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# From High Places to Heresy

## Evaluating the Writings of Hannah Hurnard

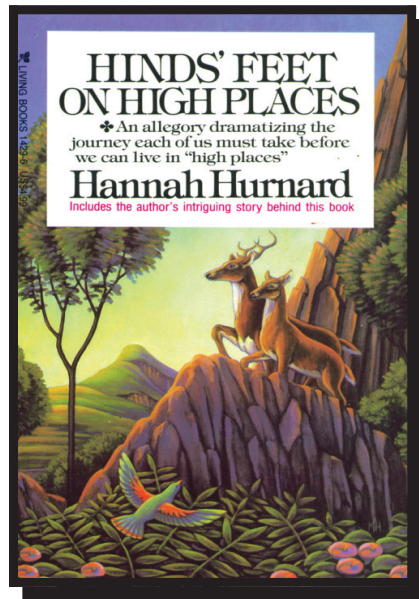
by G. Richard Fisher

A recent issue of the *Bookstore Journal* noted that “[Hannah] Hurnard’s strong individualism emerged in her later years. She liked to be the boss and usually wanted to do the talking” (December 1995, pp. 65-66).

Just like the Energizer Bunny, the sale of some Christian books never seem to abate. They just keep on going and going and going. A classic case in point is Hannah Hurnard’s partially autobiographical allegory, *Hinds’ Feet on High Places*. Hurnard has been dead since 1990, and while the volume containing her life story remains popular and continues on the best-seller list, few really know anything about her. She also has another dozen titles available. And herein is the problem.

### Hurnard’s Best Offering

Her book, *Hinds’ Feet on High Places*, was written in 1955 and from all appearances is mainstream and



orthodox. It is still stocked in Christian bookstores and there are over a million copies in circulation. Amazingly, after over four decades the *Bookstore Journal*

reports *Hinds’ Feet* at the No. 11 position on the best-selling fiction list (January 1996, pg. 140). With such longevity, there is little doubt that it could be considered a “classic” in the field of Christian publications. And from that one book, no one would suspect what is contained in other of Hurnard’s writings.

Hurnard was born in England in 1905 to wealthy Quaker parents. She traces her conversion to 1916 before which she claims to have been quite backward, having a severe stutter. Her training in England was at the Ridge-lands Bible College for two years after which she traveled with the “Friends Evangelistic Band.” She became well acquainted with John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* and that influence would show up in *Hinds’ Feet* (the title being taken from Habakkuk 3).

In 1932, unable to find a missions organization to sponsor her, she launched out on her own, moving to Haifa, Israel. There she served in a clinic and eventually engaged in Bible distribution. Her connection to Israel lasted over 50 years, although in her later years she traveled back and forth between England and Israel.

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If Hurnard had only written *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, she would have made a lasting impact for good. However, the twists and turns in her thinking brought her at last to some very strange, Gnostic, unorthodox and even occultic views. Few are aware that her views changed drastically in the late 1950s. At that time, Hurnard left the "High Places" and mountains of orthodoxy and headed for the lowlands of gross error. Hurnard's life is somewhat like the tragic figure of King Saul, starting right and ending wrong.

### Hurnard's Big Changes

In a 1994 biography by Isabel Anders (*Standing on High Places*), there are frank and honest admissions regarding Hurnard's shift from sound biblical doctrine. In the Introduction we read this:

"Later, I was to discover that there were numerous struggles and changes that had occurred within her. Many of us have since learned about some of her personal opinions and emphases evidenced in her later writings and her public speaking engagements, and have become concerned about what happened to her orthodox faith and her priorities."

Further in the volume, we are informed:

"The view that she strongly sets forth is one of universalism, or a belief that *all will be saved in the end*. This was an understanding that caused Hannah to reconsider all of her early evangelical zeal, as well as look with new eyes at the meaning of life and death. She shows, through fictional narrative, how she entered a new stage of belief that is troublesome to many readers of her later books, especially those holding to an orthodox Christian faith" (ibid., pp. 154-155, italic in original).

