

# The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 27, NO. 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2007

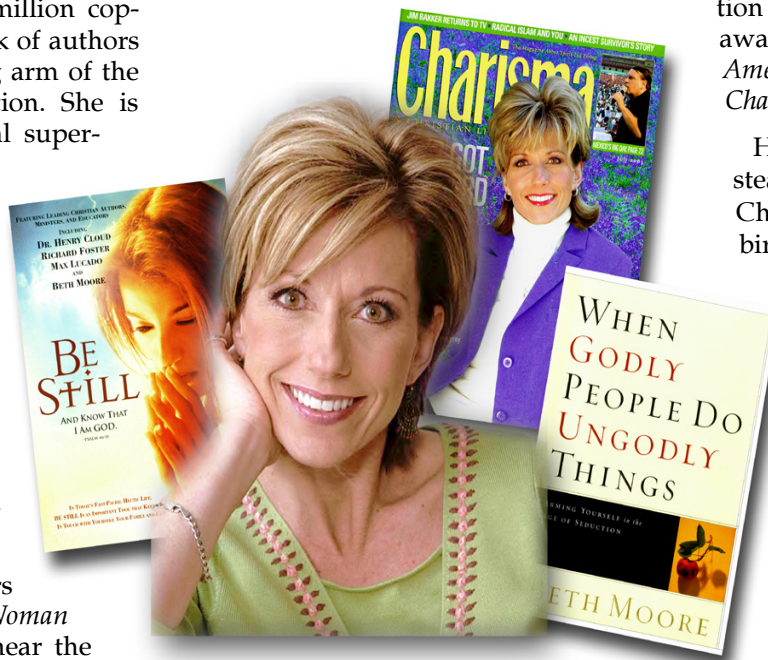
EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

## When Godly People Teach Ungodly Theology The Subtle Error of Beth Moore

by M. Kurt Goedelman  
with G. Richard Fisher

She is a best-selling author whose Bible study books and workbooks have sold more than 10 million copies, and who leads the pack of authors at LifeWay, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. She is said to be an “evangelical superstar” and “one of the most respected and sought-after Bible teachers,”<sup>1</sup> whose conferences draw women — and some men — by the thousands. She’s Beth Moore, the blond, petite 50-year-old with a Texas accent, who has become a Christian darling among believers of all denominations.

A few years ago, readers of *Today’s Christian Woman* magazine ranked Moore near the top of its list of “women [who] have had the greatest impact on [their] life in the last five years.”<sup>2</sup> The magazine’s roster had Moore (at 27%) third behind charismatic preacher Joyce Meyer (46%) and popular author Stormie Omartian (31%). At the same time, *Christian Reader* magazine



celebrated her with the lavish title of “America’s Bible teacher,” a designation from which even Moore shies away. “If I’m America’s Bible teacher, America’s in trouble!” she told *Charisma* magazine.<sup>3</sup>

Her rise to fame was slow and steady. Moore says she trusted Christ as Savior prior to her sixth birthday and says she surrendered to a call to the ministry during her late teen years while working as a counselor for sixth-grade girls at a church camp. Moore taught children, then moved on to leading a church aerobics class. In 1984, she began teaching a Sunday school class for young married adults at First Baptist Church of Houston. Two decades later,

(continues on page 18)

### Inside this Issue:

- DA VINCI CODE LINKED TO SUICIDE ..... PAGE 3
- HAVE THEY DISCOVERED THE FAMILY TOMB OF JESUS? ..... PAGE 4
- A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL ..... PAGE 5

---

---

# Editorials

---

---

## JUST WHEN I THOUGHT I HEARD IT ALL!

Francis Beckwith, author of *Relativism: Feet Planted Firmly in Mid-Air* (Baker Books, 1998), has now planted his feet firmly back in the Middle Ages and unbiblical traditions. He and his wife have “decided to seek full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.” Beckwith, Associate Professor of Church-State Studies (tenured) at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, had been featured on such shows as the Christian Research Institute’s *Bible Answer Man*.

Some may blame it on the water in Waco, but the blame goes to a mindset that is mystical and unbiblical, and thus open to deception.

Beckwith lived as a professed evangelical and was even the president of the Evangelical Theological Society — a post he has now resigned. On the *Right Reason* web site, Beckwith revealed, in his blog titled “My Return to the Catholic Church,” that he had, before age 14, received baptism, communion, and confirmation within the Roman Catholic Church. Apparently, for Beckwith, old habits must be hard to break.

Beckwith explained that trusted friends gave him conflicting advice. Some told him to fly under the radar — or “lay low” — with his decision until his term as ETS president ended in November. Others urged that by withholding his decision “he could be perceived by many as a bad witness for the Gospel.”

Rather than seek the Scriptures, Beckwith looked for a sign from God. Signs are tricky things and some may be from Satan or just from our own imagination. It also

depends on who is interpreting the signs and it can become very subjective — like seeing images in clouds. Beckwith writes:

“I did not know exactly what to do. So, I prayed and asked the Lord to provide me clear direction. I believe I received this direction on April 20. On that Friday morning, my 16-year-old-nephew, Dean Beckwith, called me and asked if I would be his sponsor when he receives the sacrament of Confirmation on May 13. I could not say ‘no’ to my dear nephew, who has credited his renewal of faith in Christ to our conversations and correspondence. But in order for me to do this I would have to be in full communion with the Church.”

This goes to prove that you can have a Ph.D. and still not think logically — or biblically.

It is hard to believe that Beckwith has no awareness of the Protestant Reformation and names such as Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Huss. He must be aware that he is committing to false doctrines such as Maryology, purgatory, prayers to dead saints, enforced celibacy, and mandated fasting.

Doug Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary, in response to Beckwith’s announcement, wrote, “This is a sad day for all true sons and daughters of the Protestant Reformation, for all who lived and died for its truth. Having abandoned the distinctives of the Reformation (which are deeply rooted in Holy Scripture), you are embracing serious theological error. ... By joining Rome, you are putting an institution above God; you are putting men (and I mean males) ahead of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ (See Galatians 1:6-11).”

(continues on page 27)

### PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

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

Visit PFO’s Web Site at: <http://www.pfo.org>

#### BOARD of DIRECTORS:

James Bjornstad .....	Cedarville, OH	Joan C. Cetnar .....	Kunkletown, PA
G. Richard Fisher .....	Bricktown, NJ	Gary E. Gilley .....	Springfield, IL
M. Kurt Goedelman .....	Saint Louis, MO	Robert L. Griffin.....	Gulf Shores, AL
Keith A. Morse .....	Denver, CO	David M. Tyler .....	Granite City, IL

© 2007 – PFO. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1083-6853. These articles may not be stored on web pages or Internet sites without permission. *The Quarterly Journal* is the newsletter publication of PFO. Published by Personal Freedom Outreach, P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, MO 63136. PFO’s *Journal* may also be obtained on CD-ROM in Portable Document Format (.PDF) for use with Adobe® Reader® software.

---

---

# News Updates

---

---

## DA VINCI CODE LINKED TO SUICIDE

The *Da Vinci Code* author Dan Brown often expressed the view that the substance of his fictional conspiracy thriller was more fact than fantasy. For one of Brown's readers, who became captivated by the mega-best selling novel, the mingling of delusion and reality had deadly consequences.

Caroline Eldridge, 38, committed suicide after she had become obsessed with Brown's book and believed that she was the target of real-life conspirators who were trying to kill her, according to a report from London's *Evening Standard*. Eldridge worked as a costume designer before becoming a freelance artist. In 2004, she moved from Gloucestershire, England, to Italy, where she studied in detail the works of Leonardo Da Vinci and was part of a six-month exhibit on the Renaissance artist and his paintings.

The *Evening Standard* reported that Eldridge "suffered paranoid delusions that she and her family were in danger 'because of the knowledge that she had' of Leonardo." Roger Eldridge, the woman's father, told the newspaper that he thought that *The Da Vinci Code* created a "muddle" in his daughter's mind "in terms of fears." She told her family on numerous occasions, "I'm not going to let them take me alive."

Her father flew to Rome and persuaded his daughter to return home with him to England. Eventually her paranoia and fear overpowered her and, in May 2006, she overdosed on paracetamol. A March 2007 inquest into Eldridge's death "recorded a verdict of suicide."

—MKG

## P&G LAWSUIT CLEANS UP

Some rumors just won't die, but should. And some can be very costly. That's what four former Amway distributors discovered in March when a Salt Lake City jury awarded \$19.25 million to Proctor & Gamble in a lawsuit that accused them of spreading false reports about the world's largest consumer product company.

Beginning in the early 1980s, the Cincinnati-based P&G was the target of rumors that said that a portion of its company's profits went to satanic cults. The evidence of this, it was claimed, was the company's logo, a bearded crescent man-in-the-moon surrounded by 13 stars. Despite dropping the logo in 1985 after more than a

century of use, P&G continued to battle talk of occultic ties and patronage.

Through the years, P&G fought in court a handful of cases against those whom it could track down as liable for the rumors. Amway had repeatedly found itself in the crosshairs of P&G's litigation. Prior to the recent verdict, Amway, a household product competitor based in Michigan, had successfully defended itself and its distributors against P&G's lawsuits.

Amway had also won victories in the current case, first filed by P&G in 1995. Initially a federal judge dismissed the case, and in 2003 a three-judge panel of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver agreed. However, P&G had the case reinstated on further appeal leading to the \$19.25 million verdict by the U.S. District Court jury.

P&G is a \$68 billion company that manufactures products such as Ivory soap, Tide detergent, Crest toothpaste, Pampers disposable diapers, and hundreds of other personal and household goods.

—MKG

## LEAVING ON A JET PLANE

Kenneth and Gloria Copeland recently came under criticism from a Dallas television station for their use of ministry assets, specifically a Cessna Citation airplane purchased in 2006 by the Copelands' Believers' Voice of Victory ministry.

A *News 8 Investigates* report stated, "For the past several months, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland of Fort Worth have been traveling the globe in a new \$20 million jet." When donations were being sought to purchase the aircraft, "Kenneth Copeland said [it] would be used only to spread the gospel," the report also said. However, according to flight records, both before and after an October 2006 seminar in Australia, the Copelands had flown to vacation spots in Maui, the Fiji islands, and Honolulu for "eating and rest." Records also revealed trips to a Colorado resort area last December.

Wayne Shaw, a former IRS agent and current Southern Methodist University business professor, told WFAA News, "You can't take the assets that are supposed to be used for a religious or charitable purpose and use them for your own purposes without some tax consequences."

The news report also questioned the Copelands' fund-raising methods. The Copelands and their ministry proclaim the prosperity gospel and faith healing. The

(continues on page 27)



# Have They Really Discovered the Family Tomb of Jesus?

## *Separating the Facts from the Froth*

by G. Richard Fisher

D. Moody Smith recently said, “We are awash in Jesus fiction.”<sup>1</sup> Case in point:

“Okay,” Simcha said, ‘Let’s play ‘Da Vinci Code’ for a moment. ...’  
‘I have a theory,’ said Simcha. ‘I can’t quite prove it yet, but we’re just playing the ‘Da Vinci Code,’ after all.’<sup>2</sup>

Anyone can claim anything they wish to and people can believe anything, whether it makes sense or can be verified. This is a day of outlandish claims and a public that will swallow anything from reports of an appearance by Jesus to stories of visits to heaven and hell.

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church claimed the possession of sacred relics. These items — the bodies or body parts of dead saints or their clothing — were reputed to be able to impart grace and grant indulgences. Even things that these relics touched were thought to have special powers. Philip Schaaf informs us:

“In the earlier years of the Middle Ages, Italy was the most prolific source of relics. ... Among the endless number of objects transmitted to Western Europe from the East were Noah’s beard, the horns of Moses, the stone on which Jacob slept at Bethel, the branch from which Absalom hung, our Lord’s

foreskin, his navel cord, his coat, tears he shed at the grave of Lazarus, milk from Mary’s breasts, the table on which the Last Supper was eaten, the stone of Christ’s sepulchre, Paul’s stake in the flesh, a tooth belonging to St. Lawrence.”<sup>3</sup>

Wild claims obviously bring much attention and income. They can be a publisher’s best friend. Bart Ehrman says, “You publish as quickly as possible, create a sensation and get known [academically] that way.”<sup>4</sup> So it’s speed, volume, and sensational content which count in today’s marketplace. Lis Rogak is even more to the point:

“Publishers know that controversy sells books, and they pray for an outraged national figure to call for a boycott of a book.”<sup>5</sup>

### LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

Cult leader Harold Camping had it right when he told PFO directors that even after his dates for the Second Coming of Christ passed without the predicted events taking place, people would soon forget and his “ministry” would go on like nothing ever happened.<sup>6</sup>

Today’s claims are more slickly packaged and hyped. Computer-generated images and mood music can make the unreal seem real. Add to

that an air of scholarship, a few academic degrees, and the cinematic magic of an Oscar-winning director, and there can be the appearance of great truth.

A recent claim that burrows at the very foundations of Christianity is the touting of the purported discovery of the grave and family tomb of Jesus Christ. Such things have been the topic of novels, such as Paul Maier’s *Skeleton in God’s Closet*.

