deeper into the Gospels, I began to see some inconsistencies and some chronology problems with the neat package that had been wrapped by modern fundamentalists."¹

Anyone who says the Gospels are inconsistent is calling the Bible faulty and saying God is a liar.

A few pages later Charles suggests, "I discovered that it was very doubtful that the Gospels were written by the ones whose name the individual Gospel records bare — perhaps with the exception of the *Gospel According to Luke*."² It quickly becomes clear this man does not believe that Matthew wrote Matthew, Mark wrote Mark, or John wrote John, and he isn't certain that Luke wrote Luke.

Two paragraphs later Charles claims:

"In AD 130 Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, claimed that a John Mark of Canatha had written the Gospel in AD 60, using information that he had received from James, the brother of Jesus, the apostle Peter, and Barnabas. But, based on information that I found at the University of Texas library, it seemed to me that James, the brother of Jesus, ... was the most likely candidate to have authored this Gospel."³

THE AUTHORITIES DISAGREE WITH CHARLES

Any serious Church history student confronted with the assertion that Mark used "information" from both James and Barnabas for his Gospel would do well to consult the nine-volume set, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, which contains all the works of the early Church Fathers up to the year A.D. 325. Reading everything Papias wrote, one will discover that Charles is unfactual in his reporting. Here is all Papias wrote about the subject:

"Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his

hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements."⁴

Papias said nothing about James or Barnabas being a source of "information" for the Gospel of Mark. Papias contradicts, rather than confirms, Charles' claim. Charles is guilty of creating his own historical facts to undermine the authorship of Mark.

Next, Charles turns his attention to Matthew's Gospel. Here he states:

"Although the author of the Gospel is traditionally believed to have been Matthew, commonly identified with Levi, the former tax collector and apostle of Jesus, this belief was not proposed until the middle of the 2nd century, when Cedus, the Bishop of Berea, claimed that an angel had appeared to him and told him that Matthew, the apostle, was the author of the Gospel. More probable is that the second (or third) Gospel was written by a late 1st century or early 2nd century Jewish convert to Christianity."⁵

Evidently Charles did not bother to read Papias at all because Papias also talks about Matthew. The Church

historian Eusebius quotes Papias as saying this about Matthew:

"[This is what is related by Papias regarding Mark; but with regard to Matthew he has made the following statements]: Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could."⁶

Here we have a clear statement made by Papias that Matthew wrote, in Hebrew, his Gospel. Charles' statements are so easily refuted that one wonders if he did any research at all.

DISPUTING OF LUKE DEBUNKED

Charles is not certain whether Luke wrote Luke, but he does say that Luke's Gospel "seemed to be greatly lacking chronologically, although Luke did objectively attempt to weave the life and ministry of Jesus into Roman history."⁷ Charles thus proves in this statement his complete lack of scholarship. Luke 1:3 says, "to write unto thee *in order*." If Charles was the scholar he claims to be, he would have known that this term "in order" is from a Greek word meaning "chronological order." Luke is, in fact, the only Gospel that is said to be written in chronological order. The NASB translates the verse correctly as, "to write it out for you in consecutive order," which, of course, means the same as chronological order.

Charles then writes that:

"In researching John's Gospel, I discovered that up until the time of the Council of Bishops held in Toledo, Spain, in AD 1215, it was generally believed by the Christian world that John, the apostle of Jesus, had been killed along with his brother, James, by Herod Agrippa in AD 44. It was at this 1215 Council of Bishops that John was proclaimed to have lived until AD 104; ... *although no evidence had ever been found to justify the council's proclamations concerning John*. It was also at this Council that John 'became' the author of the *Gospel According to John, The Revelation, and the I, II, and III Epistles of John*."⁸

Once again, Charles is out to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Scriptures by telling readers that John didn't write the Gospel of John, the three epistles of John, and the book of Revelation, and that John died in A.D. 44, along with his brother James. Charles even goes so far as to say that *no evidence has ever been found* to justify the council's proclamation that John was the author of these books in the New Testament. Charles' claim is easy to refute. Any credible Bible translation, published by a reputable institution, will say concerning Revelation 1:9, that John wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos.

Church historian Philip Schaff tells us:

"The Apocalypse professes to be the work of John, who assumes a commanding position over the churches of Asia. History knows only one such character, the Apostle and Evangelist, and to him it is ascribed by the earliest and most trustworthy witnesses, going back to the lifetime of many friends and pupils of the author. It is one of the best authenticated books of the New Testament."⁹

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson emphasizes:

"Justin Martyr states expressly that the Apostle John wrote the Apocalypse. Irenaeus called it the work of a disciple of Jesus. ... a respectable number of modern scholars still hold to the ancient view that the Apocalypse of John is the work of the Apostle and Beloved Disciple, the son of Zebedee."¹⁰

In the *Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John*, whose authorship is attributed to Leucius, we have a clear statement from one of the early Church Fathers that John wrote Revelation during the reign of Domitian while he was on the island of Patmos.¹¹ Here is evidence that Charles says doesn't exist, and it confirms that John wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos during Domitian's reign.

AN ACCOUNT FROM A NEAR-CONTEMPORARY

Additional evidence comes from the writings of Irenaeus in his work, *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus, who lived from approximately 120 to 202 A.D., wrote concerning John:

"...for if it were necessary that [Antichrist's] name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."¹²

When Irenaeus started writing this work between 182 and 188 A.D., he was only 87 years removed from John's vision. At the age of 20, Irenaeus was only 45 years removed from John's vision. There is little question about Irenaeus having the most accurate information as to when Revelation was written. Not only did Irenaeus live during the time closest to that of John's vision, he is also known as one of the most accurate Christian writers.

Regarding the statement by Charles that John died in A.D. 44 along with his brother James, one begins to wonder if Charles knows anything about Church history because Papias claimed to be a *hearer* of John and a companion of Polycarp.¹³ Keep in mind that Papias was born in A.D. 70 and would have been 25 years old when John had the vision of Revelation. Either Papias heard John before being sent to Patmos or after he left the island of Patmos. Papias contradicts three statements made by Charles on Mark, Matthew, and John.

It is clear by the end of the second chapter that Charles is a fabricator and revisionist of history who has difficulty knowing and telling the truth. In subsequent chapters he seeks to establish a variety of scenarios — some which disagree with one another — including the claim that Jesus was a Roman citizen,¹⁴ that He most likely grew up and lived in Mecca for 18 years,¹⁵ and that His mother Mary was adopted by Joseph of Arimathea who also was the "life-long legal

parental guardian" of Jesus.¹⁶ Charles goes on to describe that after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus waited three years before He started His ministry,¹⁷ and that His first miracle of changing water into wine was most likely done for Jesus' sister's wedding,¹⁸ or as one Muslim source told Charles, it was actually Jesus' wedding.¹⁹ Why Charles thinks a Muslim source would be more credible than the Bible and Church historians is hard to fathom.

Charles explains that the Sermon on the Mount was given to only six of his disciples in a cave,²⁰ and throughout the book his statements are typically backed up by paraphrased accounts given to him by mostly Muslim and Roman Catholic sources. The person doing the paraphrasing can add or delete any information he finds does not support his statements, and thus, at best the person is taken out of context, and at worst information is added to support the author's statements. Nothing can be confirmed as fact.

As far as the 18 years of Jesus (from ages 12 to 30) there are enough biblical indicators to place Him continuously in Nazareth. The so-called secret years of Jesus are not really secret at all. Claims that Jesus was in Mecca, India, or Egypt are totally false. Luke 2:51 says Jesus was subject to His parents in Nazareth. The word "subject" is in a Greek tense meaning constantly or continuously as an ongoing process or habit. Luke 2:52 says that while He was in Nazareth (v. 51) He kept on increasing (continuously) in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. In other words, He grew up in Nazareth. Later Luke says that weekly attendance in the synagogue in Nazareth — where He had been brought up — had been Jesus' habit. (Luke 4:16). A lesser argument, but bearing some weight, is the absence of Joseph or mention of Joseph during the teen years of Jesus. If Joseph had died, as some scholars suggest, then Jesus would have been compelled into the position of breadwinner for Mary and His younger siblings. This, as well, would have kept Him in Nazareth. There is nothing anywhere in the text or in the writings of the early Fathers

to suggest that Jesus was anywhere but Nazareth between ages 12 and 30. Suggestions that He was somewhere else are esoteric nonsense.

ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS SUSPECT

Charles' fabrications of history can cast doubt on his academic credentials as well. An internet search turned up various websites that listed his credentials and educational claims. A Georgia Production Partnership website says he "holds several theological degrees from Florida International University and Berean University, engineering technology degrees from the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Kilgore College, and honorary PhDs from Cambridge University and the University of Tirana."²¹ These and other grandiose academic claims are made on his vita.²²

DeWayne K. Bowie, Registrar at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, La., (now called the University of Louisiana, Lafayette) confirmed that Ronal D. Charles attended this University as an undergraduate student for only two semesters in 1970.²³

At Kilgore College, in Kilgore, Texas, the registrar's office confirmed that Ronal D. Charles had attended Kilgore for three semesters between 1967 and 1969. However, he was not awarded any degrees from Kilgore College.²⁴

According to Lynne Kroh, the registrar of Global University, Berean University did not begin offering undergraduate-level courses until 1985. Charles indicated that he acquired his degree between 1978 and 1980 when the school wasn't even in existence. Berean College did not become Berean University until it was renamed in 1995. Global University was created in 2000 by the merger of ICI and Berean Universities. The registrar searched the school database and archived files, but was unable to find any student records under the name of Ronal D. Charles.²⁵

Charles also claims an honorary Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Cambridge, England. Inquiries to

Cambridge University for such information are referred to their special website, which lists all the honorary degrees conferred by Cambridge since 1977. Ronal D. Charles was not on that list.²⁶ Cambridge University confers honorary degrees only to "members of the Royal Family, British subjects who are of conspicuous merit or have done good service to the State or to the University, and foreigners of distinction."²⁷ Foreigners of distinction on whom Cambridge has conferred honorary degrees upon in the past are Albert Einstein, General Eisenhower, and Mother Teresa. It's doubtful that Cambridge would ever consider Charles in this category.

Finally, Charles listed on his vita three degrees from Florida International Seminary in Plymouth, Fla., obtained from 1980 to 1982. Joan Spring, the seminary's registrar, confirmed that Charles does indeed have three degrees from Florida International Seminary: a bachelor's degree in Theology, a master's in Biblical History, and a doctorate in Biblical History. It sounds really impressive — even more so when achieved in just a three-year span. When asked how Charles could earn all three degrees so quickly, Spring responded that these were only home correspondence courses and that he did no course work on campus.²⁸

Excluding his claimed degree from the University of Tirana, which cannot be confirmed at this time,²⁹ the only degrees that Ronal D. Charles has are his three home-correspondence course degrees from Florida International Seminary. Claims to possess degrees from Cambridge University, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Berean University, and Kilgore College are all untrue.