And just a few pages later, we find:

"However, her friends and family were finding it increasingly difficult to travel with Hannah down

the road she was choosing. Moving gradually toward unorthodox views, she was to find that by openly expressing her individualistic ideas about diet and spirituality, she would alienate more and more people. When she voiced other, even more questionable viewpoints in her public speaking engagements, door after door would close to her. Eventually, all invitations to speak to evangelical Christian groups virtually came to an end" (ibid., pg. 161).

Hurnard went from the high places to low places theologically.

She died on Marco Island, Fla., in 1990 refusing conventional treatment for her cancer. Before her death, her home had been open every Monday evening for those who came to hear her share her form of strict vegetarianism, reincarnation and New Age thought.

Her biographer provides this additional insight:

"In fact, in the later years of her life, Hannah herself ceased to attend church. Her lifelong conviction that God would speak to her personally, giving her deeper and deeper insights and 'light' that was to be widely shared with others, led her to believe that there could be no spiritual authority over her or her speaking and writing except the Lord Jesus Christ himself" (ibid., pg. 170).

In her most recent book, *The Inner Man* (published posthumously in 1993), her mysticism and New Age teachings are reflected clearly.

### Hurnard's Blatant Heresy

In Hurnard's 1981 book, *Eagles' Wings to the Higher Places*, (Harper & Row), she announces that the love of God will ultimately deliver all men from hell. Her fictional character Aletheia discovers this higher truth from an encounter with one she assumes to be Jesus:

"Then like great waves and billows the homesick longing for the Higher Places broke over Aletheia's soul. She felt like an orphan child again, even up here

on Mountain Top City, just as she had felt when she was first led down to the school in the Low Places. To the depths of her soul she knew that she could live here no longer where there were no Higher Places in sight. No, it was not sorrow for the hopeless plight of the poor people in the dark places which caused her grief; it was anguish at the thought of the hopelessness of the only message which she had to give them. Lost forever with no hope if they rejected it! Cast off by the God who had brought them into existence, if they rejected His call now. All her unacknowledged doubts and questions arose again concerning a God who called Himself Love and who brought myriads of souls into existence without being able to prevent them from condemning themselves to an eternity of hopeless darkness and suffering, lost to Him forever. How could He possibly love them, if He let this happen to them? How could He possibly be good, if He brought them into an existence where it was possible for them to separate themselves from His love and joy and goodness forever?" (pp. 21-22)

Aletheia goes on in confusion:

"Oh, cried Aletheia's heart in an agony of despair. Oh, how terrible and hopeless to be a God who loves goodness and cannot save His own creatures from preferring evil. If he did not call Himself a God of Love it would be different. A devil might create living souls capable of tormenting themselves forever. Oh, what agony to love the souls brought into existence enough to go to the cross in a last supreme effort to save them and not be able to do so. To proclaim, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself,' and to be unable to do it! To find that the Devil is stronger than Goodness and could gloatingly and triumphantly succeed in damning at least ninety percent of God's creatures, leaving only a pitiful ten or even smaller percent to respond to His love — a handful of souls for

Him to rejoice over for ever and ever, while all the others were tormented in hell. Oh, what hopelessly bitter Bad News this was. How could she ever believe in and trust such a God again?" (ibid., pp. 22-23, italic in original).

Then, one called The Good Shepherd comes to her:

"He took her hand, saying gently, 'God is an infinite ocean of Love and Goodness. In Him there is no wrath at all. What men call His wrath and judgment is the inexorable determination of the love of the skilled surgeon to heal the sickness and suffering of a beloved son, no matter at what cost to Himself and to the son, so that no trace of anything that can hurt or harm the beloved one remains. I will lead you to a place where you will behold the higher truth which will solve completely all your sorrowful questioning'" (ibid., pg. 28).

The answer to her questioning is that it is all going to turn out right for everyone in the end:

"'He is the Saviour of *all* men!' (1 Tim. 4:10). The words burst forth in passionate triumph from the lips of Aletheia. 'Oh, how blind I have been! He is lifted up and nailed to the cross with us. As Jesus revealed when He hung between the two thieves and murderers, He will "draw *all* men unto Him.'" "As in Adam (poor fallen Mankind) all die, so in Christ, the Second Adam, shall *all* men be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Oh, what a victory! The only victory truly worthy of the Great God and Creator Who "did not make anything in vain but in the end restores *all* things unto Himself" (Acts 3:21). Oh, it is the Best News possible, the only possible News, if we are truly to love and trust Him fully'" (ibid., pp. 35-36, italic in original).