In spring 2006, James Tabor introduced the idea that Jesus was fathered by a Roman soldier and his grave is only a mile or so south of Jerusalem below a modern housing development. Tabor’s premise, though couched in fallback language, is that we now know where Jesus was buried. Yet even he offers in his book an alternative site in northern Galilee. PFO evaluated Tabor’s book, *The Jesus Dynasty*, and found it lacking.<sup>7</sup>

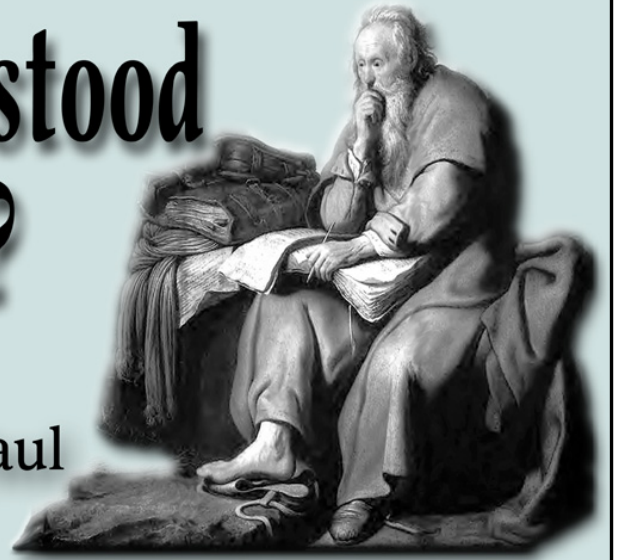
No one can doubt that all four Gospels say Jesus rose bodily from a borrowed grave in Jerusalem (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-12; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-18). Hundreds of eyewitnesses saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:4-8), not the least of which was the Church persecutor, Saul of Tarsus. Acts 1 teaches that Jesus, in a glorified, resurrected body, ascended to heaven. The people of the early Church staked their lives on Jesus’

(continues on page 11)

# Have We Misunderstood Paul All Along?

## A Critical Look at the New Perspective on Paul

by Gary E. Gilley



The lovers of God's truth can be excused if they seem to be a little "under the weather" lately, for everywhere we turn there are attacks on cardinal doctrines of the faith which most of us have considered secure and untouchable for years. Nathan Busenitz says it well:

"It seems like just about every major doctrine of historic Christianity is currently under attack. Theology proper faces the Open-Theism debate; bibliology is still reeling from higher criticism; and pneumatology is split over the Charismatic question. For Christology the issue is the lordship of Christ; for anthropology it's Christian psychology; and for ecclesiology it's the Church-growth movement."<sup>1</sup>

Not even the Gospel is safe from attacks by those who claim to be part of the Church. The foremost battle being waged at this moment is over soteriology. Emergent church leaders are in the forefront as they slice, dice, rearrange, deny, and undercut the Gospel message as found in Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Emergent church leaders fight this battle largely on the popular front, but underpinning their views is the theological framework of what has been termed the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP).

The NPP, like most novel and complicated doctrinal positions, is not

monolithic. Views among leading components vary, but there are some definite core beliefs that we will explore.

### ORIGINS

The backdrop for the NPP appears to be various searches for the "historic Jesus" stemming from Albert Schweitzer in the early twentieth century. Schweitzer was a liberal missionary/theologian who concluded that Jesus had tried but failed in His quest to rescue humanity. He further denied the trustworthiness of the Scriptures. In contrast to the Reformers, Schweitzer believed that the center of Pauline theology was not justification by faith, but Christ-mysticism, or what he calls "being in Christ." One "got into" Christ through baptism, Schweitzer maintained. He was one of the first to advocate that Paul's theology was derived from his Jewish roots and not from the Hellenistic culture. Thus, to Schweitzer's way of thinking, Paul's theology and the rabbinical teachings of the first century were very much in harmony.

Rudolf Bultmann, in the mid-1950s, introduced the second leg in this search, arising from skepticism and leading to such modern challenges as the Jesus Seminar. Still, Bultmann reversed course from Schweitzer on justification (it was central to Pauline theology), Judaism (Judaism was a

works-based religion), and influence (Paul was decidedly Hellenistic).

A third round in the search for this historic Jesus centered on trying to understand the Bible through the studies of Second-Temple Judaism (extrabiblical understanding of Judaism from approximately 200 B.C. to A.D. 200) and the rabbinical writings of that period. Challenging Bultmann were theologians such as William D. Davies, Ernst Käsemann, and Krister Stendahl, who saw little disagreement between Pauline theology and Judaism. Their contention was that Western thinking had created these differences and, contrary to Bultmann and the Reformers, the Judaizers of New Testament times taught a grace-based faith much like the Christianity Paul taught. Therefore, when Paul came to Christ he experienced not a spiritual conversion but a vocational call. His call was to take the message his Jewish brothers already had to the Gentiles, with the addition of the Lordship of Jesus. Paul was a Jewish rabbi who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. This is the seed-bed of the NPP.

What happened next, with the publication of E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, has been called "the Sanders revolution." N.T. Wright states Sanders' position as such:

"Judaism in Paul's day was not, as has regularly been supposed,

a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. ... The Jew keeps the law out of gratitude, as the proper response to grace — not, in other words, in order to *get* into the covenant people, but to *stay* in. ... Judaism ... was and is a perfectly valid and proper form of religion. Paul's only critique of Judaism, according to Sanders, was that it was 'not Christianity'.<sup>3</sup>

There are other developers and promoters of the NPP, including James Dunn of the University of Durham, but it is important to note that all of the aforementioned scholars would be considered liberal in their theology and understanding of Scripture. Enter now N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham in the Church of England and leading New Testament scholar (author of 43 books) who claims to be an evangelical and is accepted by many as such. It is Wright who has become the conduit through which the NPP teachings have entered the evangelical Church. For this reason, as we examine the NPP, it is the writings of Wright with which we will interact, principally his book *What Saint Paul Really Said*.

Phil Johnson summarizes what is being taught by Wright and his followers:

"In a nutshell, they are suggesting that the apostle Paul has been seriously misunderstood, at least since the time of Augustine and the Pelagian controversy, but even more since the time of Luther and the Protestant Reformation. They claim first-century Judaism has also been misinterpreted and misconstrued by New Testament scholars for hundreds and hundreds of years, and therefore the church's understanding of what Paul was teaching in Romans and Galatians has been seriously flawed at least since the time of Augustine."<sup>4</sup>

### BASIC TEACHINGS

Covenantal nomism is a centerpiece in the theology of the NPP. Quoting Sanders, Guy Waters gives this definition:

"'One enters' the covenant 'by baptism.' ... Once one enters the covenant, then membership 'provides salvation.' ... Obedience to (or 'repentance for the transgression of') a 'specific set of commandments' 'keeps one in the covenantal relationship, while repeated or heinous transgression removes one from membership.'"<sup>5</sup>

Under covenantal nomism, one is placed in the covenant through the grace of God, although baptism is necessary. One does not earn a place in the covenant through works, except the work of baptism. However, to maintain one's position in the covenant requires obedience to the laws of the covenant. *One enters the covenant by faith, but stays in by works*. Jack Hughes is correct when he notes:

"The similarities to Roman Catholic theology are very striking. Roman Catholic theology teaches that infant baptism places one into the 'covenant community' and as long as that person continues to observe the sacraments, he will preserve himself and be saved. That is legalism, salvation by works."<sup>6</sup>

### CORRECTING A FALSE GRID

The NPP proponents see themselves as the first people since the early Church Fathers who have rightly understood Paul and his message. This is the case, they say, because believers in the past have used the wrong grid through which to filter the words of Paul, at least since Augustine, and especially since Martin Luther. John Armstrong, once a defender of Reformed theology who has in recent years become an adherent to the NPP, writes:

"Luther understood Paul's description of the Jews, and their relationship to the law, through the grid of his medieval Roman Catholic experience. By this approach Luther saw Judaism as a religion of merit, a religion in which one earns salvation. Coming to rest in the grace of God alone, Luther believed that Paul's

first-century experience was essentially like his own sixteenth-century one. Justification by grace through faith was really new, or at least the new element of the gospel that had not been clear to Jews of the Second Temple period. In Luther's view this gospel of grace was the central point of his entire reformation effort. This is why Luther said, 'the true Church stands or falls' by this article, *sola fide*.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Luther read his own experience into the Pauline epistles. Since the Roman Church of the sixteenth century was legalistic, seeking salvation through merit, so Luther reasoned that Judaism described in Paul's epistles did the same. But the NPP leadership assures us that such was not the case. We have been misunderstanding Paul all these years. So what was Paul really after?

### RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Wright insists, "Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final creation."<sup>8</sup>

Because legalism was supposedly not on the table for first-century Judaism, Paul apparently was not discussing the issue of how one is saved, but rather who belongs at the same table. For Gentiles to be accepted in the same covenant community, it would be necessary for Jewish believers to lay down their laws concerning foods, circumcision, and holy days and welcome Gentiles on equal terms. The "badge" (a favorite NPP term) of community membership must be shifted from kosher laws to baptism, faith, and obedience to Christ.

To Paul, justification is more about ecclesiology than soteriology. That is, Paul is not really concerned about the individual's standing before God. His concern is about the status of Gentiles who are now joining the Jews in the covenant community. Paul is laying down boundary markers for those in the community (the Church); badges

that tell who is “in,” not requirements for getting “in.” Because those who practiced Judaism were already in the covenant community, so say the NPP scholars, the only issue is how to integrate Gentiles into the already-established community.

## SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

Essential to NPP theology is E.P. Sanders’ thesis that the Judaism of Paul’s day (often referred to as Second Temple Judaism or Palestinian Judaism) was not a self-righteous, merit-based religion. Long before the Reformation, Augustine had defended the faith against Pelagianism, which taught that salvation was obtained through works. The Reformers, they claim, had read their struggle with Catholicism back into the New Testament texts and assumed the practitioners of Judaism were as Pelagian as medieval Catholics. The Reformers equated sixteenth-century Roman theology with Pelagianism and linked both with Second Temple Judaism.

Thus, in the minds of Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers, Paul was addressing first-century Pelagianism found in Judaism much as they were addressing it in Romanism. It is the contention of the NPP leaders that the Reformers misread Paul because of this faulty link between Judaism and Pelagianism. For this reason it is believed that Paul did not so much as even address legalism, for Palestinian Judaism was not a legalistic religion.

NPP scholars say that when the primary rabbinical writings are studied they yield a very different understanding of Judaism than that of the Reformers and evangelicals. What these writings yield is covenantal nomism as described above: a religion in which one enters the covenant by the grace of God but stays in the covenant through obedience.

Responding to these teachings is not easy. There is much disagreement even by scholars who are reading the same texts. Interpretations of the texts are not easy and vary widely; the state and date of the texts are often uncertain; many rabbinical documents were written in the third to fifth century, but are being used to illus-

trate Jewish teaching in the first century.<sup>9</sup>

The NPP misrepresents what evangelicals teach. No one is saying that either Catholicism or Palestinian Judaism were Pelagian in the sense that they were totally works-based religions. Rather they both were semi-Pelagian, meaning that they both taught that salvation (whatever that might mean to the NPP) is based on the grace of God and accepted by faith plus works. Both Rome and Judaism were semi-Pelagian — God does His part and the rest is up to us (also known as synergism).

This means that Sanders and the others do not really understand legalism. Even as they claim that Judaism is not legalistic, they provide quotes from rabbinical sources showing that it clearly is.<sup>10</sup> Even the definition of covenantal nomism, as given by Sanders, is a synergetic, and thus legalistic, defining of Judaism.

The NPP places more confidence in rabbinical sources than in the New Testament. The Reformers in the past, as well as modern evangelicals, have drawn their conclusions about Judaism primarily from Scripture. It is impossible to go to the New Testament and not conclude that first-century Judaism is clearly legalistic. Acts 13:38-39; Luke 18:14; Galatians 2:16; and Romans 3:20 and 9:30-32 would be hard to refute. We would have to wonder what so disturbed Jesus about the Pharisees that He would pronounce them hypocrites who added their traditions to the Word of God if, in fact, they and He had been basically on the same page.

William Barrick offers this critique of Judaism as analyzed in the book of Galatians. He writes:

“Consider the following characteristics of Paul’s opposition:

- They preach a different (... *heteros*) gospel (1:6).
- They are ‘disturbing’ Paul’s converts and ‘distorting’ his gospel message (1:7). ...
- They are ‘false brethren’ (... *pseudadelphoi*) seeking bondage rather than freedom (2:4; 5:1).

• They belonged to the ‘party of the circumcision’ (... *tous ek peritomes*, 2:12).

• They compel Gentile Christians to live like Jews (... *ta ethne anagkazeis ioudaizein*, 2:14). ...

• They cause Galatian believers to be spellbound and drawn away from the gospel (3:1).