In addition to these overstatements, Charles also claims to have received a "Presidential National Merit Scholarship." Elaine S. Detweiler, Vice President - Public Information at the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, checked their records and found no record of Ronal D. Charles receiving a National Merit Scholarship.³⁰

Detweiler also noted that she had never before heard anyone use the

term “Presidential” in describing a National Merit Scholarship, so she suggested that perhaps Charles was referring to the Presidential Scholar’s Program and suggested checking there, too. Melissa Apostolides, in the United States Department of Education, confirmed that Ronal D. Charles never was named a Presidential Scholar.³¹

Charles also claims on his resume to be a Rhodes Scholar designate. Beth W. Maslowsky, of The Rhodes Trust, said after checking the records of the Rhodes Trust, that there is no Rhodes Scholar by the name of Ronal D. Charles. Because Charles claims to be a Rhodes Scholar designate, Maslowsky thought that perhaps he meant to say that he only applied for a Rhodes Scholarship. After checking those records too, they have no record of Ronal D. Charles even applying for a Rhodes scholarship.³²

Charles has a serious problem with the truth. Not only does he fabricate quotations from early Church Fathers to support his views in his book, *The Search*, he also questions the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

It is hard to understand why Charles has made up so much about Jesus and himself. His book and resume wither under the light of scrutiny. In the light of the Bible, Church History, and just plain facts,

he is, in the words of Scripture, “weighed in the balances and found wanting” (Daniel 5:27).

Endnotes:

1. Ron Charles, *The Search*. Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books Library (AuthorHouse), 2007, pg. vii.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
3. *Ibid.*
4. A. Cleveland Coxe, Editor, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1951, Vol. 1, pp. 154-155, brackets in original.
5. *The Search*, op. cit., pg. 13.
6. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pg. 155, brackets in original.
7. *The Search*, op. cit., pg. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 15, emphasis added.
9. Philip Schaff, *History of the Chirstian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1910, Vol. 1, pg. 832.
10. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933, Vol. VI, pp. 272, 273.
11. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, op. cit., Vol. 8, pg. 562.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 559-560.
13. Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius — The Church History*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1999, pg. 126.
14. *The Search*, op. cit., pp. 93, 167.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 100.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 167, 169-170.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 178.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 232.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 235.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 294, 297.
21. Georgia Production Partnership, GPP News Room web page (dated Aug. 3,

2004). Document available at: www.georgiaproduction.org/public/newsroom/2004/id20040730_001.shtml.

22. Copy on file.
23. Letter from DeWayne K. Bowie, Registrar of University of Louisiana, Lafayette, dated Feb. 11, 2008.
24. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and the Registrar’s Office of Kilgore College, Feb. 12, 2008.
25. Letter from Lynne Kroh, Global University Registrar, dated Feb. 7, 2008.
26. Cambridge University website. Information available at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/degrees/honorary/list.xls.
27. Cambridge University website. Information available at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/degrees/honorary/.
28. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Joan Spering, Feb. 7, 2008.
29. Regarding the University of Tirana, PFO has been unable to obtain a reply from this university as to Charles’ alleged honorary Ph.D. degree in Foreign Relations which he said was granted in 1990. Such information is difficult to obtain due to the country’s political unrest at the time.
30. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Elaine Detweiler, Vice President - Public Information, National Merit Scholarship Corp., Feb. 7, 2008. Confirmed with a letter stating the same, dated Feb. 11, 2008.
31. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Melissa Apostolides, Executive Director, U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, Feb. 13, 2008. Confirmed with a letter stating the same, dated Feb. 13, 2008.
32. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Beth Maslowsky at The Rhodes Trust, Feb. 13, 2008. Confirmed by an email stating the same, dated Feb. 13, 2008.



THE THIRD JESUS

(continued from page 4)

Chopra’s caricature of the early Church as a divided, squabbling group of failures is historically false. Early believers were not confused about “whether to follow Peter or Paul.”⁷ Chopra tries to paint the first-century Church as being in chaos and its members living in doctrinal ambiguity and division because they missed the mystical side of the “Jesus riddle.” The continuity and pattern of the apostles’ doctrine is clear from Acts 2:42 to the end of the book of Revelation.

Chopra needs to know that there was no division between Peter and Paul, with Peter calling Paul a “beloved brother” (2 Peter 3:15) as he affirmed Paul’s writings. It is clear that Paul spent time in the company of Peter (Galatians 1:18) and even when they disagreed about the exclusion of Gentiles in table fellowship with Jews (a new social situation created by the Gospel), Peter makes clear in his second epistle that Paul is still a “beloved brother.” Acts 15 shows all the early apostles in unity and harmony as they worked out together the unfolding questions of the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the infant Church.

COLORED BY HIS PERSPECTIVE

Chopra is a Hindu, so he will interpret things through a Hindu framework and worldview. Everything, including Jesus, will be flavored with Hindu presuppositions, and reconstituted for modern consumption. Hindus are committed to certain presuppositions, including “reincarnation” and finding “God deep within oneself.”⁸ Reincarnation becomes a form of self-atonement and a way of breaking bad karma or bad consequences. One cannot escape the cycle and may even come back as “a bird or a worm or an insect.”⁹

In just one verse, the Bible devas-
tates the concept of reincarnation.
Hebrews 9:27 says, "it is appointed
for men to die once, but after this the
judgment." The book of Romans
makes it clear that Jesus' death and
resurrection is our only atonement.
"God deep within oneself" (or self-
deification) is the lie as old as Satan's
promise to Adam and Eve that some-
how apart from God they could be
just like Him (Genesis 3:5).

It must also be understood that in
Hindu teaching the universe is only
an illusion. The statements of Genesis
1 and 2, that God created a literal
material universe are, according to
Hinduism, all wrong. Consider the
following:

"Many Hindus, under the heri-
tage of the 'way of knowledge,'
say that the most important
problem of all human beings is
that they have forgotten that they
are living in an unreal world.
There is only one true reality,
which is Brahman, the spiritual
being that is ultimately beyond
our understanding or descriptive
ability. As long as we treat the
world of our experience (*maya*)
as though it were real, we will
remain hung up in this illusory
cosmos and continue through the
cycle of reincarnations. However,
if we come to the point of
realizing that deep within our-
selves, deeper than our feelings
and our thoughts, there is a Self
(*atman*) that is identical with
Brahman, we are on our way to
escaping from the bondage of the
world once and for all."¹⁰

Chopra even misconstrues faith,
which is trust in God and His Word,
and tries to tell us, "*Faith* — When
you stop believing in the illusion of
the material world and see everything
for what it really is — light — you
have faith."¹¹ Try to tell a woman in
childbirth that her pains are an illu-
sion or that she is only bringing forth
an illusionary baby.

THE SAME OLD NONSENSE RESURRECTED

Chopra is trying to convince us that
we can find God within ourselves.

The god within he calls "God-con-
sciousness." In his view, we are no
different than Jesus and we all can
attain to His status. Actually, his New
Age mysticism is not so new. The
so-called Mind Sciences have been
around since the late 1800s.¹² The
Theosophical Society of occultist Ma-
dame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky
(1831-1891) taught that man was god,
as was every atom in the universe,
and that the Christ was the divine
part of every person.¹³ Heresy is
neither old nor a riddle. The pipe line
today runs through the books of
Neale Donald Walsch, as well as the
writings of Marianne Williamson who
wrote *The Gift of Change* and Eckhart
Tolle and his book, *A New Earth*.
Oprah Winfrey is vigorously promot-
ing the well worn New Age teachings
of Williamson and Tolle. Isaiah 5:20
warns us about those who would,
"put darkness for light and light for
darkness."

Now that we understand where
Chopra is coming from and where he
is trying to take us, we are better
prepared to proceed. Chopra's stated
goal is to get rid of everything that
has always been believed and taught
about Jesus. He writes:

"...we must begin with radical
surgery, cutting through the
timeworn Jesus that all of us
know. ... That traditional version
of Jesus was constructed as a
compromise ... so we must go
beyond it. Jesus did not physi-
cally descend from God's dwell-
ing place above the clouds, nor
did he return to sit at the right
hand of a literal throne. What
made Jesus the Son of God was
the fact that he had achieved
God-consciousness."¹⁴

So in just a few sentences, Chopra
has dismissed Christ's Ascension, His
position as High Priest and Mediator,
and His position of power in heaven.

Chopra says that Christians worship
a "mythical Jesus,"¹⁵ when just the
opposite is true. Chopra has created
his own mythical Jesus. The Apostle
Paul warned that when we turn from
true doctrine, we will be turned to
myths and fables (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

When Chopra talks about a "Third
Jesus" he is talking about his subjec-
tive re-creation of Jesus. In Chopra's
words:

"One Jesus is historical, and we
know next to nothing about him.
Another Jesus is the one appro-
priated by Christianity. He was
created by the Church to fulfill
its agenda. The third Jesus, the
one this book is about, is as yet
so unknown that even the most
devout Christians don't suspect
that he exists. Yet he is the Christ
we cannot — and must not —
ignore."¹⁶

The reason that this "Third Jesus" is
unknown is because so many Chris-
tians are ignorant of Church history
and the history of the heresies of
Theosophy.

Chopra seems ignorant of all the
historical research that has been done
on the life and times of Jesus. With
the Bible in hand and the illumination
and confirmation of archaeology,
along with the voluminous body of
work on the second temple period,
we can know enormous amounts of
information about the historical Jesus.
Chopra either is ignorant of all this or
is deliberately obfuscating.

Chopra disputes that Jesus could be
loving and yet judge sin. His lack of
understanding of who Jesus really is
has him undermining Jesus. He al-
leges that Jesus was full of inconsis-
tency, saying, "At the very least, the
living Jesus was a man of baffling
contradictions."¹⁷ Chopra also does
not have even an elemental under-
standing of the Trinity and says that
millions have built up another Christ.
Of this Christ, Chopra posits that,
"He is the Holy Ghost, the Three-
in-One Christ, the source of sacra-
ments and prayers."¹⁸ It is obvious
that Chopra is assailing the Roman
Catholic Church as he reminds us of
spiritual wars fought in the name of
Jesus, infant baptism, and sacraments.
He laments the various divisions and
sects within universal Christendom,
but seems unaware that he is propos-
ing still another fringe division. In
reality, biblical Christianity — which

adheres to the framework of the Reformation and the Bible — possesses remarkable uniformity when it comes to the major doctrines of the faith. Many have been, and are, in total agreement on the fundamentals of verbal inspiration, the virgin birth, the vicarious atonement, and the visible and victorious return of Jesus.