Hurnard here unashamedly teaches universalism. While it is true that all in Adam die (and all are in Adam) not all are in Christ and therefore do not have life. All in Christ are made alive but we

know that this is not true of everyone. Hurnard has universalized the "all" rather than observe the context and interpret in the light of other Scriptures. All the passages about Judgment become meaningless in Hurnard's scheme of things. All the "whosoever will" passages become meaningless as well if everyone makes it anyway.

In Hurnard's "garden of Eden" man only fell from "God consciousness," so Hell turns out to be only Purgatory. This doctrine of Universalism — that hell is restorative, or as she would say, "Hell is Heaven," — has always been viewed as heresy and soundly condemned and refuted all through Church History. (See further *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 539-540 and *Death and the After-life* by Robert Morey, Chapter 9.) However these teachings are now on the shelves of our Christian bookstores in various Hurnard titles.

In *Eagles' Wings* it appears that Hurnard's characters believe in the eastern mystical doctrine of pantheism (God as a universal force in everything). An angel speaks to Aletheia as follows:

"'See, the little "Son of Man" is born amongst them in order to show that he represents all the birds, beasts, and other living creatures — not just the fallen sons of men. His manger cradle is on the cross created by Mankind's sins to show that whatsoever men do to each other they do to Him too; and whatever they do to the other living creatures — the birds, beasts, insects, and creeping things — *they also do to Him*. For He is the Divine Love and Life of God immanent in every living creature in the One Great Body of Creation. Now look, Aletheia, lover of the Truth. Look and behold the Truth'" (pp. 86-87, italic in original).

Further Hurnard teaches vegetarianism, not for health reasons but because she believes God is in animals and in animal flesh. This is a necessary corollary to Pantheistic belief (ibid., pp. 91-96, 117).

She suggests that human suffering atones for sin (ibid., pp. 121-122), which really makes man his own savior.

"All suffering is atoning," she says.

The capstone of her heresy is a low view of Jesus Christ. On page 124 she teaches that Jesus rose through an "angelic level of God consciousness" to a "Son of God consciousness" which is where all mankind is headed anyway. A reading of Hebrews chapter one is an antidote to this error as it shows Jesus as far superior to angels and even as the object of angelic worship.

Her Christology is no better than the Watchtower Society's. Rarely has more heresy, old and new, been compressed into one system.

In another of Hurnard's books, *Way of Healing*, a man by the name of Othniel receives a visit from Peter and Mark. On Mount Zion there is a secret (new) truth given to Othniel by the two. There is a straying from sound biblical truth and a reinterpreting and restructuring of the Gospel accounts. With vision and guided imagination her imaginary characters are transported in time travel fashion back to the time of Christ. There we find that Jesus did not turn water into wine. Hurnard has the Apostles saying that Jesus secretly waved a heavenly wand (whatever that is) and changed his listener's thoughts and attitudes so that they *thought* they were drinking wine in a kind of a mass hypnosis. Therefore, some miracles are not literal but only contain principles that Hurnard must explain.

What we are actually dealing with here is a neo-gnosticism that she calls "new consciousness" and "Holy Wonder."

But, it gets better (or worse). We are told that Jesus did not really feed the 5000. That is the old orthodox view. The real insight is that there may have been some kind of mob psychology that made selfish people actually want to take out the lunches that they were hiding and share. There is also the possibility that some bedouin showed up just in time to sell them some bread and goat cheese. The Apostles are not too concerned about the exact details and they let Othniel take his pick of either or both stories (*Way of Healing*, pp. 59-64).

In the Preface of *Way of Healing* we have a cryptic summary of the book's



teachings that would far outdo any possibility thinker or Word-Faith proponent. Under the title "The Nine Holy Miracles" we find this:

"1. The miracle that transforms things:

You can change anything if you accept it with thanksgiving.

2. The miracle that opens all doors:

You can make anyone receptive if you serve them.

3. The miracle that makes all your wishes come true:

You can obtain anything if you have the right motive.

4. The miracle that supplies everything you need:

You can meet any need if you share all that you have.