• The Gentiles must accept their ethic in order to be saved (4:17 ...).<sup>11</sup>

Barrick continues, “Paul’s antagonists were not simply first-century Jews with a grace perspective practicing so-called ‘covenantal nomism’ nor were they “‘right wing’ Jewish Christians.’ Clearly, they were first-century enemies of the faith and opponents of the gospel in particular.”<sup>12</sup>

Phil Johnson summarizes the evangelical position:

“In fact, if we allow the gospel accounts to inform our understanding of the Pharisees’ religion, rather than selling out to the scholarship of E.P. Sanders, we *must* come to the conclusion that the old perspective of first-century Pharisaism is the correct one.”<sup>13</sup>

## THE GOSPEL

Martin Luther said that the Church stands or falls on this one doctrine — justification by faith. If that is so, and conservative Christians down through the ages have agreed with Luther, then an examination of the NPP’s gospel message should be instructive. In “older theology,” N.T. Wright tells us, “‘the gospel’ is supposed to be a description of how people get saved,” or how “Christ takes our sin and we his righteousness,”<sup>14</sup> or something along that order. To Wright, this is not what Paul meant by the Gospel. The Gospel instead is “the narrative proclamation of King Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> Paul is announcing that “Jesus is king, not only of Israel but of all the world.”<sup>16</sup> Said with greater clarity, “The gospel is the announcement that Jesus is Lord — Lord of the world, Lord of the cosmos, Lord of the earth, of the ozone layer, of whales and waterfalls, of trees and tortoises.”<sup>17</sup>

While no thinking Christian would deny the lordship of Christ over all things, when the Gospel itself becomes the message of lordship rather than the message of redemption and justification, there will necessitate a seismic shift in our understanding of why Jesus came and died, and what we are to proclaim as a result. Wright leaves no doubt where he is headed:

“As soon as we get this right we destroy at a stroke the disastrous dichotomy that has existed in people’s minds between ‘preaching the gospel’ on the one hand and what used to be called loosely ‘social action’ or ‘social justice’ on the other. Preaching the gospel means announcing Jesus as Lord of the world; and ... we cannot make that announcement without seeking to bring that lordship to bear over every aspect of the world. ... It is bringing the whole world under the lordship of Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

Of the many things wrong with this definition of the Gospel, two are crucial. First, it transfers the focus of God’s people from the proclamation of redemption to social enhancement of the planet. For, as Wright points out, his gospel is not merely the announcement that Jesus is Lord (something true before the cross, by the way), but the rallying point from which the Church is to “bring the whole world under the lordship of Christ.” Our mandate under the NPP is not to rescue people “from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Rather our mandate is to rescue the planet and ultimately to crown Christ as Lord over all earthly systems and structures. God’s people are to set up the kingdom which Christ began. This is a clear “kingdom now” perspective found in postmillennialism. That is, we are in the kingdom now and our job is to advance the kingdom to the point where Christ can declare kingship over the earth and ultimately reign in person. For now this shakes out to be a social agenda.

This becomes even clearer when vital aspects of the true Gospel are either minimized or eliminated altogether. Thus, the second concern is even more serious, for in elevating the social agenda, the redemption agenda is devalued. Take the all-important doctrine of justification, for example. Conservative Christians have agreed that justification is defined as Christ forgiving and taking away our sin and giving us God’s righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). The NPP rejects this definition and replaces it with Christ’s eschatological victory for the nation of Israel. Wright explains:

“‘Justification’ is a law-court term, and in its Jewish context it refers to the greatest lawsuit of all: that which will take place on the great day when the true God judges all the nations, more particularly the nations that have been oppressing Israel. God will, at last, find in favour of his people: he will judge the pagan nations and rescue his true people. ‘Justification’ thus describes the coming great act of redemption and salvation, *seen from the point of view* of the covenant (Israel is God’s people) on the one hand and the law court on the other (God’s final judgment will be like a great law-court scene, with Israel winning the case).”<sup>19</sup>

Phil Johnson offers the following summary:

“Ultimately, the New Perspective divests the gospel of — or downplays — every significant aspect of soteriology. The means of atonement is left vague in this system; the issues of personal sin and guilt are passed over and brushed aside. The gospel becomes a proclamation of victory, period. In other words, the gospel of the New Perspective is decidedly not a message about how sinners can escape the wrath of God. In fact, this gospel says little or nothing about personal sin and forgiveness, individual redemption, atonement, or any of the other great soteriological doctrines. Soteriology is

hardly a concern of the New Perspective — even when they are dealing with the gospel message.”<sup>20</sup>

It gets even more complicated for, as the NPP leaders seek to foster their new perspectives, it necessitates that they change the meaning of every issue that touches the subject of justification. They start with the covenant, for the big issue with the NPP is being in the covenant. This presents several questions, foremost of which is how does one get into the covenant? Amazingly, considering the covenant’s importance in the system, the NPP proponents do not like to talk about how one gets in.

Wright, however, offers a threefold process:

“...they come to believe the message; they join the Christian community through baptism, and begin to share in its common life and its common way of life. That is how people come into relationship with the living God.”<sup>21</sup>

So, people are to believe the message about Jesus, and remember it is not a message of redemption (Christ dying for our sins) but a message of lordship, a belief that Jesus is Lord. This is followed by baptism and joining the Church.

Once in the covenant, as we have already seen, one remains in the covenant through obedience. Some, such as Sanders, apparently make this a minimal level of obedience, saying that only a “renunciation of God and his covenant can put one out of the covenant.”<sup>22</sup>

While the NPP gives lip-service to faith, it can readily be seen that *one enters the covenant by faith plus works (baptism), is sustained in the covenant by involvement in the Church, and is maintained in the covenant by obedience*. You can understand why many see the NPP as merely a thinly disguised road to Rome. Under NPP theology, a theology which places no weight in *sola fide*, all who claim the lordship of Christ, whether Catholic, Protestant, or something else, “belong together in the one family.”<sup>23</sup>

In the NPP, justification has nothing to do with salvation and everything to do with the Church, or community. Declaring that the evangelical Church has misread Galatians from ancient times, Wright assures us that he and his comrades have discovered what Paul really meant:

“The problem he addresses is: should his ex-pagan converts be circumcised or not? ... it has to do quite obviously with the question of how you *define the people of God*: are they to be defined by the badges of Jewish race, or in some other way? ... who belongs to Abraham’s family. ... Justification, in Galatians, is the doctrine which insists that all who share faith in Christ belong at the same table, no matter what their racial differences, as together they wait for the final new creation. ... Justification is not how someone *becomes* a Christian. It is the declaration that they *have become* a Christian.”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, “it was not so much about ‘getting in’, or indeed about ‘staying in’, as about ‘how you could tell who was in’. In standard Christian theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church.”<sup>25</sup> According to Wright, Paul is not even concerned with the works-salvation issue; he is concerned about racial equality in the community. Jewish Christians were insisting that Gentile believers take on the badges of Judaism in order to join the community; Paul is saying not that Judaism was wrong, but that the “badges” have changed. Under the Old Covenant the badges were circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath keeping; under the new covenant it is belief in the lordship of the Messiah, baptism, and joining the community. All who meet these three criteria belong at the same table.

According to the NPP, Paul did not in his epistles express concern with the subject of salvation because that subject was not a major issue. Palestinian Judaism was not a merit-based religion and, therefore, the apostle

was not wasting his time correcting their theology. Paul’s concern was the barriers keeping Jewish believers and Gentile believers from participating in a single community.

What had to be changed was not the means of salvation but the badges of salvation in order that followers of Christ would know who was in the community. Paul changed the badges from Jewish Torah-keeping, especially circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath-keeping, to faith, baptism, obedience to the covenant, and covenant community involvement. The Church

NPP scholars see first-century Judaism as a grace-based, non-legalistic religion while, as we have already seen, other scholars using the same documents disagree. But the final arbitrator should be the New Testament itself.

Even a quick run through the New Testament reveals a completely different picture of Judaism, especially the leaders within Judaism, than the NPP portrays. John the Baptist called the leaders of Judaism a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7). Jesus described their righteousness as inferior and told His

---

---

*Thus the NPP devastates  
sola fide and turns salvation  
into the very thing it claims  
to not do: a semi-Pelagian,  
faith-plus-human-merit-  
based religion.*

---

---

would no longer be divided over racial lines, but would be united by the new badges.

Thus the NPP devastates *sola fide* and turns salvation into the very thing it claims to not do: a semi-Pelagian, faith-plus-human-merit-based religion. This is the identical error the Reformers recognized and battled. Far from getting it wrong, the Reformers were exactly on the mark. They saw in Roman Catholicism the same error they recognized in New Testament Judaism — both being semi-Pelagian.

The NPP system stands or falls on its understanding of Second Temple Judaism. If the Judaism of Paul’s day was acceptable to God, only in need of minor adjustments to accommodate the coming of their Messiah, then we have misunderstood Paul for centuries. In the rabbinical writings, the

audience, “that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

The Gospels record numerous conflicts between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders (E.P. Sanders dismisses the ones found in Mark 2:1-3:6; Mark 7; and Matthew 15 by denying the historical accuracy of the Gospels). In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces eight woes or judgments on the Pharisees. It hardly sounds like all is well in first-century Judaism. Our Lord even told the Pharisees that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44).<sup>26</sup>

We would be hard-pressed to find even one positive encounter or description of Jewish religious leaders in the Gospels. It was these very religious leaders who led the people in

crucifying their own Messiah. In similar fashion, throughout the book of Acts, we find the same adherents to Judaism rejecting the Gospel and persecuting Christians.

Things do not improve for Judaism in the Epistles. So convinced are the NPP theologians that Judaism was acceptable to God that they see Paul's Damascus Road experience as a call, not a conversion. Paul did not change religions so much as he changed his focus.<sup>27</sup> But that is not how Paul saw it. He accused the Jews of being those who had caused the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (Romans 2:17-24). He said they had failed in their pursuit of righteousness because they did not pursue it by faith (Romans 9:30-32). He accused them of preaching a different gospel and cursed them for it (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul calls them false brethren "who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 2:4). In Philippians 3:2-11, the apostle recounts his efforts while in Judaism as of absolutely no value in gaining the righteousness of God through Christ.

The picture we get in the New Testament of first-century Judaism is of a religion which had morphed from the teachings of the Old Testament to become a system of merit-based legalism repudiated by Jesus and Paul. That some of the rabbinical writings demonstrate faith being a component of Judaism does not significantly change the problem. Faith plus works is essentially the same heresy as works alone. Both Jesus and Paul condemned first-century Judaism because it did not teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Somehow the NPP misses the fact that "if the Jews in the first century had exhibited the spirituality demanded by the OT, they would not have rejected the Messiah and they would not have been judged by exile and dispersion."<sup>28</sup>

### MISCELLANEOUS VIEWS AND DOCTRINES

In order to make the NPP "work," it becomes necessary to redefine or

deny fundamental doctrines of the faith. For example, Wright gives this definition for *the righteousness of God*:

"For a reader of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Jewish scriptures, 'the righteousness of God' would have one obvious meaning: God's own faithfulness to his promises, to the covenant. ... God's righteousness is thus cognate with his trustworthiness on the one hand, and Israel's salvation on the other."<sup>29</sup>

This is representative of what Wright does. Actually he believes that the evangelical Church has missed the point of Scripture in numerous ways. Not only was Paul not primarily interested in the doctrine of salvation,<sup>30</sup> but we have misunderstood:

- Judaism.<sup>31</sup>
- The purpose of the covenant.<sup>32</sup>
- The definition of justification.<sup>33</sup>
- Eschatology.<sup>34</sup>
- The Gospel.<sup>35</sup>
- Imputation.<sup>36</sup>
- Justification by faith.<sup>37</sup>
- Exclusivism.<sup>38</sup>

Ultimately the NPP is ecumenical in nature. By eliminating and reworking the foundational truths of Scripture, the NPP has reduced the requirements to become part of the covenant community to a nebulous belief in Jesus, baptism, and obedience. This allows for a set of doctrines, especially that of justification, with "which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour. ... and which declares that all who believe in Jesus belong together in the one family."<sup>39</sup>

As a matter of fact, one has to wonder if Wright in his ecumenism is flirting with universalism. He writes:

"The point is this: the covenant between God and Israel was always designed to be God's means of saving the whole world. It was never supposed to be the means whereby God would have a private little group of people who would be saved while the rest of the world went to hell (whatever you mean by

that). Thus, when God is faithful to the covenant in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the work of the Spirit, it makes nonsense of the Pauline gospel to imagine that the be-all and end-all of this operation is so that God can have another, merely different, private little group of people who are saved while the world is consigned to the cosmic waste-paper basket."<sup>40</sup>

Robert Thomas, at the end of his article on the hermeneutics of the NPP, offers an excellent summary of the NPP teachings:

"First-century Judaism was not a salvation-by-works religion. ... Until the death and resurrection of Christ, by virtue of God's election, any physical descendant of Abraham is a member of the covenant people and thereby justified. ... Those who maintain the covenantal nomism relationship by obedience are the ones who will be saved. ... Paul retained his covenantal nomism after his Damascus Road experience. ... From that point on, his mission was to dispense with circumcision, sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions of the Mosaic law as boundaries that limited who could be a member of the covenant people. ... Guilt was not expressed in Paul's writings, but was introduced by Augustine and Luther. ... Justification by faith and imputed righteousness was read into Paul by Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Calvin because of their contemporary situations. ... Faith is not the means of justification or of joining the covenant community; it is rather a badge of covenant membership. One joins the covenant community through water baptism. ... Final justification is based on works of obedience to the Mosaic law so that any justification a person enjoys at present is only preliminary and can be reversed."<sup>41</sup>


The NPP movement offers the appeal of a new idea (Paul's critique of Judaism has been misunderstood),

along with the old idea that salvation comes not by grace alone through faith alone, but at least partially through our efforts. This double-edged appeal to our thirst for novelty and our age-old pride in our own efforts is as dangerous as any cultic teaching out there.