Chopra is intent on trying to sell us a Hindu mystic Jesus who taught us how to reach God-consciousness:

“I want to offer the possibility that Jesus was truly, as he proclaimed, a savior. Not *the* savior, not the one and only Son of God. Rather, Jesus embodied the highest level of enlightenment.”¹⁹

Jesus talked of false christs in Matthew 24:24 and the Apostle Paul warned that there would be those presenting “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4). Surely this is the case with Chopra and his “Third Jesus.”

Chopra negates the Gospel, dismisses Christ’s death for sin as well as His resurrection, and makes Jesus simply a way-shower:

“Jesus intended to save the world by showing others the path to God-consciousness.”²⁰

To Chopra, Jesus then is just another guru, just one who showed the way to inner enlightenment, and facilitator of self-salvation. Jesus never referred to Himself as one who showed the way, but rather as *the Way* (John 14:6). The apostles of Jesus certainly understood this and Paul was clear to say, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Paul’s words mean obviously that Jesus is the *only* Way and the *one* Mediator, and there is no other. Peter reminded his hearers, “Nor is there salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12).

Chopra catches himself in a dilemma as he teaches that words were put into Jesus’ mouth “by followers writing decades later.”²¹ However, when Chopra uses the words of Jesus to make his point, we can advance the same argument against him unless we

believe that Chopra, like the members of the Jesus Seminar, somehow knows which words are genuine to Jesus and which words were added later. Chopra cannot have it both ways. As well, he cannot be the last word on which sayings of Jesus are authentic and which are not. Jesus Himself left no such latitude when He said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

WHEN IS A RETURN NOT A RETURN?

Chopra has everything wrong when it comes to Jesus and Christianity, so it comes as no surprise that he derails the doctrine of the literal Second Coming of Jesus and tries to replace it with a form of personal enlightenment:

“The idea of the Second Coming has been especially destructive to Jesus’s intentions, because it postpones what needs to happen now. The Third Coming — finding God-consciousness through your own efforts — happens in the present. I’m using the term as a metaphor for a shift in consciousness that makes Jesus’s teachings totally real and vital.”²²

Chopra has tried to single-handedly cancel Christ’s return. He sees it as no more than a metaphor. The return of Jesus, and the doctrines which accompany it, really mean that if we can get into an enlightened frame of mind and get into God-consciousness, we move past the “destructive” to Jesus’ true intentions.

A metaphor is defined as a word or phrase which describes one thing by stating another with which it can be compared without using the words “like” or “as.” For instance, when Jesus says He is bread, or water, or light, or a door, those are things which are clearly metaphorical.

A metaphor describes one thing as something else and the something else is a figure of speech that conveys a truth. Nowhere is the literal return

of Christ called something else or set up to parallel something else. The Second Coming is never set against a figure of speech. Paul speaks of Christ’s return as His coming again (1 Corinthians 11:26). It assumes as His first coming was literal, so too will be His return. There is nothing even close to a metaphor in Acts 1:11, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” In other words, He was taken up literally, visibly, bodily, and He will return in the same exact way in His resurrection body.

The return of Jesus is always presented as something that will take place in the future, not as a subjective present experience. We look for a future appearance of Jesus (Matthew 24:30, Acts 3:10-21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, Titus 2:13, Revelation 22:20). To even suggest that the return of Jesus is anything other than what it really is, one has to walk through the looking glass and ignore and obscure the clear meaning of words. Chopra seems to be suggesting that words only can mean what he says they mean. He uses Christian words, but has a dictionary straight from a Hindu bookshelf. The “Third Jesus” is Chopra’s way of looking at Jesus. Chopra’s Jesus came simply to make us all passive and to help us merge into equality of soul with all humanity. When that happens, Chopra teaches, there will be heaven on earth.

RIGHT AND WRONG

Occasionally Chopra has something right to say. He has it right when he says:

“Enlightenment and consciousness-raising are considered eastern concepts, not Christian ones. ... Westerners are scornful of outsiders coming in to claim Jesus as a teacher on the order of Buddha and Muhammad instead of seeing him as the one and only Son of God.”²³

Regarding biblical salvation, Chopra proposes that we all have light inside ourselves. This light is God-conscious-

ness and we all happen to have it, though Chopra does not offer to tell us how it got there. As such, one should inquire if he would extend that inner light to Charles Manson, Adolph Hitler, and Osama bin Laden. According to Chopra:

*“Salvation — You are redeemed when you move into the light. You’ve escaped your false self and arrived at your true self. ... The true self is as unbounded as the light.”*²⁴

The Greek word for salvation is *soteria*. Its primary meaning comes from a root meaning deliverance or safety. It is true that *soteria*, in some limited contexts, can mean a material and temporal deliverance. However, when the word is used in a theological context, it means “the spiritual and eternal deliverance granted immediately by God to those who accept His conditions of repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus, in whom alone it is to be obtained, Acts 4:12, and upon confession of Him as Lord, Rom. 10:10; for this purpose the gospel is the saving instrument, Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:13.”²⁵ Likewise, “Man must be freed from the just punishment which God’s judicial sentiment requires so that he may without fear be reconciled to God, but in such a way that God may still be just in his justifying or saving action. Blood sacrifice, which develops its full meaning in Christ’s death, is that which propitiates God’s wrath and saves (Rom. 5:9).”²⁶

REAL OR UNREAL

Chopra suggests that we can pray to whomever or whatever we please (even ourselves), and in this way really connect with reality. Consider what Chopra recommends when he writes, “By praying to whatever deity or higher self you believe in, you are essentially making a connection with reality, asking to be reminded that illusion isn’t real.”²⁷ Praying to oneself, or some illusory deity, is not reality. Somehow Chopra believes reality is created by unreality. When he writes, “Behind the appearance of craziness lies profound wisdom,”²⁸ he

is saying that if we think he sounds crazy — think again — it is really wisdom. Wisdom is well-defined in the book of Proverbs and we find wisdom in Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30, Colossians 3:16). By the biblical standard, Chopra is promoting craziness.

When godly people of the Bible prayed, they prayed to the God of heaven, the God defined by the Bible. Prayer is to be directed always to the true and living God of heaven. He is Creator and Lord, Yahweh the compassionate covenant-keeping Redeemer. How we petition the heavenly Father is beautifully laid out in categories in the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus Himself gives us all we need to know about prayer. He is the great Model and Teacher. From Jesus’ teachings we can derive the following:

“(1) The most important factor in Christ’s doctrine of prayer is his insistence upon the Fatherhood of God (*q.v.*). God is essentially *Holy Father*, however, who, while acting in a fatherly manner to all men, is a true father only to those who are his children through his grace and their repentance and faith. (2) Jesus also emphasized the value of the individual before God in prayer. Not only is the individual child of the Heavenly Father assured of a welcome to his presence; he is also assured that the Father had been going out in love toward him, to bring him home to himself. ... In addition to faith Christ emphasized two other conditions for success in prayer. Prayer must originate in a loving and forgiving disposition (Matt. 18:21-35), and it must be offered in Christ’s own name (John 16:23 f.).”²⁹

SYNTHETIC SYNONYMS

Chopra also moves his readers into his theories regarding the kingdom of God. His views do not in any way resemble the Jewish Old Testament longing for God’s kingdom, nor can his views equate with any of the New Testament material. At one point Chopra describes reaching the kingdom of God as “arriving at a higher

level of consciousness.”³⁰ Chopra wrongly concludes that Christians see the kingdom of God as only heaven, or paradise as “a throne above the clouds”³¹ in eternity. To get at what Chopra really means, one simply has to understand how he defines the kingdom of God. Chopra reduces it to “you must find a place that is neither physical nor mental. Jesus calls this place the kingdom of God, *or the soul.*”³² So one need only look into the mirror, because that is all we get. The kingdom is us!

Essentially the kingdom of God is, in Chopra’s view, our own souls. Moving our souls into God-consciousness or enlightenment (meaning buying into Chopra’s mystical meanderings) will bring us into our godhood. We are to understand that the soul and the kingdom of God are interchangeable. If two words roughly mean the same thing, they should be interchangeable in a sentence.

To demonstrate the folly of Chopra’s premise, let’s survey a few Scripture verses and insert “kingdom of God” (rendered in italics) where “soul” is used. Genesis 2:7 informs us, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living *kingdom of God.*” David referred to his soul on a number of occasions. Psalm 23:3 says, “He restores my *kingdom of God.*” In Psalm 42:1-2, 4-5, we find, “So pants my *kingdom of God* for You, O God. My *kingdom of God* thirsts for God, for the living God” and “I pour out my *kingdom of God* within me. ... Why are you cast down, O my *kingdom of God?*” And lest we forget God’s warning through Ezekiel, “The *kingdom of God* who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). There definitely is something wrong here.

New Testament passages fare no better as with Jesus’ warning, “fear Him who is able to destroy both *kingdom of God* and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). In the garden, Jesus prayed, “My *kingdom of God* is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26:38). Neither does it work with other New Testament writers,

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of *kingdom of God* and spirit" (Hebrews 4:12). And then in Revelation we would be told that John "saw under the altar the *kingdom of God* of those that had been slain" (6:9). Substitute the word "soul" in the "kingdom of God" passages and it gets even worse.

Chopra has no understanding of the biblical teaching of the soul. Putting together all the pertinent Scriptures we find that in the Old Testament the soul (*nepes*) "often comes to be used for the ego itself ... [It] is then simply the individual in his totality. ... The NT, although it continues the idea of the soul (*psyche*) as the life-principle (Acts 20:10; Rev. 8:9) which becomes personified (Acts 2:43), yet also views it as a spiritual entity which continues to exist after death."³³

Chopra tries to prop up his argument with the use of Luke 17:20-21, "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! Or, Lo there! For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (KJV).

The first thing to notice is whom Jesus is addressing: the religious leaders (Pharisees) whom He has previously called hypocrites and white-washed tombs in Matthew 23. He has also told them that they were of their father the devil in John 8:44. He is not telling them that they had the kingdom of God in them. The rendering of *the kingdom of God is within you* in the King James Version is a mistranslation. The Greek word for "within" is *entos* and, depending on the context, can be translated as among or in your midst. Vine concludes that, "'in the midst of,' is to be preferred; the Kingdom of God was not in the hearts of the Pharisees."³⁴ *The Jerusalem Bible* translates Luke 17:21 as "the kingdom of God is among you."