5. The miracle that calms all tempests of hate:

You can destroy every wrong if you forgive it.

6. The miracle that takes you anywhere:

You can get anywhere if you risk everything.

7. The miracle that makes you invulnerable:

You can make anything harmless if you make friends with it.

8. The miracle that withers up falsities:

You can destroy falsities if you waken love for the truth.

9. The miracle that delivers from evil influence:

You can open any hell if you share it."

This mystical mishmash can mean anything someone wants it to and hence means nothing at all.

Another strange suggestion on pages 44-45 is that the miracles of Jesus, along with truth, direction and instruction can be found in fairy tales and fables. Along the way, the Apostles instruct Othniel in "Jack and the Beanstalk," "King Midas," "The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg," "Ali Baba," and "Beauty and the Beast."

In *Wayfarers in the Land*, Hurnard claims she has gone all over Israel throughout the year making a great spiritual impact. In this writer's many trips to the Holy Land, not one Church leader was found who had heard of her.

### Hurnard's Befuddled End

In 1988, Harper and Row, released another biographical attempt by Hurnard, *Thou Shalt Remember — Lessons of a Lifetime*. In this volume, she "let's it all hang out." She blatantly expresses favor for such things as aura reading (pg. 148), and out-of-body experiences (pg. 180). These things are the stock in trade of spiritism and occultism, yet they sit on the shelves of Christian bookstores.

She also objects to the Old Testament sacrifices, saying that God hated them (pg. 157). This view was first put forth by the heretic Marcion in the second century and recently was revived by Carl Austin. This view, dubbed "theological anti-Semitism" by F.F. Bruce, radically reinterprets Judaism and undermines the integrity of Scripture. Jesus fully accepted and endorsed the Old Testament system with all its sacrifices, calling it God's unalterable Word (Matthew 5:17-18; John 10:34-36; Luke 24:27, 44, 45).


Hurnard reveals that after the doors of

the evangelical world closed to her she began association with what can only be called a mystical, metaphysical fringe group known as "Camps Farthest Out" (pp. 136-142). Eventually Hurnard "camped" so "far out" that even they disowned her. One sticking point was her radical vegetarianism.

Spiritually speaking, a Christian Science reading room or a Christian bookstore with a heavy emphasis on Word-Faith literature would be a dangerous place. We expect them to be. Unfortunately, the least-expected places can be dangerous nowadays. Tread with extreme caution and discernment in your local Christian bookstore. It is really hard to believe but universalism, gnosticism, relationalism, pantheism, self-atonement, defective Christology and skewed bibliology are all available at your Christian bookstore.

A major aspect of the problem is that bookstore managers are unaware of the later content in Hurnard's books, assuming all the later writings follow the line of *Hinds' Feet in High Places*. The subtle problem is that in endorsing Hurnard, one endorses all she offers.

We must stay in the highlands of our Bible. We must stay in the heights of sound theology and proper discernment. What a tragedy that one woman could start so high and end so low and influence so many so negatively.

Samson started in the "high places" of the rolling hillsides of the Shephalah but tragically ended in the lowlands of the Philistines. The sacrifices he made, bit by bit, robbed him of God's blessing and leading. Those "sad ending" stories do parallel the tragedy of any who start well but do not finish that way. 

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### Editorials

(continued from page 2)

board, however, [thought that] the decision to release the Toronto church was not a rash one. In September 1994, the denomination's position on the renewal was hashed out in an emergency session of the board and distributed to all Vineyard pastors. Over a 14-month period, Wimber said, the Toronto leaders repeatedly violated the guidelines contained in the position report. The 20-member board voted unanimously to release Toronto from the denomination."

With the controversial (holy laughter) "renewal" taking place in Canada, Wimber apparently has had difficulty explaining to the media this "current move of God." He became apprehensive about the manifestations of animal noises that are a part of the "blessings" in Toronto. Arnott's open letter further stated that Wimber "felt he could no longer answer questions, including innuendoes and rumours regarding the renewal services. Rather than ask us to revamp the renewal meetings, they released us to continue as we believe God is leading us. ... [Wimber] feels the AVC Board is not called to shepherd something outside the ministry model God has given them."