### Endnotes:

1. Nathan Busenitz, "What Did Saint Paul Really Say?" This article is published on the Shepherds' Fellowship subscriber web site by Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, Calif. Copy on file.
2. See Gary E. Gilley, "The Challenge of the Emerging Church," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2006, pp. 1, 17-26.
3. N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1997, pp. 18-19, italics in original.
4. Phil Johnson, "A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul." This article is published on the Shepherds' Fellowship subscriber web site by Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, Calif. Copy on file.
5. Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004, pg. 61.
6. Jack Hughes, "A New Perspective's

- View of Paul and the Law," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 16, #2, pg. 272.
7. John H. Armstrong, "Do Good People Go to Heaven?" *Reformation & Revival*, The Weekly Messenger, Feb. 10, 2003. Copy on file.
8. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, op. cit., pg. 122.
9. See F. David Farnell, "The New Perspective on Paul: Its Basic Tenets, History, and Presuppositions," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 16, #2, pg. 220.
10. See *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, op. cit., pp. 42-57.
11. William D. Barrick, "The New Perspective and 'Works of the Law,'" *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 16, #2, pg. 281, italics in original.
12. *Ibid.*
13. "A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul," op. cit., italic in original.
14. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, op. cit., pg. 41.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 45.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 53.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 155.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 33, italics in original.
20. "A Defense of the Old Perspective on Paul," op. cit.
21. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

22. *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, op. cit., pg. 48.
23. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, op. cit., pg. 158.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 121, 122, 125, italics in original.
25. *Ibid.*, pg. 119.
26. Robert Thomas, "Hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, Vol. 16, #2, pp. 299-300. I have paraphrased Thomas' excellent section on this subject.
27. *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul*, op. cit., pg. 26.
28. "The New Perspective and 'Works of the Law,'" op. cit., pg. 291.
29. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, op. cit., pg. 96.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 32.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 35.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 33.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 34.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.
38. *Ibid.*, pg. 158.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pg. 163.
41. "Hermeneutics of the New Perspective on Paul," op. cit., pp. 315, 316. 

## THE FAMILY TOMB OF JESUS

(continued from page 4)

resurrection and were willing to be martyred for that truth. Yet, in these more enlightened days, the resurrection of Jesus has all but been dismissed, leaving those in the early Church looking like a group of dupes or deceivers.

On the heels of Tabor's book comes movie director James Cameron's special, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus,"<sup>8</sup> which aired on the Discovery Channel, and the book, *The Jesus Family Tomb*,<sup>9</sup> written by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino. Both the documentary and the book are amplifications of Tabor's ideas.

The title, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, states as fact something that is pure speculation. No recognized archaeologist in Israel, including those who originally discovered the Talpiot tomb, considers the theories of Tabor, Cameron, Jacobovici, or Pellegrino to be credible.

Amos Kloner of Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, who oversaw the archaeological work and wrote the report of the tomb's discovery in 1980, states that the entire Discovery Channel endeavor is "not scholarly and not scientific." He also called it "very amateur."<sup>10</sup>

Kloner also uses words such as "absolute nonsense" and "impossible."<sup>11</sup> In response to the assertion that Jesus and His family were buried in Talpiot, he said:

"It makes a great story for a TV film. But it's completely impossible. It's nonsense. There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. They were a Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem. The Talpiot tomb belonged to a middle class family from the 1st century CE."<sup>12</sup>

Shimon Gibson, who also collaborated on the Discovery Channel documentary, did the original drawings of the interior of the tomb. His view is

that he is "still not convinced we have a tomb connected with the family of Jesus, ... when I saw the inscriptions, all I sort of understood was that these were common Jewish names of the first century on these ossuaries. And that was it. Nothing else."<sup>13</sup>

Therein we have the story of "The Lost Tomb of Jesus." It should have been called "The Supposed Tomb of Jesus" or "The Alleged Tomb of Jesus" or even "We Are Claiming It Might Possibly Be the Tomb of Jesus, But We're Not Really Sure." The chain of evidence that this documentary is supposed to forge is full of broken links and is missing some, too. Both the television presentation and the book are more speculation than scholarship. Whenever Jacobovici, the film's producer, was pressed with hard questions, he retreated with, "I am just a filmmaker." When making unproven claims, he masquerades as the expert, but then lapses to being "just a filmmaker" when pushed with demands for evidence.

## MANY FATAL FLAWS

The tomb in question was discovered on March 28, 1980. A construction company was blasting for a foundation for an apartment complex about a mile or so south of the Old City of Jerusalem in a place known as East Talpiot. Work was halted to allow archaeologists and other specialists to examine the interior of the tomb and the ten limestone ossuaries within it. There also were scattered unidentified human bones on the tomb floor.

Secondary burial — burying bones minus flesh and muscle a year after the initial burial — was practiced during a short period in Israel's history. The family visited the tomb of the dead and collected the bones of the deceased person and placed them into an ossuary.<sup>14</sup>

The ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb fixed the time frame (a span of about 140 years) of the tomb because that mode of burial in Israel was unique to the period from the Maccabees (70 B.C.) until A.D. 70. It is important to note that no archaeologist has been able to state with precision the exact date of the Talpiot tomb within the 140-year window. In Amos Kloner's original report he stated, "This burial cave was probably used for three or four generations."<sup>15</sup>

We do not know if the tomb was in use before, during, or after the life of Jesus of Nazareth. This is just one of the fatal flaws in the Jesus Tomb theory. Even Jacobovici and Pellegrino admit:

"The people who constructed the Tomb of Ten Ossuaries, who mourned in the antechamber and courtyard and whose remains were sealed in the niches of the innermost chamber, had lived either just before, or during, or shortly after the time of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

The only certain thing is that the names on six of the ossuaries were very common to that period of almost a century and a half. The boxes were cataloged by the Antiquities Authority as 80/500-509. The 80 stands for 1980, the year of the find, and each of

the ten ossuaries was given a number from 500 to 509.

The names on six of the ossuaries are: Mariamne Mara, a contraction of Martha; Judas, son of Jesus; Matthew, in its shortened form; Jesus, son of Joseph; Jose, a contraction of Joseph; and Marya. All the names found were commonly used during that era.

## A FICTIONAL FAMILY, FICTIONAL AUTHORITIES

There is not one shred of legitimate historical evidence that Jesus was married, but Cameron cannot let that get in the way of a good story.

The authors draw their conclusions before presenting any evidence. They embarked on their project loaded with presuppositions and biases that would create non-existent links for the chain of evidence they claimed to have. Whatever facts are there in the book are connected by leaps in logic. Everything else has to be made to look like it fits the theory.

Take, for instance, what is stated in the opening page of the Foreword:

"But now, with this stunning book, Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino have delivered not just a particle of evidence but a veritable avalanche of it. Their investigation proves, I believe, beyond any reasonable doubt that a first-century Jewish tomb found in Talpiot, Jerusalem, in 1980 is the tomb of Jesus and his family."<sup>17</sup>

It is necessary to get rid of the Gospels and to cast them as unreliable so that a different authority can be established. The bias is boldly stated:

"Most of what we know, or think we know, comes from the four great Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But what exactly are these Gospels? To the deeply and unquestioningly faithful, they are the direct and absolute word of God, recorded by the most saintly of men. Historians, however, now view them as composite works, each created by several authors and based in turn on oral traditions

carried on for decades, possibly half a century, after Christ's actual ministry. There is no historical evidence that any of the authors, if in fact they were individuals, actually heard the words of Jesus from his own lips. ... The Gospels as we know them today have been retranscribed and rewritten many times and translated from one language to another — from Aramaic to Greek to Coptic to Latin to various forms of English — with corresponding losses in nuanced meaning. They have been edited by Church fathers, centuries after the original words were spoken, to conform to their subsequent vision of orthodoxy. And yet, in the absence of the tiniest scrap of concrete physical evidence, they were our only record of the life and times of Jesus."<sup>18</sup>

The authors seem happy to quote the four Gospels where and when they agree with them, but the ground rule for accepting the premise of this book is clear: Let go of the four Gospels because they are unreliable and filled with error. Cameron, in writing his Foreword, displays a deep ignorance of the doctrines of inspiration and preservation of Scripture. He seems to be parroting the now-debunked views of Ferdinand Baur and Rudolph Bultmann (that Scripture was written based on late faulty oral history). Cameron apparently is unaware of many current studies, including those by Richard Bauckham (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*), Craig Evans (*Fabricating Jesus*), Carsten Theide (*Eyewitness to Jesus*), Ed Komoszewski (*Reinventing Jesus*), and others on the reliability of oral transmission and the demands of first-century eyewitnesses for legitimate biography. He seems decades behind current scholarship.

While the authors toss out the four scriptural Gospels, they offer instead the Gnostic gospels, Coptic documents written centuries after Christ's resurrection, which reflect a variety of heretical and non-Christian beliefs. Cameron flaunts his confusion even more when he calls these books Christian:

“Complicating matters are the *other* Gospels: the apocryphal texts such as the Gnostic Gospels of the Nag Hammadi Library found in the Egyptian desert in 1945. Buried in an earthen jar to keep them from the Christian orthodoxy of the fourth century, which sought to eradicate all the so-called heresies, these precious and astonishing books show the rich diversity of early Christian thought and give clues to the historical story not available in the Big Four of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.”<sup>19</sup>

So, according to Cameron, the Gospels cannot be trusted, but somehow these esoteric latecomers can. We are being set up to believe that these documents are “precious” simply because they will be stretched to try to fit into arguments for the strange conclusions to follow.

Cameron presents a cynical view of history. He indicates that we cannot trust written and documented history because “history is a consensus hallucination.”<sup>20</sup> If so, there is no need for this book, either. However, it is clearly written to try to establish an alternate history for Christianity. In fact, the book is subtitled, “*The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History.*” Cameron is really saying, “Do not trust biblical or Christian history, but trust the Gnostic slant as expressed in the Gnostic gospels.”

The authors waste no time with the “if” word, first employing it on pages 2 and 3: “If the disciples took the body” and “If Jesus was reburied.”<sup>21</sup> As the uncertainty begins, readers are asked to accept speculation, which is not what was promised in the Foreword. The promised investigation that was supposed to “prove” beyond any reasonable doubt is quickly reduced to a series of “ifs” and the chain of evidence already is showing its missing links.

### MERRY MYTH MAKERS

Like Dan Brown and his fictional work, *The Da Vinci Code*, Jacobovici and Pellegrino try to construct a case for the supremacy of Mary

Magdalene in the early Church. They also propose that she was married to Jesus and bore a child. One fabrication is piled on top of the other to build this scenario without a shred of historical evidence. An assumption is made — without evidence — that the ossuary of Mariamne/Mara is, in fact, Mary Magdalene’s.

The ossuary — with a Greek inscription — reads “Mariamne known as Mara.” The authors suggest that Mara means “Master” or “Lord,” but offer no real proof. Even if it did, it would still not turn Mariamne into Mary Magdalene. Further, whatever the meaning of Mara (in Hebrew it means “bitter” — Ruth 1:20), it was a variant of Martha, and people of that time were called by their name, not by the meaning of their name. The name “Mara” seems less spectacular when we realize that there are 20 ossuaries in Israel’s State collection with the same name. It is one of the most common names of that period. According to archaeologist and long-time resident of Jerusalem, Dr. James Fleming, “the name Mara can simply mean the head of a household.”<sup>22</sup>

If the authors thought they had an impeccable case history, they were mistaken. Major scholars have weighed in:

“Stephen Pfann, a textual scholar and paleographer at the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem, said he has released a paper claiming the makers of ‘The Lost Tomb of Jesus’ were mistaken when they identified an ancient ossuary from the cave as belonging to the New Testament’s Mary Magdalene. ... But having analyzed the inscription, Pfann, who made a brief appearance in the film as an ossuary expert, published a detailed article on his university’s Web site asserting that it doesn’t read ‘Mariamene’ at all. The inscription, Pfann said, is made up of two names inscribed by two different hands: the first, ‘Mariame,’ was inscribed in a formal Greek script, and later, when the bones of another woman were added to

the box, another scribe using a different cursive script added the words ‘kai Mara,’ meaning ‘and Mara.’ Mara is a different form of the name Martha. According to Pfann’s reading, the ossuary did not house the bones of ‘Mary the teacher,’ but rather of two women, ‘Mary and Martha.’ ‘In view of the above, there is no longer any reason to be tempted to link this ossuary ... to Mary Magdalene or any other person in Biblical, non-Biblical or church tradition,’ Pfann wrote. In the interest of telling a good story, Pfann said, the documentary engaged in some ‘fudging’ of the facts.”<sup>23</sup>

### WHICH JESUS?

As noted, the very title of the book makes an assertion that must be questioned at many levels. A question that looms large is, “Which Jesus?” In the first century, the name “Jesus” was as common as “Joe” or “Mike” is today. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus mentions at least a dozen men named Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

Everywhere archaeologists turn in Israel they find the name Yeshua or Jesus. In 1873, an ossuary was discovered on the Mount of Offence (Jerusalem) with the name Jesus inscribed.<sup>25</sup> In the year 1926, Eleazar Lippa Sukenik discovered a “Jesus, son of Joseph” ossuary in a Jerusalem tomb.<sup>26</sup> In 1945, two “Jesus” ossuaries turned up near Talpiot.<sup>27</sup> Tal Ilan, who majors in first century and biblical names, has identified 104 individuals who bore the name “Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> Ilan has also identified 232 individuals who bore the name “Joseph.”<sup>29</sup>

*The Times-Herald* of Newnan, Georgia, reported:

“Dr. Jim Fleming says the current theory that a tomb in Jerusalem is that of Jesus and his family is highly unlikely. Fleming ... said there is little evidence to indicate the tomb — being touted by filmmaker James Cameron as the tomb of Jesus and his family — is Jesus’ tomb and much evidence that it is not. ...