Charles Ryrie concludes the same, saying, "*the kingdom of God is in your*

midst. The necessary elements of the kingdom were there present and needed only to be recognized. It cannot mean 'within you,' for the kingdom certainly was completely unconnected with the Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking (v. 20)."³⁵

Another scholar observes the same thing:

"Jesus would hardly say that the Kingdom of God is within the hearts of the Pharisees, the better translation is, 'The Kingdom of God is among you,' but ye do not perceive it."³⁶

Jesus would not have instructed His apostles to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), if somehow it was already inside of them. The kingdom of God was being foreshadowed in the ministry and miracles of Jesus Himself. He was in their midst. Alva McClain, in his classic work on the kingdom of God, brings this all together:

"...as to the personal presence of its *King*, the Kingdom was actually 'in the midst' of men. Answering the query of the Pharisees as to 'when' the Kingdom of God would come, Christ said, 'The kingdom of God is in the midst of you' (Luke 17:21, ASV margin). The King James rendering, by '*within*,' cannot be true; for surely in no sense could the Kingdom of God have been 'within' the hearts of the Pharisees to whom our Lord was speaking, and who had charged blasphemously that His miracles were being accomplished through the power of the devil (Matt. 12:24). But in the Person of its divinely appointed King, visibly present in incarnate form on earth where He must eventually reign, the Kingdom was in that sense already 'in the midst of' men regardless of their attitude, whether for or against Him. ... In truth, the long-awaited Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy had come so near to the men of that generation that they had actually seen the face of the King and also had witnessed the super-

natural works, which were the predicted harbingers of His Kingdom."³⁷

Many look forward to the day when the fullest manifestation of the kingdom will occur in the millennial reign of Jesus. This will ultimately issue out into the eternal kingdom.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY GUY

Chopra does not want to leave anyone behind:

"When Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is within, he meant within everyone. This would be in keeping with his injunction to love your enemies. The same God is in them as in you. Killing an enemy would be the same as killing an aspect of God as well as of yourself."³⁸

Chopra's twisted logic goes like this: If God within is simply your enlightened higher self (which is universal reality), then because yourself is within yourself, God is in you. So because everyone's self is already within them, then everyone has the kingdom of God within (which is in fact their souls). Because our higher self is part of some ultimate universal reality (that is, shared by all), to kill another is to kill an aspect or part of ourselves. If it sounds confusing, it's because it is and really makes no sense. One of the repercussions of this is that we can conclude that if we already possess God within, how we live is of little or no consequence.

The middle section of Chopra's book³⁹ is a meandering compilation of what he thinks of various sayings of Jesus. It is interspersed with ideas about karma and pacifism as he twists, bends, manipulates, and misinterpreted verses in an effort to support his mystical-riddle thesis. He isolates verses, thereby allowing for a lack of any historical or immediate context. There is no attempt at proper hermeneutics. Every verse always tails back to Chopra's skewed blasphemy, which is:

"...faith in God becomes the same as faith in yourself. ... You don't

need to have faith in the Messiah or his mission. Instead, you have faith in the vision of higher consciousness. ... Jesus helps a great deal here, because no one in history was more secure in the reality of God and the Kingdom of Heaven to be found within ourselves."⁴⁰

WE ARE THE PLANTS AND THE PLANTS ARE US

Pantheism is the philosophical view that sees the entire universe as God. The word "pantheism" translates out literally as — all is God. The 18th-century British Deist John Toland coined the term. The idea though really stretches back to ancient India and is also called monism. Nothing could be further from the personal Savior and Father God of the Bible. Toland insisted that, "God is the mind or soul of the Universe."⁴¹ Chopra is deeply rooted in pantheism and follows in the footsteps of Toland and others like him. He wants us to know that:

"The physical world itself came from God's mind, and when we draw close to God, all of creation becomes part of us. In a very real sense we are clothed by divine glory. Without faith, this glory is hidden from sight. We feel that the world is separate from us and often hostile to our needs. It is necessary for Jesus, in his higher state of consciousness, to hold out a vision that will free us from this limited perception. Once that happens, we find ourselves basking effortlessly in glory, like the lilies of the field."⁴²

In other words, if we will only have faith in Chopra and all he is telling us, and have faith to believe that Jesus was a pantheist, our higher consciousness will rally Him. The truth is Jesus was a Jew. Even with a cursory study of the Jewish Old Testament and the theology of Judaism, one thing is clearly and consistently seen: God created the material world (Genesis 1:1) and there is a distinction between creature and creation that is never violated.

In pantheism there is not only the loss of the true God, but the loss of morals:

"Pantheism not only destroys the foundation of morals, but it renders all rational religion impossible. Religion supposes a personal Being endowed not only with intelligence and power, but with moral excellence; and to be rational, that Being must be infinite in all his perfections. Pantheism, however, denies that an infinite Being can be a person; that is intelligent, self-conscious, or possessed of moral attributes. It is just as impossible to worship such a Being as it is to worship the atmosphere, or the law of gravitation, or the axioms of Euclid."⁴³

IT IS ALL IN YOUR HEAD

Chopra reduces Jesus to an entity who only "exists in our own awareness at the level of God-consciousness."⁴⁴ He further says that, "Jesus isn't reachable as a personality."⁴⁵ Despite these claims, there are ways that we can get this Jesus experience. One of the ways is to focus on religious paraphernalia and even talk to it:

"Usually I ask people to say, 'Our Father, who art in Heaven,' but you may prefer 'Hail Mary, full of grace.' Silently repeat the words to yourself, letting them settle naturally into your awareness, becoming softer and deeper. Continue for at least five minutes and up to twenty minutes. This kind of sacred repetition is common to every religious tradition. When you open your eyes, let your gaze settle on a sacred image, such as an icon, a picture of Jesus, a statue of Mary. Ask this figure to embody itself through you. Gently feel a connection. Don't force this, just put out the intention that the archetype of Christ, Mary, or a chosen saint merges with your being. Some people use angels for this purpose, which is the same as asking for the essence of God to reach you."⁴⁶

Here Chopra goes from the bizarre right into the occult. He suggests that we go into mind-altering mystical chanting and channeling, which are forms of spiritism and necromancy. Altered states leave one open to believe anything.

MORE RECYCLED HERESY

Chopra continues to try to undermine our confidence in Scripture and rob us of the promises of God:

"It is likely that many unknown scribes altered the original texts of the New Testament before a final version was settled on between the third and fourth centuries AD. There is no agreed method for sorting out when a verse entered the gospels or what the original wording might have been."⁴⁷

Chopra then parrots the Marcionite heresy of the second century, writing, "The difference between the vengeful God of the Old Testament and the loving God of the New Testament is that human consciousness was ready for a shift in perception."⁴⁸ Everywhere in the Old Testament God is shown, not as vengeful, but as a just and righteous Judge full of compassion, loving kindness, and mercy. He is a covenant keeper whose mercy endures forever and the psalmist found shelter under His wings. The false dichotomy of the evil Old Testament God vs. the loving New Testament God is a fabrication constructed by Marcion and soundly condemned by the early Church Fathers.

David Bercot informs us about Marcion:

"Marcion, who founded his own church, was one of the leading heretical teachers of the second century. His teaching incorporated many Gnostic elements, including the belief that the God of the Old Testament was a different God from the Father of Jesus. Marcion accepted only the Gospel of Luke and the writings of Paul for his New Testament canon, and he was forced to alter even these to fit his teachings."⁴⁹

Justin Martyr, around A.D. 160, wrote, "There is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive. He teaches his disciples to believe in some other God greater than the Creator."⁵⁰ Irenaeus (A.D. 180) warned the Church that, "By dividing God into two, declaring that one is 'good' and the other is 'just,' Marcion actually puts an end to Deity altogether. ... The spiritual man will also examine the doctrine of Marcion — how he holds that there are two Gods, separated from each other by an infinite distance."⁵¹

It follows that Chopra does not believe in the existence of Satan or demons. He believes these are products of our imaginations. When we begin to imagine these things, Chopra says, we create our own personal drama believing the demons and temptation are real. Our minds only create the delusion of demons and spiritual warfare. Chopra tells of a man who believed that demons were tempting him and Chopra then asks:

"Can anyone tell this man that he created his life-and-death scenario in his mind? The demons who pursued him were conjured up from his own images of the Christian struggle between good and evil. Vivid images lurked in his memory, placed there by things he first heard, no doubt, in Sunday school."⁵²

So we are just deluded victims of silly stories and religious fairy tales told to us as children. We are to believe then that when Jesus spoke about (and spoke to) demons, He was deluded and only imagining things. We can only conclude then that Jesus was not really *the truth* because He was teaching something imaginary and untrue. If Jesus was just accommodating Himself to the false beliefs and imaginations of the era, He Himself was misled and was misleading others.

COULD JESUS CARE LESS?

Chopra misrepresents Jesus when it comes to the issue of homosexuality. Chopra seems open to homosexual "rights," as if any form of immorality

should be favored and promoted. Under the topic of gay rights, Chopra insists:

"There is a long tradition of condemning homosexuality in Judeo-Christianity. Again, this stricture was transferred from the Old Testament, since Jesus himself is silent on this issue. It isn't possible to limit Jesus to the conventions of his time. ... If fundamentalists want to take their cue from Jesus, this teaching demonstrates that he was on the side of the despised. ... homosexuality isn't mentioned by Jesus."⁵³

What Chopra is subtly suggesting is that because Jesus did not address homosexuality directly, this implies that either He was unconcerned about it or perhaps even for it. Nothing could be further from the truth. As Chopra admits there are strong prohibitions in the Old Testament against homosexuality and any and all forms of sexual immorality. Jesus affirmed the Old Testament law. He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Then He added, "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven" (v. 19). Jesus completely affirmed all the morality of the Old Covenant. The fact that Jesus held up heterosexuality in male and female marriage speaks volumes. Monogamy between husband and wife is the absolute standard.

Joe Dallas, who has been on both sides of the issue, counters the old canard about Jesus being unconcerned about homosexuality:

"Or, put another way, are we really to believe that Jesus didn't care about wife-beating or incest, just because He said nothing about them? Aren't the prohibitions against incest in Leviticus and 1 Corinthians, as well as Paul's admonition to husbands to love their wives, enough to instruct us in these matters without being mentioned in the Gospels?

There are any number of evil behaviors Jesus did not mention by name; surely we don't condone them for that reason alone! Likewise, Christ's silence on homosexuality in no way negates the very specific prohibitions against it which appear elsewhere, in both the Old and New Testaments. ... Homosexuality, while absent from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, is conspicuously present in both Testaments and, just as conspicuously, it is forbidden."⁵⁴

One of the reasons Chopra takes such a cavalier attitude toward homosexuality is that he proposes that forgiveness in Jesus' mind means that Jesus simply either condones or overlooks all sin. One does not have to repent and confess sin as so many Scriptures affirm (Psalm 51, 1 John 1:9). Chopra argues his proposition in this way:

"Jesus came into the world to forgive all sins. ... We know that the thieves on either side of the cross were grave sinners, and yet Jesus offered them entry into the Kingdom of God without condemnation or approval."⁵⁵

So we can live as we please because in the end there is neither condemnation nor approval, and everyone makes it. Chopra's statement is downright false. We know only one malefactor was offered entrance into paradise, and only after he pleaded for entry which strongly implies his repentance and an acceptance of who Jesus was (Luke 23:39-43). Throughout his book, Chopra is very selective in his choice of New Testament verses and he avoids any verses that speak of future judgment and the need for confession of sin as a requirement for forgiveness. Even those verses which he does employ, he distorts as we have seen with the case of the two criminals on either side of Jesus' cross.

Chopra seems to be against nothing except fundamentalist Christians (that is, those intolerant toward evil). Somehow he cannot see his way clear to overlook what he views as their

intolerance toward sin. Fundamentalism seems to be the only evil that Chopra allows to exist. Why can't he tolerate and love fundamentalists? Why don't they have the kingdom of God within them? So we can conclude that evil exists after all, at least in some cases for Chopra.

The Third Jesus is a truly pathetic book. There is not a shred of evidence to support a so-called "Third Jesus." This book presents nothing new, but simply conjures up a fantasy Jesus spun together by heresies from the past, then compacted together with the sticky paste of mysticism and pantheism. We also have to question the soundness of anyone who teaches, "If I sense the presence of God, then in some way I have entered God's identity and taken it as my own."⁵⁶ Chopra and his book are far removed from Christianity and the Jesus of the Bible. He in no way presents anything that even remotely resembles the true Jesus of history and the Gospels.

Endnotes:

1. Deepak Chopra, *The Third Jesus*. New York: Harmony Books, 2008, pg. 4.
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3. *Ibid.*, pg. 1.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-35.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 225-227.

7. *Ibid.*, pg. 3.
8. Winfried Corduan, *Pocket Guide to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006, pg. 69.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 71.
10. *Ibid.*, pg. 72, italics in original.
11. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 24, bold italic in original.
12. See further, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pp. 390-417.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444.
14. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pp. 3-4.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 7.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 9.
19. *Ibid.* pp. 9-10, italic in original.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 10, italics in original.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. 24, bold italic in original.
25. W.E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984, pg. 988.
26. Everett F. Harrison, Editor-in-chief, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1960, pg. 470.
27. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 28.
28. *Ibid.*, pg. 30.
29. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., pg. 413, italics in original.
30. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 36.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 37.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 29, emphasis added.
33. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit.,

- pg. 492, italic in original.
34. *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, op. cit., pg. 1236.
35. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, note on Luke 17:21, pg. 1580, italics in original.
36. J.R. Dummelow, Editor, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958, pg. 762.
37. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, pp. 272, 273, italics in original.
38. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 40.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-139.
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 62.
41. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, op. cit., pg. 391.
42. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 64.
43. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. 1, pg. 333.
44. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 130.
45. *Ibid.*, pg. 143.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 132.
48. *Ibid.*, pg. 159.
49. David W. Bercot, Editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pg. 419.
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Ibid.*
52. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 191.
53. *Ibid.*, pg. 224.
54. Joe Dallas, *A Strong Delusion*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996, pp. 155, 156.
55. *The Third Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 225.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 212.

TO HELL AND BACK

(continued from page 1)

also boxes himself in when he states, "What Scripture states is all that matters ... Examine the verses, as Acts 17:11 states, and then decide for yourself."⁵ This article intends to do just that. Wiese then lays the ground rules:

"One thing I was sure of: if what I experienced was true, then I should be able to find proof of it in the Bible. ... The Bible tells us not to add or take away anything from His Word."⁶

Then he adds, "any spiritual experience should be viewed in light of the Scriptures."⁷ However, within the

confines of his book's covers, he repeatedly violates his own ground rules. Many of his experiences have no remote relationship with what's in the Bible.

It is clear from the start of Wiese's book that Scripture will not be the ultimate court of appeal. All he offers us is his unverifiable and experiential claims. For instance, Wiese writes, "I believe Scripture indicates that currently in hell (*Sheol* or *Hades*), God does allow the demons to torment the lost souls."⁸ Wiese himself admits the idea of demons tormenting the lost in hell is suspect teaching when he writes, "This may not be absolutely conclusive in Scripture."⁹ In fact, it is absolutely absent from Scripture. So, apparently, what the Bible actually

teaches *does not* matter to Wiese. This clearly is a case of modern Gnosticism — believing one can receive private revelations of new truth — and a clear violation of Revelation 22:18-19, which forbids adding new content to the Bible. And this is only the start.

Wiese is either totally confused or not being truthful when he claims:

"I have since discovered that my story coincides with what Scripture details about hell. This is of far greater importance than what I have to say."¹⁰

Serious students of the Bible agree wholeheartedly that Scripture is more important than what any of us has to say, but something cannot be absent from Scripture, contrary to Scripture,

and coincide with Scripture all at the same time.

EVERLASTING OR TEMPORARY?

Scripture cannot support Wiese's claim to have spent 23 minutes in hell. Hell is presented everywhere in the Bible as a place where souls go but do not leave. Jesus said, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the *everlasting* fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41, emphasis added). Again Jesus says, "And these will go away into *everlasting* punishment" (Matthew 25:46, emphasis added). Revelation 14:11 is equally clear, "And the smoke of their torment ascends *forever and ever*" (emphasis added).

Hebrews 6:2 affirms that it is eternal judgment. Jude warns that some will have to experience "the blackness of darkness forever" (v. 13), and suffer "the vengeance of eternal fire" (v. 7). What Wiese proposes corresponds more with the unbiblical Roman Catholic notion of purgatory and temporary punishment. In fact, there are a few points of exact correspondence with the tradition of purgatory:

"That it is a state of suffering. ... that the suffering is from material fire. ... The departed may remain in this state of suffering for a few hours or for thousands of years."¹¹

No one mentioned in the Bible ever went to hell and returned. No one in Scripture ever prayed his way out of hell. Luke 16 militates strongly against it. In death we are either absent from the body and present with the Lord or absent from the body and separated from the Lord.

Wiese suggests that Jonah went to hell. He cites Jonah 2:6 as a proof text for someone going to hell and back.¹² But there is no evidence in Scripture that Jonah ever left the stomach of the great fish. Nothing in the text suggests Jonah died. In poetic language, he states that he is as good as dead if he does not get out of there. Jonah declares, "The earth with its bars

closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit" (Jonah 2:6). The "pit" of certain death was where he was, the fish's stomach, and this does not equate with hell. Hebrew linguists C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch note, "The expression is a poetical figure used to denote the danger of death, from which there is apparently no escape."¹³

Moreover, Jonah 2:1 is clear that the whole prayer is from one location, "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly," not literal hell. Jonah calls it *sheol* (or the grave) in verse 2 and complains of the seaweed that is wrapped around him in verse 5. However, no one would suggest that there is seaweed in hell. *Sheol* has a wide range of meanings. A few expositors have suggested that Jonah had to die to be a perfect type of Christ. Yet, no "type" is perfect because all types are based on fallible, sinful humans and defective human systems. Just as Isaac — being called Abraham's only begotten son (Hebrews 11:17) — is said to be a type of Christ, but did not die when he was "offered up" on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22). Only the fulfillment or antetype is perfect and the types or foreshadowings are merely defective shadows.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

So-called "glimpses of hell," after the Middle Ages, were stock in trade for occultist and modalist Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). He wrote prolifically of his glimpses of both heaven and hell. Claiming a personal visit from the Lord Himself, Swedenborg boasted:

"He opened the sight of my spirit, and thus introduced me into the spiritual world, granting me to see the heavens and many of the wonderful things there, and also the hells, and to speak with angels and spirits, and this continually for twenty-seven years."¹⁴

Swedenborg claimed the Bible was only authoritative when it was interpreted allegorically by him and he taught salvation by faith and works.

ALL KINDS OF REASONS

There can, of course, be explanations for these claims of journeys to hell. Some might be outright fabrication. Some might stem from the desire for attention and/or profit. Some might be delusionary thinking, sleep loss, or a near-death episode, which can trigger processes within the brain. Recent brain and sleep studies have shown that there are abnormal dream states that are so vivid that they seem real.

Genuine clinical death is not always simple to determine. Last year, a news article reported a "dead" man waking up under an autopsy knife:

"A Venezuelan man who had been declared dead woke up in the morgue in excruciating pain after medical examiners began their autopsy. Carlos Camejo, 33, was declared dead after a highway accident and taken to the morgue, where examiners began an autopsy only to realize something was amiss when he started bleeding. They quickly sought to stitch up the incision on his face. 'I woke up because the pain was unbearable,' Camejo said, according to a report on Friday in leading local newspaper El Universal. His grieving wife turned up at the morgue to identify her husband's body only to find him moved into a corridor — and alive."¹⁵

NOT A CONSIDERATION

It certainly never occurred to Jews in the Intertestamental Period to suggest anyone could go to hell and then leave. One Jewish document, from around 160 B.C., said that "as the spirit leaves the body ... if it is one of those who have shown scorn and have not kept the way of the Most High ... such spirit shall ... wander about in torment, ever grieving and sad ... they will consider the torment laid up for themselves in the last days (2 Esdras 7:78ff)."¹⁶ The consistent affirmation of Intertestamental Jews was that in hell they were ever grieving.

The teaching of hell as an eternal and permanent place was the accepted view into the time of Herod the Great and Jesus. No one could go to the other side without really dying and leaving their body, and once departed they could not come back. On that, all were agreed. However, by the time of Christ's ministry there were differing schools of thought as to the duration of hell and possible extinction to follow. While no one left hell, some could suffer less time before annihilation. Jesus entered this mix and sorted it out and set them all straight. To this, historian Alfred Edersheim adds, "the question arises about the precise meaning of the words which Christ used. It is, indeed, maintained that the terms *αἰώνιος* and kindred expressions always refer to eternity in the strict sense."¹⁷

Likewise, Jesus' consistent teaching was that a stay in hell was not of short duration leading to heaven or extinction, but eternal and one of conscious torment. There are degrees of punishment in hell, but there is no question as to the permanency of hell. Perhaps the first notions of purgatory came out of this confusion. Jesus used terms like "eternal" and "forever" for both heaven and hell, so we can be sure both places are of the same duration.