An examination of names from known ossuaries from the period would indicate about 60,000 of those women would have been named Miriam, the Hebrew name translated as Mary in the Greek New Testament. The other names found in the tomb were also extremely common, Fleming said. There would have been about 21,000 Josephs, 15,000 Judases, 13,000 Jesuses and 7,500 Matthews during that time period. ... It was customary in first century Palestine to identify people from the local area by

ily engaged in secondary burial and living in Jerusalem in the first century was the family of Jesus."<sup>31</sup> Jesus, according to the united consensus of the Gospels, was raised in Nazareth and lived there with His family until He launched His ministry around age 30. Jesus and His close association with His hometown are mentioned 22 times in the Gospels. He is called Jesus of *Nazareth* seven times in the book of Acts (2:22, 3:6, 4:10, 6:14, 10:38, 22:8, and 26:9). Jesus visited Jerusalem for feasts, but other than that there is nothing indicating family there.

after them, living on in Palestine and very probably in Nazareth itself, it is possible to believe that remembrance of at least some particular sites in the home town of Jesus would long be preserved. ... in spite of speaking of Nazareth and Cochaba as Jewish villages, Africanus in the same passage also tells of the *desposunoi*, or relatives of the Lord, who come from both towns and keep the records of their descent with great care."<sup>32</sup>

The two authors also show their total ignorance of Christian history when they parrot the Dan Brown line that the deity of Jesus was something that was made up in the fourth century A.D. in the reign of Constantine:

"Roughly three hundred years separate the crucifixion of Jesus ... and his elevation as a supreme deity — if not *the* Supreme Deity."<sup>33</sup>

They are not cognizant of all of the New Testament data concerning the deity of Christ and verses such as John 1:1, John 20:28, and Colossians 2:9, to name only a few. The New Testament clearly establishes the deity of Jesus, whether one accepts it or not. We also have numerous well-documented statements by many of the early Church Fathers (A.D. 100-300) and their firm commitment to Christ's deity, and this long before Constantine.<sup>34</sup>

On page 42, Jacobovici and Pellegrino raise the old conspiracy theory of F. Paul Peterson. In a small, self-published 1960 booklet, *Peter's Tomb Recently Discovered in Jerusalem*, Peterson suggested that the Roman Catholic Church conspired to hide the finding of an ossuary in 1953 because it contained the inscription "Simon Bar Jonah." He thought that the discovery at Dominus Flevit by P.B. Bagatti was explosive and would destroy Rome's claim of Peter's burial in Rome. Actually there was no suppression.

The find of the Simon ossuary was published first in Italian and can be

---

---

***Jacobovici and Pellegrino make statements with no attempt to justify them or document them. Evangelical scholars and apologists would be rightfully ridiculed and hammered for this.***

---

---

their lineage and people from other areas by their town of origin. The fact that the ossuaries for Jesus and Mary have no geographical identifier indicates they are not likely to be those of the biblical figures, but rather people from Judea. They would have likely been identified as 'Jesus of Nazareth' and 'Mary of Magdala' had they been buried in Jerusalem."<sup>30</sup>

**WHERE IS THE PROOF?**

Jacobovici and Pellegrino make statements with no attempt to justify them or document them. Evangelical scholars and apologists would be rightfully ridiculed and hammered for this.

One such statement says, "historically speaking, the most famous fam-

While Jacobovici and Pellegrino will reject anything in the New Testament that does not agree with their premise, it is possible to use extra-biblical sources to show the ongoing connection between Jesus' family and Nazareth:

"With respect to the possible remembrance of any particular location in Nazareth associated with the life of Jesus, it is important to recall that, according to positive evidence, members of the family of Jesus were still living in Palestine, some of them perhaps in Nazareth, until the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, and further descendants were probably there much longer than that. ... With such members of the family, and undoubtedly others

researched in any number of books in English. The ossuary is available for viewing in Israel. It is in very poor shape with sides missing. Not much was made of the find and inscription because, as Princeton's Jack Finnigan has stated regarding the word "Jonah," "It must be emphasized, however, that the reading of the last word in the ossuary inscription remains uncertain."<sup>35</sup>

It seems that the purpose of mentioning the Simon ossuary in *The Jesus Family Tomb* book is to heighten ideas of a conspiracy and the possible suppression of the Talpiot inscriptions. The idea is that if the original Talpiot team suppressed evidence once, they would do it again. Perhaps Cameron, Jacobovici, Pellegrino, and Tabor really know that their theories will not stand serious historical and archaeological scrutiny and are throwing out red herrings to confuse the issues.

### THE JACBOVICI CODE

This book's success depends on people not knowing early Christian history. One aspect of this is Jacobovici and Company trying to get as many names as possible that were associated with Jesus into the Talpiot tomb. The biggest example already alluded to is the effort to turn Mariamne into Mary Magdalene. This all begins in earnest in Chapter 6, "A Mary Named Mariamne." To do this, the New Testament and early Christian history has to be ignored because Mary Magdalene is only called Mary Magdalene by the Gospel writers and the early Church Fathers. We are being told by the authors that we have to consult and trust later Gnostic writings because "The Acts of Philip provides us with a much more complete version of Mary Magdalene than the Gospels."<sup>36</sup> Also that "The Acts of Philip ... provided a status for Mariamne — she was an apostle, a teacher, ... her bones were buried in Israel."<sup>37</sup>

The authors add a bit more than even the Gnostics by suggesting that Jesus and Mary were husband and wife. While admitting that, "In none of the Gospels, be they canonical or

apocryphal, is Mary Magdalene — Mariamne — described as being married to Jesus. Nor is a child of Jesus ever mentioned."<sup>38</sup>

Enter Dan Brown. The Tomb team says that both Jesus and His child "would be spoken of in code."<sup>39</sup> Of course, we do not have to wonder who figured out this code as we shade off into speculation and myth.

Regarding the suggestion that "Jesus" and "Mariamne" might have been married, Dr. Carney Matheson of the Lakehead University Paleo-DNA Laboratory in Thunder Bay, Canada, and a consultant on the Discovery Channel program, said:

"There is a statement in the film that has been taken out of context. While marriage is a possibility, other relationships like father and daughter, paternal cousins, sister-in-law or indeed two unrelated individuals [are also possible]... My conclusion is that they are not maternally related. You cannot genetically test for marriage."<sup>40</sup>

Jacobovici and his accomplices use what they label "This strange code"<sup>41</sup> and patch it together with almost unintelligible verses from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.<sup>42</sup> They declare that Judas was Jesus' actual son and he was, in fact, also none other than Thomas. Because Thomas means twin, the code somehow dictates (at least to them) that Judas/Thomas had to be hidden behind a code from rulers who would kill him.<sup>43</sup>

Even if we could make sense out of this, it would still make no sense that leaders in Jerusalem would care one bit about the offspring of a failed Messiah figure. If indeed there was a son of Jesus, some would find it curious that he did not become the leader of the Jerusalem Church or that James, Peter, Paul, and other prominent leaders never mentioned him.

Gnostic writings, such as the Acts of Phillip, have been known about and refuted throughout Christian history. The Gnostics were a confirmed and persistent enemy of orthodoxy. Their writings began to appear 150 years

after Jesus' birth. Despite this, some often reject the scriptural Gospels on the premise that they came decades after Christ and perhaps were not from eyewitnesses — despite what good scholarship says — yet these Gnostic gospels written more than a century after Jesus are given a clean bill of health. Gnosticism is a conglomeration of Hellenism, Judaism, Egyptian heresies, and Christianity. That the Gnostics decided 150 years or so after Jesus to refer to Mary Magdalene as Mariamne means absolutely nothing. Jehovah's Witnesses call Jesus "Michael," but that does not make it so.

Philip Jenkins, distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University and authority on Gnostics and Gnosticism, says:

"The Gnostic attack on the apostles necessitated an outside figure who could serve as a counterpoint, someone who recognized Jesus' mystical message, and was thus wiser and more spiritual than the established leaders. Mary had many qualifications for this subversive role. ... Perhaps, too, suggestions of a sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary were inspired by the practices of the Gnostic groups themselves. ... The Gnostic image of Mary Magdalene as Queen of the Apostles is purely a literary construction and contains not a shred of historical memory, and much of what appears to be primitive in these texts is rather a deliberate literary device of much later writers. ... Feminist interpretations of the hidden gospels represent a triumph of hope over judgment. If a source dating from perhaps 180 or 200 purported to describe the events of the apostolic age, it is very unlikely that reputable scholars would assume that the text was historically authoritative, unless there were clear signs that it contained some kind of independent tradition. The chance that the work would produce any useful information about the ear-

liest Jesus followers would be all the slimmer if it obviously stemmed from a Gnostic source, because the mythological character of that movement's writings is so well known."<sup>44</sup>

The Jacobovici team also tries to connect nonexistent dots by placing another name in the tomb that is associated with Jesus. The Talpiot Tomb originally yielded ten ossuaries. Six of them had names and four were unmarked. Presently there are only nine in the holding area at Beth Shemesh outside Jerusalem.

At this point in the book, the well-known James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus ossuary comes into play. There are all kinds of debate about when and where the James ossuary was first found. Original reports placed it first in a dealer's shop in the 1970s, long before the Talpiot discovery.

There is also fierce debate as to the authenticity of the "brother of Jesus" part of the inscription. If the James ossuary is the missing tenth one from Talpiot, it might increase the odds for a Jesus family tomb. So the book goes into all kinds of "ifs" and "maybes."

*The Jerusalem Post* returned to Kloner, the expert eyewitness, for the answer. It turns out to be very simple as Kloner was asked, "What of the assertion that the 10th ossuary disappeared from your care and may be none other than the 'James' ossuary?"<sup>45</sup> To which Kloner answered:

"Nothing has disappeared. The 10th ossuary was on my list. The measurements were not the same (as the James ossuary). It was plain (without an inscription). We had no room under our roofs for all the ossuaries, so unmarked ones were sometimes kept in the courtyard (of the Rockefeller Museum)."<sup>46</sup>

The "James" ossuary is 30.2 centimeters high, whereas the Talpiot ossuary at the Rockefeller Museum is 30 centimeters high. Additionally, the "James" ossuary is 56.5 centimeters in length and the other is 60 centimeters in length. Case closed!

Regarding the initial claim that the patina or finish on the "James" ossuary was a "match" to the Talpiot tomb, Robert Genna, the Suffolk County Crime Lab Director clarified:

"I would never say they're a match... No scientist would ever say definitely that one ossuary came from the same tomb as another... We didn't do enough sampling to see if in fact there were other tombs that had similar elemental compositions."<sup>47</sup>

In Chapter 8 of *The Jesus Family Tomb* there is much made of the cluster of names at Talpiot. In spite of all the statistical juggling, clusters like that are common for that era. Even a random drawing of common names would produce such clusters. Regarding these statistics:

"The statistical analysis is of course only as good as the numbers that were provided to the statistician. He couldn't run numbers he did not have. And when you try to run numbers on a combination name such as 'Jesus son of Joseph' you decrease the statistical sample dramatically. In fact, in the case of 'Jesus son of Joseph' you decrease it to a statistically insignificant number! Furthermore, so far as we can tell, the earliest followers of Jesus never called Jesus 'son of Joseph'. It was outsiders who mistakenly called him that!"<sup>48</sup>

### WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN

What is more noticeable in the Talpiot cluster is who is missing. Jesus' half-brothers James, Simon, and Judas are not there. Neither is His half-sister Salome. If this were an actual family tomb of Jesus, there would be many more matches and far more of the family of Jesus represented. The oldest history we have says James "was martyred in A.D. 62. Eusebius says he was beaten to death with a club after being thrown from the temple parapet; Hegesippus also records that he was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple."<sup>49</sup>

Further, regarding the "James" ossuary:

"We know that the ossuary was found in an area near or in the old City of David where there would be Jewish tombs. In other words, James was not likely buried in a graveyard specifically for Christians. He was buried with his fellow Jews. ... James was not carried back to Nazareth and buried there. His fellow Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were his primary family and community at the time he died and in all likelihood they provided for his burial."<sup>50</sup>

The "James" ossuary was purchased by Oded Golan from an antiquities dealer. According to Golan, the dealer told him the ossuary came from Silwan, southeast of the Temple Mount (and northeast of Talpiot). Ben Witherington further discloses that the ossuary:

"...had dirt in it that matched up with the soil in that particular spot in Jerusalem. In fact Oded confirmed this to me personally when I spoke with him at an SBL meeting. Why is this important? Well because the ossuaries that came out of Talpiot came out of a rock cave from a different place, and without such soil in it. To theorize that there was a Jesus family tomb, and yet the one member of Jesus' family who we know was buried in Jerusalem for a long time did not come out of the ground from that locale contradicts this theory. Furthermore, Eusebius reports that the tomb marker for James' burial was close to where James was martyred near the temple mount, indeed near the famous tombs in the Kidron valley such as the so-called tomb of Absalom. Talpiot is nowhere near this locale. ... It was apparently a single tomb, with no other Holy family members mentioned nor any other ossuaries in that place. The locality and singularity of this tradition rules out a family tomb in Talpiot. Christians would not

have been making pilgrimage to the tomb if they believed Jesus' bones were in it — that would have contradicted and violated their faith."<sup>51</sup>

To add to the confusion, the Jacobovici team muddles history by making the Ebionites and the Nazarenes one and the same.<sup>52</sup> The Ebionites denied the deity of Jesus and sought salvation by law-keeping. In contrast, the Nazarenes were the early Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem and environs (Acts 24:5). Ray Pritz writes:

'Ebionism was not the direct heir of the Jewish apostolic church; it was at best only third generation, and to reconcile its doctrines with those of the New Testament requires no small amount of mental gymnastics. ... One event which would seem to provide the first link between that Jerusalem congregation and the Jewish Christianity of patristic writings is the reported flight to Pella of the Decapolis. This move to Pella was undertaken, according to Epiphanius, by the sect known as the *Nazoraioi* (Nazarenes). Or, as Epiphanius would rather express it, the Nazarenes were the descendants of those Jerusalem believers who fled to Pella."<sup>53</sup>

### IT KEEPS GETTING STRANGER AND STRANGER

Jacobovici and Pellegrino spawn a wild scenario based on imaginary links to the chevron (an inverted V) appearing on the facade of the Talpiot tomb. The chevron has a circle under it and there is nothing to suggest it is anything but decorative. The tomb facade could be simply an artist's flair. Though Jews may have reflected religious themes in their art, they did not decorate in secret codes. They had no reason to. The worn circle that protrudes under the chevron may just be a worn wreath often used over ancient entrances.<sup>54</sup>

However, there is the suggestion by Jacobovici and Pellegrino that the chevron stood for the rebuilt temple and that is then connected somehow

to the Templars, a Roman Catholic order of the Crusader period. This leap of 1200 years across religions and cultures is totally fictional and imaginary. The Knights Templar were responsible for the safety of pilgrims in the Holy Land and were headquartered on the Temple Mount. They became so rich and powerful that Phillip IV of France felt threatened and brought the order to an end in A.D. 1314.<sup>55</sup>

Further on, in Chapter 10, the authors attempt to create the link with the Templars simply because that Order used the symbol of a triangle with the all-seeing eye of God in the center. We know that the triangle in Christian history was used as a symbol of the Trinity. The reader is asked to believe that it was the hidden code that showed the Templars knew of the Talpiot tomb and may have been the ones who placed three skulls (in triangular configuration) on the floor of the tomb, telegraphing that Jesus and the robbers by His side were buried there.<sup>56</sup> This was the Templar's version of the true Golgotha.

Jewish architecture and symbolism did not have the same meaning as Christian symbolism 1200 years removed. Jews used swastikas in their mosaic floors shortly after the time of Jesus. Yet, to modern Jews, the swastika is a hated symbol. The quartet of Jacobovici, Pellegrino, Cameron, and Tabor are truly playing the Da Vinci Code. However, destroying the faith of others is no game.

It just so happens that Harper Collins, the publishers of *The Jesus Family Tomb*, released a 2007 novel by Michael Byrnes titled *The Sacred Bones*. It is based on the premise that the bones of Jesus are found in an ossuary in Jerusalem and directly connected to a Templar conspiracy. It all sounds so very familiar. Perhaps the real conspiracy is for a publisher to flood the market with ideas that push the envelope so as to make huge amounts of money.

As far as the statistics used on the Discovery Channel broadcast and in the book, it is important to remember that one can only work with the

numbers one is given, even if they are based on suppositions. Professor Andrey Feuerverger of the University of Toronto said of the figures used in the Discovery Channel special, "I must work from the interpretations given to me, and the strength of the calculations are based on those assumptions."<sup>57</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

In the end, *The Jesus Family Tomb* is a mix of a few facts — there really is a tomb and ossuaries — along with speculation and imaginary links. Christian scholars and Israeli archaeologists recognize that it is studded with spectacular, but speculative, scenarios. It really belongs in the world of fiction with Michael Byrnes, Dan Brown, and others. *The Jesus Family Tomb* blends folklore, flights of fancy, secret symbolism, codes, and Gnostic writings. There is no evidence anywhere that Jesus' family ever lived in Jerusalem. There are late conflicting traditions that put Mary's (the Mother of Jesus) death at both Mount Zion and the Kidron Valley — a half-mile apart. The earliest and most likely tradition puts her closing years in Ephesus. Any credible history puts Jesus' family and their descendants in Nazareth.

The whole endeavor is a not-so-hidden attempt to deny one of the foundation stones of Christianity: the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus stated clearly, "'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ... He was speaking of the temple of His body" (John 2:19, 21, emphasis added). Whoever the tomb belonged to, it was not Jesus of Nazareth. As the Gospel writer confirmed the words of the angel, "He is risen! He is not here" (Mark 16:6).

### Endnotes:

1. D. Moody Smith, "Painting a Portrait of Jesus," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, March-April 2007, pg. 24.
2. Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007, pp. 124-125.
3. Philip Schaaf, *History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991, Vol. 5, pp. 845-846.
4. David Van Biema, "Rewriting The

- Gospels," *Time* magazine, March 12, 2007, pg. 56, brackets in original.
5. Lis Rogak, *The Man Behind The DaVinci Code*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2005, pg. xi.
  6. Phone interview with Harold Camping by M. Kurt Goedelman and G. Richard Fisher, c. April 1994.
  7. See G. Richard Fisher, "The Jesus Dynasty - The Imaginary and Irrational Interpretations of James Tabor," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2006, pp. 4-12.
  8. "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," The Discovery Channel, March 4, 2007.
  9. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit.
  10. Julie Stahl, "Jesus Tomb' Filmmakers Should Be Ashamed, Archaeologist Says," Cybercast News Service, March 1, 2007.
  11. Etgar Lefkovits and David Horovitz, "Israel may open 'Jesus Tomb' to public," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 27, 2007.
  12. David Horovitz, "Kloner: A great story, but nonsense," *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 27, 2007.
  13. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pp. 19, 20.
  14. Gordon Franz, *The Ossuaries of Joseph, Mary and Jesus Rediscovered in Jerusalem*. Unpublished manuscript, pg. 2.
  15. Amos Kloner, "A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot, Jerusalem," *Atiqot* XXIX, 1996, pg. 21.
  16. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 16.
  17. *Ibid.*, pg. vii.
  18. *Ibid.*, pp. ix, x.
  19. *Ibid.*, pg. x, italic in original.
  20. *Ibid.*, pg. ix.
  21. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3, emphasis added.
  22. Seminar by Dr. James Fleming on "Luke's Version of the Passion Narratives," Ocean Grove, N.J., March 9, 2007.
  23. Associated Press, "Scholar offers new criticism of 'Jesus Tomb' documentary," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 14, 2007, second ellipsis in original.
  24. Translated by William Whiston, *Josephus, Complete Works*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1960, pg. 765 (Index).
  25. Jack Finnigan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972, pg. 239.
  26. Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries*. Dallas: Baylor University Press, 2003, pg. 94.
  27. *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, op. cit., pp. 240-242.
  28. *Jesus and the Ossuaries*, op. cit., pg. 120.
  29. *Ibid.*, pg. 119.
  30. W. Winston Skinner, "Tomb of Jesus theory challenged," *The Times-Herald*, Feb. 28, 2007.
  31. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 29.
  32. *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, op. cit., pp. 29-30.
  33. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 35, italic in original.
  34. See further, David Bercot, Editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pp. 652-657.
  35. *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, op. cit., pg. 245.
  36. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 96.
  37. *Ibid.*, pg. 102.
  38. *Ibid.*, pg. 105.
  39. *Ibid.*
  40. Ted Koppel, host, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," Discovery Channel, March 4, 2007, brackets and ellipsis in original. This one-hour rebuttal aired on the same network immediately following the James Cameron documentary.
  41. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 108.
  42. See further, G. Richard Fisher, "The Gospel of Thomas: Gnostic Nonsense?," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 1995, pp. 4, 10-11.
  43. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pp. 107-109.
  44. Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 142-143, 146.
  45. "Kloner: A great story, but nonsense," op. cit.
  46. *Ibid.*
  47. "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," op. cit., ellipsis in original.
  48. Ben Witherington, "The Jesus Tomb? 'Titanic' Talpiot Tomb Theory Sunk From The Start," blog posted Feb. 26, 2007. Document available at: <http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/jesus-tomb-titanic-talpiot-tomb-theory.html>.
  49. Introductory notes on The Epistle of James, *New Geneva Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, "Author," pg. 1958.
  50. Hershel Shanks and Ben Witherington, *The Brother of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003, pg. 170.
  51. "The Jesus Tomb? 'Titanic' Talpiot Tomb Theory Sunk From The Start," op. cit.
  52. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 127.
  53. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1988, pp. 9, 10, italic in original.
  54. Hershel Shanks, *Judaism In Stone*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, pp. 64-65.
  55. See further, *Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia*. New York: Viking Press, 1953, Vol. 1, pg. 666.
  56. *The Jesus Family Tomb*, op. cit., pg. 131.
  57. "The Lost Tomb of Jesus: A Critical Look," op. cit.

## BETH MOORE

(continued from page 1)

she taught a coed Sunday school class with about 700 members, along with a Bible study on Tuesday evenings that drew more than 3,000 women and some men who, while not prohibited from attending, were not encouraged to attend.<sup>4</sup> Moore's practice of coed teaching spills over into her other venues, such as the Passion '07 conference held this past January in Atlanta.

Her longtime and former pastor, John Bisagno, acknowledges Moore as a stellar teacher, and "gave Moore opportunities to grow as a teacher by

allowing her to speak regularly during the church's Sunday-evening services."<sup>5</sup> However, Bisagno contends that Moore's teaching venues do not run counter to Southern Baptist principles.

No doubt much of Moore's appeal and success across denominational lines stem from the fact that "she doesn't get caught up in divisive doctrinal issues. In fact, she purposely steers clear of topics that could widen existing rifts between different streams in the body of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

### GOOD, BUT NOT PLENTY

Moore has some admirable qualities, including her desire to promote

biblical literacy and a hunger to seek "after the absolute priority of worship and being in God's Word."<sup>7</sup> She also maintains that, "I am convinced that discernment will be one of the most important criteria in the devoted believer's life to provide protection from seduction."<sup>8</sup> Likewise, one can glean from her writings sound biblical instruction. In her highly popular volume, *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, she writes that Christians must take full responsibility for their sin if they are ever to find freedom and restoration.<sup>9</sup>

However, the problem with her sound biblical expressions is that they are drowned in a sea of what she calls

seduction, deception, and victimization. In the very statement where she says we must take full responsibility for our sin, she identifies the guilty as “victims” who “temporarily turned ungodly.”<sup>10</sup> Moore’s counsel is a mixed bag. It is unfortunate that most of her readers read her uncritically.

Perhaps Moore could best be described in terms of Eliphaz the Temanite, the eldest and wisest of Job’s three friends. Not every single thing Eliphaz told Job was wrong, but his cumulative philosophy was skewed. His counsel stemmed more from observation and experience, as attested by the recurrence of “I have seen.”<sup>11</sup> Moore echoes the source of Eliphaz’s wisdom:

“My dilemma is that I’ve seen too much, experienced too much, and studied too much to totally discount what completely unrelated and perfectly lucid people are saying.”<sup>12</sup>

Eliphaz also claimed a special spiritual illumination for his counsel (Job 4:12-13), just like Moore, who says God gave her the message in *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*. It’s an assertion that’s found throughout the volume. For example, she writes in the Preface:

“When the message for this book was complete (in His estimation — *not mine!*), God compelled me to ink it on paper with a force of the Holy Spirit unparalleled in my experience. He whisked me to the mountains of Wyoming where I entered solitary confinement with Him, and in only a few short weeks, I wrote the last line.”<sup>13</sup>

On the very next page she asserts, “What I’m saying is that I wrote this message to the best of my ability under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and I do not believe it conceptually departs from the precepts of God’s Word.”<sup>14</sup> Of course, it could not, if it indeed was written as she says, “under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Elsewhere she maintains that in the course of compiling data for the book “God explicitly told me that I had

plenty and to get busy writing this message.”<sup>15</sup> She further asserts that not only was the book’s content from God, but the very title:

“Oddly, the concept for this book came complete, God delivering the title to me *in full*. My Bible was open to these verses for the first time in a long while, and the instruction from the Lord came so unmistakably that I dated it in the margin: *April 19, 2000*. My pen still didn’t touch the paper until almost exactly a year later when I knew His Spirit was saying to me, ‘Now.’ I headed to the mountains, and within a few weeks it was done.”<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, it seems that such supposed special spiritual revelation was not just limited to her *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* book. While penning her *Praying God’s Word* volume, she says “God directed me” and “He revealed to me.”<sup>17</sup>

And in the midst of the divine obligation to get the *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* message out, it looks like God is somewhat of a harsh taskmaster:

“One of the peculiarities about this assignment is that God also required me to fast. He would not release me to eat until the very end of each day after all writing for that day was accomplished. Sometimes He would not release me until the end of the next day. ... To tell you how adamant He was, the one time I thought I’d be fine to eat breakfast; my thoughts became completely warbled and confused until midafternoon.”<sup>18</sup>

One should ask how Moore received her divine mandate to fast. This, like other mystical statements throughout the book, stems from her personal subjectivism. On this one, Moore is acting upon the direction and desire of her own heart and imagination. The “God spoke to me” is a strategy used for selfish purposes. For all her talk of “seduction” throughout her book, she is the one

being seduced by her own subjectivism.

Yet in fairness to God, it doesn’t appear that He’s all business and no play. In the midst of writing the book during an April snow, God spoke to Moore and said: “Come and play.” Moore next tells her readers:

“So I did. I built a snowman. I used grapes for his eyes, and a half-moon-shaped sesame snack made the perfect smile. I didn’t give him a nose. I have enough for both of us. ... I laughed with God. He laughed with me.”<sup>19</sup>

Moore’s writing is recurrent with whisperings and statements from God, some complete with quotation marks.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Moore encourages her readers along the same mystical lines. “Hear His tender voice speak to you now,”<sup>21</sup> and “Begin practicing an open dialogue with Him concerning your past, present, and future,”<sup>22</sup> she instructs. She also informs them:

“Sometimes we get a gut feeling that we ought to avoid involvement in a situation, and sometimes that gut feeling is the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>23</sup>

Here Moore is dangerously arming her readers with a feelings-based belief system, under the guise of the Holy Spirit. The problem with such a guidance system is that feelings can and do err. Psalm 119:105 is our antidote to avoid error. It is the Word alone which “is the work of the Holy Spirit” to guide the believer.