Edersheim also informs us about the School of Hillel:

"In regard to sinners of Israel and of the Gentiles it teaches indeed, that they are tormented in Gehenna for twelve months, after which their bodies and souls are burnt up and scattered as dust under the feet of the righteous; but it significantly excepts from this number certain classes of transgressors 'who go down to Gehinnom and are punished there to ages of ages.' ... However, therefore, the School of Hillel might accentuate the mercy of God, or limit the number of those who would suffer Eternal Punishment, it did teach Eternal Punishment in the case of some. ... the doctrine of Eternal

Punishment was that held in the days of our Lord, however it may afterwards have been modified."¹⁸

The Jewish schools of Jesus' time all agreed on the eternity of punishment, though some thought that in certain instances some sinners might be annihilated eventually because of the mercy of God. Yet the outcome was still eternal. Jesus taught the eternity of punishment with no interruptions. In every case, however, no one ever suggested one could leave Gehenna or make trips back and forth.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Wiese says he experienced some kind of translocation of his body for 23 minutes and was taken into hell on Nov. 23, 1998. He later described it as an out of body experience.¹⁹ In his initial telling of his purported trip to hell, it is not immediately clear that he is talking of an out of body experience:

"There was nothing unusual about that night. Annette and I headed home around 11:00 p.m., and we fell into bed shortly before midnight, unaware that my life was about to be changed forever by an event I still find hard to explain. Suddenly, at 3:00 a.m. on the 23rd, without any notice, I found myself being hurled through the air, and then was falling to the ground, completely out of control. I landed in what appeared to be a prison cell. The walls of the cell were made out of rough-hewn stone and had a door made of what appeared to be thick, metal bars. I was completely naked, which added to the vulnerability of a captive. This was not a dream — I was actually in this strange place. Fully awake and cognizant, I had no idea what had happened, how I had traveled, or why I was there until it was shown to me and explained later during my journey."²⁰

There is an old saying: "The devil is in the details." And there are prob-

lems in the details of Wiese's story. Wiese continues the story of his trip on that November night:

"The very first thing I noticed was the temperature. It was hot — far beyond any possibility of sustaining life. It was so hot that I wondered, *Why am I still alive? How could I survive such intense heat?* My flesh should disintegrate from off my body at any moment. The reality was that it didn't. This wasn't a nightmare; it was real. The severity of this heat had the effect of taking every ounce of strength out of me. I wasn't yet fully aware of it — but I had fallen into hell."²¹

Wiese claims to know exactly where hell is:

"I believe the scripture states that presently it is in the center of the earth. ... I sensed it to be approximately thirty-seven hundred miles deep. It was as if my senses were keener or more aware than normal."²²

While there are some who think hell (*hades*) is located in the center of the earth, it is nevertheless a view never clearly presented in Scripture — despite Wiese's claim to the contrary that, "I believe Scripture is clear and speaks for itself."²³

Take careful note that Wiese knew the exact location because he "sensed" it. This contradicts Wiese's earlier claim that the Scripture is of far more importance than what he says. Of course, the diameter of the earth is 7,926 miles, meaning its exact center would be 3,963 miles. It might be that Wiese is merely applying basic geography to his "approximately thirty-seven hundred miles deep" claim.

As noted earlier, it has been observed that the idea of demons tormenting the occupants of hell cannot be supported from the Bible. This does not deter Wiese as he tells of fierce demonic creatures that crushed his head:

"One of those demonic creatures grabbed me and carried me back

into the cell. It threw me on the floor and another creature quickly grabbed my head and began to crush it. Then all four of the creatures were on top of me, each grabbing a leg or an arm as if I were lifeless prey."²⁴

Perhaps Wiese thinks this description is needed to frighten people into making a decision. But when people discover the unbiblical nature of all of this, they are likely to respond with skepticism or ridicule. Unbiblical means cannot produce biblical outcomes. If what Jesus had to say is not enough, it is safe to say Wiese can't improve on it.

TWISTED TEXTS AND MISSING CONTEXTS

Wiese misuses the Bible throughout his book. He constantly mistakes earthly scenes and earthly judgments for descriptions of the afterlife. He writes, "I was catapulted out of my bed into the very pit of hell. My point of arrival was a cell."²⁵ Describing the cell in hell, he then quotes Isaiah 24:22, "And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison."²⁶ However, the context of Isaiah 24:22 leads one to conclude that the passage is not about hell:

- "Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty" (v. 1).
- "The land shall be entirely emptied" (v. 3).
- "The earth mourns and fades away" (v. 4).
- "The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants" (v. 5).
- "Therefore the curse has devoured the earth ... therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned" (v. 6).
- "The city of confusion is broken down; every house is shut up, so that none may go in" (v. 10).
- "The mirth of the land is gone" (v. 11).
- "In the city desolation is left" (v. 12).

- "... in the midst of the land among the people" (v. 13).
- "Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth" (v. 17).
- "The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly" (v.19).
- "The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard" (v. 20).
- "And on the earth" (v. 21).

This chapter clearly speaks of earthly judgments. The literal fulfillment of Isaiah 24 will occur on earth. Yes, hell is a reality taught in Scripture, but not here.

Some expositors also see future references to the end of time and the reign of Messiah in His Kingdom (v. 23), but none suggests that it is anything other than an earthly scene. Dr. Harry Ironside writes:

"... a careful study of both passages would seem to make it clear that they refer primarily to the land of Palestine in the darkest period of the great tribulation yet to come, and not only to that land but to the prophetic earth as a whole. ... But at least in the early part of the chapter, it is not the world as such that is in view but the land of Israel which the prophet sees as empty and desolate because of the terrible experiences through which the covenant people will pass in the last days. ... When the Lord arises to shake terribly the earth, those signs in the heaven to which Christ referred will be followed by the appearing of the glorified Son of Man accompanied by His heavenly saints descending to take over the government of this world and to bring in the long-awaited age of righteousness."²⁷

Wiese also makes a similar mistake when he calls Lamentations 3:6-11 a reference to hell.²⁸ When Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, he was not in hell. He was alive on earth. God would not send Jeremiah to hell

anyway, because he was a righteous prophet. Jeremiah, in writing Lamentations, told of his agony as he looked at the literal rubble of his destroyed city and demolished temple. The book begins, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people!"

Jeremiah is lamenting the death and destruction all around him inflicted by the Babylonians. Rather than consult his experience, Wiese should have consulted a Bible teacher or some good commentaries. One such teacher writes, "The Book of Lamentations is the Book of Tears. It is a memorial dirge about the destruction and humiliation of Jerusalem."²⁹ The great British expositor, G. Campbell Morgan, agrees that Lamentations "describes the desolation of the city."³⁰

WIGGLE ROOM

Wiese waits until the end of his book to cover his tracks and grudgingly admits that what he says about the verses he uses may be suspect:

"I believe many of these verses that describe punishment of the rebellious on the earth are also revealing clues of what is entailed in hell's sufferings. However, if these verses are pertaining only to the suffering those without God will experience on the earth, then how much more severe will it be in hell? I leave it for you to come to your own conclusions."³¹

Wiese's statement is unacceptable on two points. First, many who suffered in earthly judgments were righteous and innocent. So Wiese is misreading what he labels "clues." When speaking to issues of salvation and eternal consequences, the Bible does not speak in riddles or clues. And second, a legitimate Bible teacher could not, in good conscience, tell others, "Maybe the Bible means this, but on the other hand it may mean that, so I will just leave it up to you to try to figure it out." It was said of the post-exilic teachers in Israel, "So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense,

and helped them to understand the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). The Ethiopian eunuch longed for someone to help him understand the Scripture and Phillip taught him with understanding (Acts 8:30-37). The book of Proverbs repeatedly urges us to get wisdom and understanding (Proverbs 1). Reading books such as *23 Minutes in Hell* could leave one not only biblically illiterate, but far worse, biblically confused. Publications such as this could be the making of a new Gnostic cult.

A VISIT FROM THE SAVIOR

Another wild and unscriptural assertion — but one familiar to those within the Word-Faith arena — is Wiese's story about Jesus coming to visit him in hell:

"Continuing up, it seemed as if about thirty seconds had passed, when suddenly, a burst of light invaded the entire tunnel. The light was so brilliant, a pure, white light such as I had never seen. It was so bright that I could not see the face of the one who was before me, but I instantly knew who He was. I said, 'Jesus,' and He said 'I AM,' and I fell at his feet. It was as if I died. It seemed as if only a few moments had passed when I regained my awareness. I was still at His feet. ... As soon as He appeared, He restored an awareness to my mind that I was a Christian."³²

A number of Scripture verses militate against this assertion. What is identified as the present heavenly session of Jesus is a very important doctrine for the believer. Christ is seated in the heavenly places as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16). If Jesus left that position we would have no Mediator. Hebrews 7:25 assures us of one thing and it is that Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for us. Then we have the firm assurance that Jesus will remain in heaven until He returns. As the Apostle Peter shares the Gospel on Pentecost, he speaks to his audience about the day of Christ's return. Concerning our Lord, he

clearly and firmly says, "whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Jesus remains in heaven until the time of His return. He is not making trips to hell or anywhere else. F.F. Bruce writes:

"Jesus, their Messiah, invested with this holy office by God Himself, had been received up into the divine presence, and would remain there until the consummation of all that the prophets, from earliest days, had foretold."³³

IT SOUNDS TOO FAMILIAR

Those familiar with this genus of books will recognize similarities between Wiese's account and the crass literalism of Mary Baxter. Baxter's own purported trip to hell was detailed in her 1993 book, *A Divine Revelation of Hell*.³⁴ And one of the books that Wiese lists in his bibliography is Baxter's.³⁵

In his chapter "Confirmations," Wiese discloses what he calls "A Divine Connection," which was his encounter with "a woman who had also seen hell."³⁶ From Wiese's description, and the subtitle he used, this "woman" appears to be Mary Baxter, yet she goes unnamed.³⁷ This anonymity on Wiese's part is curious, in that the "woman" is said to have written a book, has produced audio media of her testimony, and keeps a busy speaking schedule. Privacy is not an issue, so the exclusion of a name raises a red flag.

One can wonder whether Wiese's editors at Charisma House left the woman anonymous because of the publisher's dislike of Baxter's book. The quote cited at the beginning of this article ("Sensationalism fascinates, but it also breeds heresy. Authors who claim to have divine revelations should willingly accept close scrutiny."³⁸), and which appeared in *Charisma* magazine, was directed at Baxter and her book. To identify this "woman" as Baxter — who is now being cited by Wiese to confirm his own testimony in a *Charisma*-pub-

lished book — would be another example of *Charisma's* ongoing hypocrisy.