## ACCOUNTABILITY? COUNT BETH OUT

Moore, like so many of the other modern mystics, visionaries, and prophets, grooms around herself a nice “hedge.” Amongst all her grandiose claims of divine exposition, is her escape strategy:

“Certainly I’m not audaciously implying that this book is written under the same kind of divine inspiration as the Holy Scriptures! The Word of God is our only volume of pure truth. We

mortals no doubt taint everything we touch however accidentally."<sup>24</sup>

Yes, it is true that mortals do taint everything we touch. But that's exactly what divine inspiration overrules. Inspiration is God overseeing the process of recording His special revelation without error. Apologist Ron Rhodes tells us inspiration "mean[s] that God superintended the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities (and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man. Because of inspiration we can rest assured that what the human authors wrote was precisely what God wanted written."<sup>25</sup>

Apparently, according to Moore, this is no longer the case. Yet the truth is that either one is inspired of God or one is not. One simply cannot, as Moore does, repeatedly say, "God told me," and then dodge accountability for such a prescript. Apart from the written Word, making a claim such as "God told me" or "God spoke to me" is bearing false witness against God.

### DO UNTO OTHERS, NOT UNTO ME

Moore also tries to avoid responsibility in other ways as well. Before the reader ever turns to the first page of chapter one, they are warned:

"I cannot write to please man as much as I'd like to at times. So, when you've turned the last page, if you're not *pleased*, kindly consider telling God and not me. My self-esteem is shakier than His."<sup>26</sup>

Moore's appeal is regrettable on several fronts. First, when a book or periodical is published and circulated to the public, it becomes open to, when necessary, public criticism, rebuke, and correction. This is especially crucial for Christians, because false teaching *inside* the Church is much more lethal than false teaching *outside* the Church. Jay Adams addresses the need for public criticism:

"Any Christian who sets himself up as a teacher in the church of Christ and publicly teaches anything thereby opens himself up for criticism by others (cf. James 3:1). If they think what he is teaching is harmful to the church, they have an obligation to point it out just as widely as it was taught. Such public warning or debate on the topic should not be considered a personal attack at all. ... What a critic of a public teaching does in pointing out his disagreement with that teaching has nothing to do with personal affronts or lack of reconciliation; he is simply disagreeing at the same public level as that on which the teaching was given in the first place."<sup>27</sup>

It is also noteworthy that in nearly every case, criticism of a work never receives the prominence, distribution, or circulation of the work itself. Moore's books, workbooks, and video lessons have sold in the millions, while what little criticism she receives pales in comparison.

Secondly, Moore plays the well-worn "self-esteem" card. One who acts as spiritual as Moore should know better. Moore's self-esteem shouldn't be shaky; it should be absent. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3). Moore employs ideas that pop theologians and psychologists of our day use, teaching that someone who is disapprovingly judged or mistreated will suffer damage to his or her self-esteem.<sup>28</sup> And, perhaps those who injure her self-esteem may find themselves in union with the devil, as Moore writes that "Satan would still love to torture me with a low self-esteem."<sup>29</sup>

Finally, in sidestepping accountability and pre-empting criticism, Moore fails to meet some of the sound biblical guidelines she herself instructs others to follow. Consider these trustworthy statements by Moore:

"Beloved, do you see that those who have discernment don't get defensive and start rationalizing

when they're rebuked! Instead, they gain knowledge. Hallelujah!"<sup>30</sup>

"Not only is the seduce-proofed individual a hearer and doer of the Word, he is also a man (or woman, of course) who does not despise the instructions, exhortations, or warnings of those whom God sends his way."<sup>31</sup>

And:

"We need to be desperate for good advisers, and we also need to be desperate for the humility to receive instruction."<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, it appears that criticism is acceptable in Moore's eyes as long as she's on the giving end. She writes:

"Let's throw out another hypothetical situation. Let's say I have no hard evidence, but I discern something wrong in a fellow believer or in a relationship between believers. After much prayer, God appoints me discreetly and lovingly to approach the person with concern."<sup>33</sup>

### UNORTHODOX FRIENDS CORRUPT GOOD THEOLOGY

As earlier noted, Moore, in *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, properly calls for discernment and stresses its importance. However, once again, she doesn't heed her own call. In light of her bent toward mysticism, some of those she esteems should not be surprising. Yet others will be — or at least should be.

One of those who would fall into the former category is fellow Southern Baptist mystic Henry Blackaby.<sup>34</sup> Blackaby is one of the leading exponents of subjectivism through his writings and seminars. He is the author of the hugely popular *Experiencing God*, which offers advice on determining God's will that is based primarily upon Blackaby's own personal experience and is largely extra-biblical. Moore holds Blackaby in high regard. She writes that she doesn't consider herself worthy to shine his shoes.<sup>35</sup> She also insists that Blackaby

has a long track record of faithfulness.<sup>36</sup> Faithful Blackaby may be, but it's not a "faithfulness" to the sufficiency of the Word, nor to its proper interpretation.

Moore also admires Brennan Manning, author of the best-selling book, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* and the contemplative prayer guru whom *Christianity Today* labeled as "evangelicals' favorite Catholic." She repeatedly cites his works, including a testimony to the "insecurity, inadequacy, inferiority, and low self-esteem" he experienced in life.<sup>37</sup> Moore tells her readers, "What God has used Manning to bring to the mixed bag of our generation of believers may be a gift without parallel"<sup>38</sup> and that he has written "one of the most remarkable books I have ever read."<sup>39</sup>

Manning is a prominent exponent of contemplative prayer, which calls for one to empty one's mind, then fill it with imaginative experiences and allow Christ to be the source of our words and actions.

In 2005, he described to *Christianity Today* magazine how he sat out Hurricane Katrina in his New Orleans apartment so he could help numerous victims following the cataclysmic disaster. It was the stuff of which heroes are made, but it wasn't true. One week after publishing the initial interview, *Christianity Today* posted on its web site a brief editorial note at the beginning of the article. It read, "We regret to inform our readers that, following this on-the-record conversation, Brennan Manning called our office to apologize. He reiterated that he had been 'disoriented, confused, and depressed' lately and that certain details he provided were not true. ... 'The essential truth: I lied.'"<sup>40</sup>

As Moore brings her book to a close, she cites, without qualification, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>41</sup> Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was part of the resistance movement against Hitler in the early 1940s.<sup>42</sup> He was involved in a failed plan to assassinate Hitler, was sent to prison, and was hanged there for treason. In January 1943, Bonhoeffer, just before going to

prison, proposed marriage to a parishioner half his age.<sup>43</sup> His story is very sad. From a human standpoint he was justified in helping Jews and being against fascism, but that is not the problem.

Bonhoeffer admitted in his own writings that he did not hold to biblical truth. He was ambiguous about the resurrection of Jesus and outspoken in his denials of fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. In an article, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Rejected Classical Christology," David Becker states:

"In his book, *Christ the Center* (1960, Harper & Row), Bonhoeffer wrote: 'So if we speak of Jesus Christ as God, we may not speak of him as the representative of an idea of God who possesses the properties of omniscience and omnipotence (there is no such thing as this abstract divine nature!)' (p. 108). So Bonhoeffer didn't really believe that Jesus is God. ... Bonhoeffer didn't think that Jesus is sinless either. 'The assertion of the sinlessness of Jesus fails if it has in mind observable acts of Jesus. His

---

---

*Moore appears to have a propensity to cite more teachers who are off the orthodox charts than those who are on them. Equally questionable are some who help promote her.*

---

---

"I don't mean to be critical of people, but I do want to speak the truth in love, and one of my pet peeves is when I see people, especially those who consider themselves to be, and present themselves as, theologically conservative, praise Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer espoused a so-called religionless Christianity, and expressed doubt about God as a working hypothesis. He was a father of the so-called 'death of God' 'fad' of a few years ago. He wrote a lot and also wrote some things that sounded orthodox but he consistently had a low view of the Bible, considering a lot of it myth."<sup>44</sup>

In reviewing one of Bonhoeffer's books, Becker writes:

deeds are done in the likeness of flesh. They are not sinless, but ambiguous. One can and should see good and bad in them' (p. 113). ... So Bonhoeffer rejected classical christology, had a low view of the Bible, denied the deity of Christ, doubted the virgin birth of Christ, denied the sinlessness of Christ, and doubted the physical resurrection of Christ."<sup>45</sup>

Moore appears to have a propensity to cite more teachers who are off the orthodox charts than those who are on them. Equally questionable are some who help promote her. The July 2003 issue of *Charisma* magazine devoted a nine-page spread to her and called her "one of America's most popular ministers today."<sup>46</sup>

While *Charisma* is presented as a magazine that holds itself to a high standard of biblical integrity, it is much closer to being the publication for a mutual admiration society of self-anointed apostles and prophets. Some of its editorial content comes from the likes of pragmatist Joyce Meyer, prosperity guru Gloria Copeland, and boisterous televangelist Paula White. It carries advertisements promoting the ministries of Oneness preacher T.D. Jakes, faith healer Benny Hinn, “singing prophet” Kim Clement, angel enthusiasts Charles and Francis Hunter, and many more. It is a mish-mash of confusion and unorthodoxy.

Many of the popular teachers whom *Charisma* publishes have a confused understanding of the Bible and mislead their followers with aberrant teaching. Unchecked doctrine can and does affect the lives of those who follow such a teacher. James 3:1 warns that teachers will be more strictly judged.

Further, Moore’s ties to *Charisma*’s publishing empire go beyond gracing the cover of its magazine. Casa Creacion, the Spanish language division of Strang Communications Group’s book publishing Creation House, is the publisher of at least four of Moore’s titles in Spanish, including *Cuando Gente De Dios Hace Cosas Que No Son De Dios (When Godly People Do Ungodly Things)*.

At the same time, Moore began another, even closer, association with one who has strong charismatic leanings. Moore appears every Wednesday on *LIFE Today*, the television ministry of James Robison and his Fort Worth-based Life Outreach International. Robison is a former Southern Baptist crusade evangelist who in the early 1980s parted company with the denomination because of its resistance to charismatic revivalism. His conversion into the world of charismatic teachers and teaching came when he said he was delivered from demonic oppression. Authors Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe offer the following details:

“In spring 1983, Robison added demonology and exorcism to his repertoire after meeting Milton Green, a Baptist layman from Tennessee whose followers were dubbed ‘Greenies.’ In the furor that followed, Robison left the Euleless, Texas, church where he was a member and took his ministry, now Pentecostal in all but name, deep into the charismatic land of tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy.”<sup>47</sup>

There’s also a bit of irony in the Moore-Robison relationship. For more than a decade of Moore’s tenure as an author for LifeWay, Dr. James T. Draper was the president of LifeWay.<sup>48</sup> When Robison began his trek into the unorthodox world of deliverance and healing, it was Draper who was his pastor at the First Baptist Church of Euleless, and who was an outspoken critic of Robison’s shift into charismatic beliefs and who, in private meetings, warned him “about his new theological direction.”<sup>49</sup>

It appears that Moore’s association with such teachers is shaping her theology. The “About Beth” page, featured on LifeWay’s web site, contains a quote from Moore which says in part, “God does signs and wonders that are just staggering.”<sup>50</sup>

Moore writes in her book, “Scripture prophesies an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s sons and daughters in the latter days.”<sup>51</sup> Moore’s timeframe for this statement is here and now, but she provides no biblical reference for such a prophecy. Perhaps she, like so many of the Latter Rain enthusiasts and modern day revivalists, is referencing Joel 2:28 about a latter rain which is to be an outpouring of supernatural power upon the Church. If so, Moore is two thousand years late. The Apostle Peter said that the events described in Acts 2 are what was prophesied by the Old Testament prophet Joel (“this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel,” Acts 2:16).

Moore also pitches the old “double portion anointing” cliché used by Benny Hinn and others:

“Clearly, we are living in the best of days and the worst of days. While fresh winds of the Spirit are blowing upon many of our churches and a double portion of anointing on many believers, the Word also strongly suggests that we are occupying planet Earth during the scariest time in human history to date.”<sup>52</sup>

## BE STILL, BETH

In 2006, Moore was featured on *Be Still*, a video presentation supporting the mystical practice of contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer advocates say that the technique stills one’s thoughts and emotions for us to better focus on God. It is said to be a process within one which, when practiced, will experience deep and lasting transformation. In reality, it is an attempt to know and encounter God apart from His Word.

Moore says on the video:

“God’s Word is so clear that if we are not still before Him, we will never truly know to the depths of the marrow in our bones that He is God. There’s got to be a stillness. We’ve got to have time to sit before Him and just know that He is.”<sup>53</sup>

*Be Still* employs meditators from a variety of religious affiliations and backgrounds. In addition to Moore, others who make up the instructional video include Roman Catholic author and heretical philosopher Peter Kreft, and mystic occultist Richard Foster.