Or one could conclude that Wiese used Baxter's book as a primary source and, as such, preferred to keep her in the shadows. In a few places Wiese's account closely parallels Baxter's. He speaks of the odors of hell and a "foul stench"³⁹ which emanated from the beasts and creatures there. By his account:

"It was absolutely disgusting, foul, and rotten. It was, by far, the most putrid smells I have ever encountered. If you could take every rotten thing you can imagine, such as an open sewer, rotten meat, spoiled eggs, sour milk, dead rotting animal flesh, and sulphur, and magnify it a thousand times, you might come close."⁴⁰

In Baxter's account, we find recorded a hell with "burning and decaying flesh mingled with the smells of offal, stale garbage and mold."⁴¹

Wiese also claims to have met giant creatures that were composites of animals and humans, although neither:

"Each giant beast resembled a reptile in appearance, but took on human form. Their arms and legs were unequal in length, out of proportion — without symmetry. The first one had bumps and scales all over its grotesque body. ... The second beast was taller and thinner, with long arms and razor-sharp fins that covered its body. Protruding from its hands were claws that were nearly a foot long."⁴²

Wiese continues:

"These demonic creatures were all sizes and shapes. Some of them had four legs and were the size of bears. Others stood upright and were about the size of gorillas. They were all terribly grotesque and disfigured. It looked as though their flesh had been decomposing and all their

limbs were twisted and out of proportion. ... There were also gigantic rats and huge spiders at least three feet wide and two or three feet high. I also saw snakes and worms, ranging from small to enormously large."⁴³

In contrast, Baxter describes creatures that are a mix of grizzly-bear-size beings with bat heads and other monsters with smooth skin, large ears, and a tail.⁴⁴ Baxter also writes Satan has a queen who can change into various animals or into a human.⁴⁵

One could conclude that because Wiese and others who claim visits to hell come back with the same description they are simply just confirming one another's account. And by drawing attention to — even with qualification — some of these individuals, that's exactly what Wiese suggests as well.⁴⁶ However, in Baxter's case, for the handful of similarities to Wiese, she reports many more delusions — such as hell being shaped like a human body,⁴⁷ and that hell is occupied by witches who sit in rocking chairs.⁴⁸ Yet because Wiese's novel revelations are also unbiblical, it is more likely that Wiese did some creative borrowing from Baxter and others.

Wiese writes, "There are others who were taken to hell or have had a glimpse of hell on their deathbed."⁴⁹ However, he claims ignorance of these individuals and their reports — at least until after his own experience.⁵⁰ Referring to these other visionaries is another demonstration where Wiese circumvents dependency on the Bible alone, and appeals to the flimsy, subjective confirmation of the unorthodox and unproven claims of others.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, one account specifically mentioned by Wiese by name is Richard Eby's book *Caught Up into Paradise*, in which Eby claims to have visited hell for a few minutes. Eby's account has come under many a critical review. After giving the standard fare of foul odors, Eby actually claims that hell is cold and a place

where one never gets warm.⁵¹ In the hell described by Eby, demons dance to heavy metal and punk music.⁵² Wiese may claim that he neither endorses nor condemns these books, but by citing them he gives them credibility.

THE BIBLE'S ASSURANCES VS. WIESE'S CLAIMS

Romans 8:29-30 assures all believers that they are predestined to glorification, and Romans 8:1 assures all believers that they cannot, in any way, suffer hell, punishment, judgment, or the wrath of God. First Thessalonians 5:9 gives us the comfort that, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." With such promises, God cannot violate His own Word and subject one of His own to hell and torment — even for only 23 minutes. Wiese needs to show us in Scripture where the punishments of hell can be imposed on a believer for short periods.

CONTRADICTIONS AND MORE CONTRADICTIONS

The more Wiese writes, the more his story unravels. It was unclear at first that Wiese was claiming an out of body experience. Initially he reported that he "fell into bed shortly before midnight"⁵³ and then was "catapulted out of [his] bed" and into hell.⁵⁴ Later, upon returning from hell, he reports that he was above his house and able to see his body.⁵⁵ What is completely contradictory from his original claim of being catapulted into hell from his bedroom (i.e., "out of my bed") was where his body was when he returned from hell. Upon his return he says:

"I could see through the roof. As I looked into the *living room* I was startled to see my body lying on the *living room floor*."⁵⁶

The inquiring mind will want to know who dragged his body out of the bedroom and into the living room. His spirit left his natural body from his bed, he claimed. Wiese says he left his body through some kind of OBE

while sleeping alongside his wife. Upon his return, Wiese reports his wife being awakened by screams coming from the living room.⁵⁷ The book has his wife's report agreeing with his own account of his return, but does not explain how the body got from the bedroom to the living room.

Wiese also reports what he calls a second "tour" of hell,⁵⁸ but only as an observer. We again have to ask where in the Bible one would ever find the concept of a brief trip to hell to just observe. These new Gnostic categories are so clearly unscriptural they cannot be of God. Thus, we may properly conclude that they stem either from: 1) a deluded imagination or hallucinations; 2) intentional fabrication; 3) plagiarism from other such books; 4) drug inducement; 5) demonic deceptions; or a combination of the above.

There is no doubt that Wiese has absorbed a lot of study material and books about hell — including bizarre and unhealthy claims of visits there. His bibliography is a melting pot of the good, the bad, and the ugly, with a listing of 41 books, as well as audiovisual materials. He claims he discovered it all after he wrote his book. Only he knows for sure. Whatever the answer, we know he did not get these things from Scripture.

RECAPPING WITH SOME INEVITABLE CONCLUSIONS

Wiese completely fails his own test and violates his own ground rules. There is not a shred of evidence anywhere in Scripture that there is the possibility of short visits or temporary stays in hell.

Church Father Cyprian (c. A.D. 250) reminded us that "the pain of punishment will then be without the fruit of penitence."⁵⁹ Cyprian's point is that there is no getting out and no way to alter one's eternal destiny. Earlier, Barnabas echoed the universal belief of the Church, saying, "It is the way of eternal death with punishment."⁶⁰ Polycarp (c. A.D. 130) spoke of "that fire which is eternal."⁶¹ Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 160) said of the lost one, "He goes to the everlasting punishment of

fire."⁶² Irenaeus (c. A.D. 180) spoke of the "eternal fire."⁶³ Clement of Alexandria was no less emphatic in A.D. 195, stating, "they are punished with the endless vengeance of quenchless fire. Since they do not die, it is impossible for them to have an end put to their misery."⁶⁴ Of eternal punishment, Tertullian (c. A.D. 197) said, "For it is not merely long-enduring; rather, it is everlasting."⁶⁵ Hippolytus (c. A.D. 205) affirmed that God would "leave them to remain in the flame of torment."⁶⁶

This is the universal testimony of the Church and its apologists borne from a deep knowledge of the text of Scripture.

Wiese is misleading and disingenuous by listing statements about hell from mainline evangelicals and even historic creeds. The presumed appearance given is that all of these agree with Wiese's premise: that people can visit hell temporarily. Those quoted believe in the truth of hell as an eternal place as presented in the Bible. Wiese's flights of fancy are far removed from the sober biblical positions of those that he often quotes. Knowing that some will be aware of this fact, Wiese offers a paltry disclaimer about the liberty he took in using the quotes:

"However, it is very likely that many of them would have an incredulous opinion about God taking someone there for an experience such as the one I had. And I would agree, for I too have been skeptical of such 'experiences' in the past. Yet the fact remains that this did occur to me, and Scripture supports that such an experience could take place."⁶⁷

This remark is beyond the height of conjecture. To write "Scripture supports that such an experience could take place" is completely false.

First Thessalonians 5:21 instructs believers to test all things and hold fast to that which is good. We only have one test and that is the test of Scripture. Here Wiese fails miserably. He must believe that saying some-

thing over and over makes it true as he insists his claims can be shown to be scriptural. They are not. The concept of a short-term visit to hell, where one is punished briefly, cannot be found in Scripture.

To use a biblical phrase, Wiese's claims have been "weighed and found wanting." Wiese says we can choose to believe him or not. We choose not to believe him or that his book, *23 Minutes in Hell*, has any basis in the Bible.

Endnotes:

1. Chris Maxwell, "Controversial Topics," *Charisma*, April 1995, pg. 85.
2. Bill Wiese, *23 Minutes in Hell*. Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2006.
3. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, Vol. III, pp. 874-875, 877.
4. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 131.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., pg. 81.
7. Ibid., pg. 98.
8. Ibid., pg. 130, italics in original.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., pg. xvii.
11. *Systematic Theology*, op. cit., Vol. III, pg. 749.
12. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 117.
13. C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *A Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Vol. X, 1984, pg. 400.
14. Swedenborg cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 442.
15. "'Dead' man wakes up under autopsy knife," Reuters news article, Sept. 17, 2007.
16. Merrill Tenney, General Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, Vol. 3, pg. 115, ellipses in original.
17. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Vol. 2, pp. 794-795.
18. Ibid., pg. 792.
19. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 45.
20. Ibid., pg. xv.
21. Ibid., pg. xvi, italics in original.
22. Ibid., pg. 107.
23. Ibid., pg. 108.
24. Ibid., pp. 13-14.
25. Ibid., pg. 2.
26. Ibid., italic in original.
27. H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1952, pp. 140, 141, 147.

28. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 132.
29. Keith E. Knauss, *Travelogues In Truth*. Liberty, N.Y.: Days of Decision Publications, 1968, pg. 62.
30. G. Campbell Morgan in *The Analyzed Bible*. Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1964, pg. 239.
31. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 135.
32. Ibid., pg. 31, italics in original.
33. F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1955, pg. 91.
34. See further, "Mary Baxter's Vision of Hell - Divine Revelation or Deluded Ranting?," *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 1, 14-16.
35. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 165.
36. Ibid., pg. 58.
37. In response to an inquiry, on Dec. 21, 2007, Wiese confirmed to PFO director Kurt Goedelman that the unnamed woman is Baxter.
38. The book review goes on to state, "Read Baxter's book as she suggests, with the Bible in hand. Do not immediately canonize the vision. Weigh carefully her every word." (Chris Maxwell, *Charisma*, April 1995, pg. 85.)
39. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 7.
40. Ibid.
41. Mary K. Baxter, *A Divine Revelation of Hell*. New Kensington, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1993, pg. 78.
42. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pp. 3-4.
43. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
44. *A Divine Revelation of Hell*, op. cit., pg. 40.
45. Ibid., pg. 179.
46. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pp. 58-59, 97-99.
47. *A Divine Revelation of Hell*, op. cit., pg. 34.
48. Ibid., pp. 84-85.
49. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 97.
50. Ibid.
51. See further, William M. Alnor, *Heaven Can't Wait*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996, pg. 48.
52. Ibid.
53. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. xv.
54. Ibid., pg. 2.
55. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
56. Ibid., emphasis added.
57. Ibid., pg. 46.
58. Ibid., pg. 56.
59. David W. Bercot, Editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pg. 298.
60. Ibid., pg. 242.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., pg. 243.
64. Ibid., pg. 244.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., pg. 245.
67. *23 Minutes in Hell*, op. cit., pg. 87.

Campolo speaks of “holistic Christianity” (pg. xiv), but it is hard to see how Catholic mystics could be seen as holistic because most of them spent their lives in cloisters or caves outside the realm of real life. Their lifestyles, at times, were so bizarre that they bore no similarity to real living. The Bible condemns the legalistic and destructive lifestyles of the radical mystics (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-5).

Then Campolo’s obsession with Francis shades off into spiritism. He writes, “That insight about Saint Francis is what motivated me to partner with Mary Albert Darling in writing this book. She, too, had sensed Francis’s mystical presence in her own visit to Assisi” (pg. xiii). What Campolo describes here the Bible calls necromancy. Unfortunately, coming into contact with the presence of the dead is, in fact, coming into contact with what the Bible calls a familiar spirit or demonic entity.

Campolo starts on his rabbit trail departing from the Bible and expounding on the theories of Jewish Philosopher Martin Buber (pg. 5). Buber speculated that we can somehow mystically “feel a oneness of mind and heart” with humans and non-humans. As Jesus knew what was in everyone (John 2:25), so can we (pp. 5-6). The Bible does not support the idea that we can or should do this. The idea of mystically connecting with others, which Buber called an “I-thou” relationship, leads us toward Campolo’s wordless witnessing.

Campolo equates Bible characters such as Moses and Paul, who received direct revelation from God, with medieval mystics. This is the big lie. Many of the more crazed mystics, such as Madame Guyon and Anne Catherine Emmerich, believed they merged with God and became God or Jesus. None of the Bible greats ever believed they fused with God and co-mingled identities. Scripture strongly maintains the creature-Creator distinction.

Darling’s claim that her mother saw a “ball of light,” which she identified as “the light of Christ” (pg. 11), is not convincing. Satan himself can appear as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Campolo totally distorts the Scripture when he claims that the parable of the soils in Matthew 13 is all about mystical experiences (pg. 13). He does the same with Philippians 3:10-11 and claims we can really be “deeply connected to Christ through mystical experiences” (pp. 13-14). A better way would be to get to know Him through the pages of Scripture, because our feelings and emotions can be faulty and misleading.

Campolo’s strange ideas about “witnessing” are attributed to Frank Laubach. Very few probably have ever heard of Laubach, but he is known for his stint in the

Philippines where he labored doing literacy work in the 1920s. According to Campolo, Laubach suggested praying to a person and not just for them. He writes:

“Laubach proposes that a person who is resisting God might be open to the spiritual impact of a Christian concentrating God’s power on him or her. ... Call it a kind of mental telepathy, but what Laubach is suggesting is that the Holy Spirit flowing into a Christian, as a result of prayer, can stir up spiritual energy ... You focus all your psychic energies on her, nonverbally pleading with her to decide for Christ right there and then. Now consider what might happen if this psychic communication could be heightened” (pg. 35).

When we pray for someone, it is certainly a mystery as to what God does and how He does it. To try to explain it and reframe it in an occult fashion, as our psychic energy and mental telepathy, is way off the mark. There is nothing in the entire Bible to suggest Campolo’s view. The moving and changing of a heart is the domain of the Holy Spirit and not dependent on our psychic abilities. The way in which our compassion and prayer will be used of God is unknown to us and not delineated in Scripture. We are to pray as commanded, but the results and outcomes are up to God. Some sow and others water while God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

What Campolo is describing, a type of psychic witnessing or telepathic evangelism which creates responses in others, is actually a form of a paranormal and occultic technique called psychokinesis (PK).

Advocates of PK claim they can significantly affect everything by using their mind. It is “the apparent ability of a person (or other organism) to influence the environment without using any of the known conventional means such as muscular action. The term is compounded of the Greek roots *psyche* (‘mind’ or ‘soul’) and *kinesis* (‘movement’). Thus, it implies that the mind is acting directly on the external world; hence the popular phrase for PK — ‘mind over matter.’ ... PK has been offered as an explanation for many unusual experiences that are traditionally viewed as either miracles or the action of spirits” (Leonard George, *Alternative Realities*, pg. 234).

Campolo and Darling’s book might make it with adherents of the emerging church movement and possibly even among Roman Catholics. The expressed desire to crawl back into the Dark Ages to emulate so-called saints will not appeal to Bereans who take their Bible seriously. The appeal to occult techniques of witnessing and mystical legalistic rituals and practices is repugnant to those who know the liberty of Christ and grace. This book is really not about a deeper spirituality, but about retrogression into unbiblical bondage and untrustworthy emotions.

—GRF

Bynum said during the interview that following her husband's abuse, she fought depression and even entertained the thought of suicide. Producers for the reality show invited Bynum for the express purpose of relating her own domestic-abuse survival and to be an adviser to Toler for a similar case. Her own divorce proceeding is not "on the docket" for the program. Weeks also was invited to be part of the broadcast, but declined.

Yet not all are sympathetic to Bynum's mission. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* observed that, "Bynum's decision to appear on 'Divorce Court' after the media blitz surrounding her domestic violence trial has some metro Atlantans wondering whether the Pentecostal 'prophetess' is trying to extend her stay in the limelight." Some even wonder if the attack by Weeks was a "staged incident" or "publicity stunt." Bynum insisted to Toler that it wasn't.

—MKG

THERE'S A NEW REVIVAL COMING?

"Holy Spirit" revivals appear to have come full-circle — at least geographically. Fifteen years ago, crowds packed the 10,000-seat Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland, Fla., to be intoxicated by "Holy Ghost bar-

tender" Rodney Howard-Browne. A year later, revival enthusiasts began barking, squealing, and braying at the Airport Vineyard church in Toronto. The following year, the phenomenon manifested itself in Pensacola, Fla., as followers were urged to get into the "river" of revival at the Brownsville Assembly of God church. Then, the next year saw the "Cornfield Revival," which took place in the rural Missouri community of Smithton before relocating to the Kansas City area. Now revivalists are once again heading back to Lakeland, this time for "The Florida Outpouring."

In early April, Stephen Strader, pastor of Ignited Church, invited revival leader Todd Bentley for five days of meetings. "On the second or third night, we just looked at each other and said, 'We've got to extend it another week,'" Strader told *The Tampa Tribune*. During the weeks that followed, the services outgrew both the Ignited Church and another larger church and were moved to the Lakeland Center. Estimates place nightly attendance between 4,000 and a capacity crowd of 7,000, with many coming from outside the Lakeland area.

Bentley is described as "a tattooed, body-pierced, T-shirt wearing evangelist from British Columbia." Operating under the banner of "Fresh Fire Ministries," Bentley claims to be responsible for "sparking revival fires and equipping the body in power evangelism and healing ministry." "It's electric. It's tangible. That's what people are coming for and also the notable miracles," Bentley told the *Tribune*.

—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

SECRETS OF WATCHMAN NEE

by Dana Roberts

Bridge-Logos, 206 pages, \$11.95

Dana Roberts is unique and his book is unique. He is probably the only man in America who has spent over 25 years studying the life and works of Watchman Nee. He also singularly received a Master of Arts in Religious Studies from Eastern Nazarene College for his research on Watchman Nee, along with his Master of Theological Studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. There is probably no one who knows Nee and his teachings better. Some of Roberts' studies on Nee took place in China, which was Nee's lifelong home and the place of his final incarceration. Roberts has researched Nee's final days and dispels some of the myths.

Roberts is thoroughly familiar with all the major biographies on Nee and the large number of Nee's books that are still being reprinted and released. There currently are close to 60 different Nee titles in English with more in preparation. It is not that Nee himself was a prolific author. But many of his "books" have been obtained from English and Mandarin shorthand notes taken by his students during lectures. Others have come from articles or booklets done by Nee. This, of course, presents a huge dilemma for Nee's followers because no one knows how accurate the notes are, or what kind of alterations occurred in editing. There are both longer texts of his work and edited shorter texts.

Roberts shows that Nee went through stages of development depending on what teacher was influencing him at the time. Nee's teachings on the "baptism of the Spirit" were picked up from a Miss Dora Yu. His Keswick victorious-life teaching was imparted to him by a British missionary, Miss M.E. Barber. Nee went through a phase when he was enamored by Jesse Penn-Lewis and put together much of his anthropology from her skewed understanding of man. His metaphysical system came almost entirely from the speculations of Penn-Lewis. Nee also had a short excursion into the writings of Madame Guyon. His ecclesiology and Church teachings obviously were drawn wholesale from the

Plymouth Brethren Movement and the writings of John Nelson Darby.

Nee followers probably will not take kindly to this book. Many revere him as a saint who is not to be questioned. Those who see Nee in a harsher light and think he is off the orthodox and evangelical charts will probably think Roberts deals too kindly with him. This probably shows that Roberts treated him fairly. He is not afraid to show Nee as flawed in many areas and in need of correction. Roberts' view is sympathetic, but honest.

The book has extensive footnotes and a large bibliography. What could have made this good book better would have been an index for easy retrieval of materials.

—GRF

THE DISCIPLINE OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

by Tim Challies

Crossway Books, 206 pages, \$16.99

The twenty-first century Church is starving for discernment — yet, for the most part, it is ignorant that such a famine even exists. Heresy was not a matter confined to only the first few decades of the Church's existence. And today's heretics often come disguised as pastors and prophets. Therefore, a book such as *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* is essential.

Author Tim Challies writes, "This book is written for the general reader who wishes to understand discernment and to understand what the Bible teaches us about discernment, and who wishes to equip himself in this discipline" (pg. 15). He satisfies his purpose with excellence, as he systematically defines discernment from several biblical facets. He also counsels as to the dangers of discernment and how one is to develop and practice this important spiritual gift. His subjects and disciplines are quick and to the point.

The book is greatly enhanced with study questions for each chapter and exhaustive general and Scripture indexes.

Scripture, over and over again, exhorts one to seek wisdom, understanding, and discernment. Challies' book is a tremendous asset in helping one learn to discern.

—MKG

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