Kreft, in his book, *Ecumenical Jihad*, writes of an out-of-body experience where on a “Heavenly beach” Muhammad taught him the heart and soul of all true religion — all of which was sanctioned by God.<sup>54</sup> Foster is best known for his enduring volume, *Celebration of Discipline*, and in the early printings of this book he encouraged his readers to have an out-of-body experience of their own.<sup>55</sup>

When warning and criticism of the film’s Eastern underpinnings were

issued by discernment organizations and Moore was contacted with these concerns, she responded with surprise. Her original statement confessed:

"I'm afraid I have to convey the full extent of my ignorance when I tell you with stark honesty that I wasn't even aware of the controversy. I am not involved in any kind of emergent church movement or any kind of mystical prayer movement. ... If I have participated in something unsound, it was hugely accidental and I ask your forgiveness. Nothing could be further from my desire."<sup>56</sup>

Portions of the video that spotlight Moore show her to be an informed and persuasive exponent of contemplative prayer. And apparently Moore's initial regret was short-lived. Lighthouse Trails, a ministry focusing upon the Church's drift into mystic and Eastern thought, is reporting that Moore has, through her own ministry, issued a revamped statement which says "because we certainly always stand for Truth, and because we believe that once you view the Be Still video you will agree that there is no problem with its expression of Truth."<sup>57</sup>

The "Be Still" title and concept is derived from Psalm 46:10 and has become the primary slogan of the contemplative prayer movement. It is, however, a verse taken out of context and misapplied to develop unbiblical teaching. Psalm 46:10, in its contextual setting, has nothing to do with becoming totally silent in order to merge with the Divine. It is an exposition of God's power, might, and majesty against those who war against Him.

Perhaps a better scriptural verse to engage would have been Psalm 4:4b, "Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still." Yet even this verse does not sanction or instruct contemplative prayer, but rather is "An exhortation not to give way to exasperation or anxiety (lit. 'tremble' in anger or fear) but look to the Lord."<sup>58</sup>

## MOORE PROBLEMS

Moore makes a lot of small mistakes and the overall accumulation of these things ends up as less-than-helpful biblical direction and counsel. But sometimes that imprecision can move into dangerous, heretical territory. A clear example of this is her declaration about Jesus and His Church that, "We are His physical body meant to flesh out His ministry to the world."<sup>59</sup> If we are, as Moore states, Christ's *physical body*, then something else must have been raised on the third day. Christ's physical resurrection is the evidence for Christians that we too will be raised (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:20). To imply or state otherwise is a direct denial of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). There would be little doubt that Moore holds to the bodily resurrection of Christ, yet a statement as the above demonstrates a real lack of important theological precision. It is a shame that her editors did not catch the serious implications of such a statement.

Notwithstanding the above, for the most part the drift with Moore is so small, at first, it may be hard to detect. Consider the old analogy of the airplane that takes off from New York City and heads to San Diego. After departure it begins to veer from its intended course by only a few degrees. Initially the error is not noticeable, but the plane ends up in Anchorage.

With Moore it may be a word or phrase improperly defined, or a testimony pushed too far or generalized for everyone. Her errors are subtle, but real. Where it ends, though, is the real point, and her readers — especially the untaught or sensitive — are the ones ultimately misled.

"Seduction," "victims," "strongholds," "oppression," and "loosing and binding" are found throughout her teachings. Questionable application and eisegesis of Scripture can be found in her writing. For example, as she details the struggle when writing *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, she writes:

"Finally God gave me understanding and I realized that He was applying the principle Christ introduced in Mark 9:29 (KJV). This book — written specifically to expose one of the most insidious assaults of the evil one — would 'come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.'"<sup>60</sup>

How Moore is able to correlate the instruction from our Lord to His disciples regarding the casting out of demons to the coming forth (i.e., the writing) of her book is beyond comprehension. Worst yet, Moore attributes such misuse of Scripture to God Himself, when she says that she "realized that He was applying the principle."

Moore also disappoints those with sound biblical understanding in her use of "binding and loosing." It is essential to note that only twice in the Gospels do we find the "binding and loosing" principle — and both instances are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (16:19 and 18:18). Moore appeals to both references, but with unqualified interpretation. She instructs her readers:

"I want you to enlist the support of several people of godly integrity who know how to war in prayer. Together start binding the enemy from any further work where your situation is concerned. Pray according to Matthew 16:19, asking God to bind Satan and to loose the Holy Spirit upon every single detail. Bind it from Satan in Jesus' powerful name, and loose it to the full trustworthy work of God through His Holy Spirit. As you and several others agree (Matt. 18:19-20) in binding the enemy, whatever is loosed, even if it is temporarily painful, will be from heaven and not from hell and will work for your good."<sup>61</sup>

A short while later, she writes:

"*The prayers of the saints to bind the enemy can ... bind the enemy!* And the prayer to loose the Spirit can do just that: loose

the Spirit! (Matt. 16:19). Prayer can be used of God to completely thwart any further plan of the enemy and take back what he stole."<sup>62</sup>

The principles Moore here establishes for believers are an affront to true spiritual warfare. Her misguided ideology that "binding" will "completely thwart any further plan of the enemy" is foolish, illusory, and harmful. Equally faulty is her notion that we should pray "to loose the Spirit." God is sovereign and acts according to His sovereignty. His Spirit is not limited or controlled by our prayer for Him to be "loosed." Here Moore offers the very "superficial Bible lessons" and "spiritual quick fixes"<sup>63</sup> that are supposedly absent from her ministry.

Pastor David Kirkwood provides helpful insight toward a proper understanding of "binding and loosing" in its biblical setting. As to the Matthew 16:19 passage, he writes:

"Jesus' use of those words is *obviously* metaphorical, as He certainly did not mean that His followers would be taking physical ropes or cords and literally binding anything or literally loosing anything that was bound with physical ropes or cords. Jesus must have used the words *binding* and *loosing* figuratively. What did He mean? For the answer, we should look at His words *binding* and *loosing* within the context of whatever He was speaking of at the time. Was He talking on the subject of evil spirits? If so, we could conclude that His words about binding have application to the binding of evil spirits. ... Regardless of the precise meaning of the metaphors, you can see that, in this passage, Jesus did not mention evil spirits."<sup>64</sup>

One could add to Kirkwood's commentary the specific that in the passage Jesus did not mention the Holy Spirit. Moore's direction to "loose" the Holy Spirit is foreign to the text.

Kirkwood also speaks to the issue of what is loosed:

"One final question that could be asked about that particular interpretation is this: If Jesus meant that we are to bind evil spirits, did He also mean that sometimes we should loose evil spirits? If not, then what are we supposed to loose? Some might claim we should loose God's power, or loose His angels, or loose His protection, and so on, as some Christians often attempt to do. But where in the New Testament can we find anyone doing such things?"<sup>65</sup>

Finally, Kirkwood addresses the Matthew 18:18 passage:

"In this second passage that mentions binding and loosing, there is absolutely *nothing* within the text that would lead us to believe that Jesus was speaking of binding evil spirits. Here Christ spoke of binding and loosing directly after speaking on the subject of church discipline. This would seem to indicate that in reference to binding and loosing in this passage, Jesus meant something like, 'I'm giving *you* responsibility to determine who should be in the church and who should not. It is your job. As you fulfill your responsibilities, heaven will back you up.'"<sup>66</sup>

Moore fails to understand the context and proper use of verse 18 within the framework of church discipline — which may be a biblical prescript that has eluded her. Her unfamiliarity with the process of church discipline is suggested when she writes:

"As I live and breathe, I cannot find a single time in Scripture when God called upon the popular vote of man to help Him deliver a verdict over one of His children."<sup>67</sup>

Scripture tells us differently. The Apostle Paul chastised the Corinthian church for not following the Lord's mandate of church discipline concern-

ing an unrepentant immoral brother when he wrote, "Are you not to judge those inside? ... Expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13).

As earlier noted, not everything that Moore says is wrong or unhelpful. When dealing with the nature of Satan's control over believers, she writes:

"When *self* grants *control* to the Holy Spirit and we live within the boundaries of God's will for our lives, our wall stands firm and Satan must work from more of a distance. He is limited to opposition rather than outright oppression."<sup>68</sup>

Here Moore appears to have her ship clear sailing and in the right direction. Unfortunately, on the very next page she hits a reef and capsizes:

"I even think it's possible for some people to feel 'possessed' by a demon when in reality they are terribly 'oppressed.' Perhaps demonic oppression can be so powerfully 'on' a person that it can feel 'in' the person."<sup>69</sup>

She follows that thought up with:

"In our war with demonic powers and principalities, if (relatively speaking) opposition is a game of *softball*, then oppression is *hardball*. And if oppression is *hardball*, seduction is *curveball*. Seduction is a form of oppression."<sup>70</sup>

New Testament Scripture does not speak in great detail to the subject of "oppression." That is because it is found only twice within the pages of the New Testament: James speaks of the rich oppressing the poor (James 2:6) and in Acts 10:38 where it is clear that it refers to Jesus *casting out demons*.<sup>71</sup> Thus, in its strictest sense — in Acts 10:38 — it is connected to Jesus and is a synonym for demon possession.

"Oppression" has become a cliché and whole traditions and practices have been built around the concept. If someone is having a bad day, it very

easily falls under the heading of oppression. What Moore and so many others do is take the normal struggles of daily life and sanctification and dramatize them by turning them into some kind of theater with themselves in the leading role. There is an excess of attention on the negative and not enough focus on the positive side of salvation and the grace given to believers as Peter instructs in 1 Peter 1:13.

Christians would do well to scripturally reflect upon and emphasize how much occurred at the cross, and how much victory is afforded us by the grace, the Holy Spirit, and the New Covenant which is given to the believer. The devil tempts and solicits to evil, but the whole oppression notion is contrived. Such belief places the attention upon demons and violates Philippians 4:8, which commands believers to focus on what is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good, virtuous, and praiseworthy. It is hardly setting our minds on things above.

We must not lose sight of the reality of the spiritual battle. The Christian does have a three-fold enemy: the devil, the world, and the flesh. The devil knows our weaknesses and desires, but we no longer have to sin. The truth is we want to. In a biblical view, none of us is really a victim. In sin and sinful behavior there is culpability, not victimization. Claiming to be a victim, as Moore does, will bypass the necessary and appropriate biblical response. It is diagnosing the problem incorrectly then applying an incorrect remedy.

An overview of comments by Jay Adams on the book of James is most beneficial:

“James explains, ‘The force at work within you when you turn trouble into temptation is not some foreign power that invaded you from without; it is your own desire. That is your principal problem.’ ... James doesn’t even bring Satan into the picture. You must take full responsibility for your sin. You can blame it on no one but yourself. ... It is a matter

of individual responsibility in every instance. When you lust after another person, it is because of your own desires. Sin of the heart means allowing your desire rather than God’s commandments to direct you. ... We are to obey all the Lord’s commands, in the wisdom and power of the indwelling Spirit, who strengthens us to overcome sin by means of the Scriptures to which He enlightens us. ... From all of this we learn that God holds each one personally responsible for his thoughts, imagination, acts, and words, and will allow no blame-shifting. ... Christian, resist sin at the start, as Jesus did. Abort inner sin before it is born. Augustine encourages us with these words: Pray that God may make you conqueror of yourself ... not of your enemy without, but of your own soul within. ... Let no enemy from without be feared: conquer yourself, and the whole world is conquered.”<sup>72</sup>

No doubt, Moore would not disagree. But therein is the problem with Moore — the helpful counsel one can find within her writing is muddled with harmful advice. And Adams is able to say, in just a few short pages, what Moore misses in her 300-page volume.

Mysticism, claims of divine inspiration and direction (apart from Scripture), unfavorable associations, questionable (and outright heretical) sources and citations in her writings, and aberrant teaching all combine to make Moore a teacher to be avoided. Christian women who desire to live godly lives and want Christ-centered, biblically profound, and *doctrinally sound* resources to help them to this end, would be better served by the writings of Martha Peace, Elyse Fitzpatrick, and Carol J. Ruvolo, just to name a few.

Yes, doctrinally sound books are not only important, but necessary. What we believe shapes and directs how we live. Moore seems to shy away from a healthy emphasis on doctrine when she says, “Christ didn’t give His life

for church doctrine.”<sup>73</sup> While this is true, Moore’s comment is yet another subtle bent toward ecumenicalism and her readers are left with the sense that doctrine is unimportant.

Regrettably, well-written and biblically sound books are rare today. Christians need to exercise care, caution, and discernment in their selections. PFO has long contended that a Christian bookstore can be a dangerous place for a believer to visit. The good in such bookstores, amidst the bad and ugly, are few and far between. Yet here is another area in which Moore lacks discernment:

“God has also equipped us with more uncompromising media and materials than any generation before us have ever had, suited for everything from Christian growth to Christian entertainment. In the United States, we have access to innumerable Christian tapes and CDs. We have all sorts of Christian magazines of excellent quality. We have tremendously well-written Christian novels. We have more Christian programming than ever before. ... God has not left us ill-equipped.”<sup>74</sup>

This idea is taken a step further when Moore writes:

“The quality and content of Christian magazines, music, and novels have vastly improved over the last decade or so. I believe this was divinely intended so that in a world of increasing wickedness, we’d have plenty of safe alternatives.”<sup>75</sup>

Moore is living in a fantasy world in more ways than one. The quality and content of Christian resources is not improving; it is getting worse. Decades ago, Christian publishing houses would have never even entertained the thought of publishing materials espousing open theism, Eastern mysticism, pop psychology, and on and on. Today it’s all commonplace. The aberrational and heretical have become the norm, while the scriptural

ally sound has become the exception. Publishers have displaced the "Great Commission" with sales commission. The almighty dollar has supplanted the Almighty.

For all her exposition of seduction and deception, Moore fails to understand that some of the most prevalent seedbeds of deception and seduction today are the media outlets — including books, magazines, tapes, and broadcasts — hailed under the banner of "Christian."

While readers of Moore's books and viewers of her videos might find helpful statements, they will do so only after picking through all the error. Many Christians do not have the ability or discernment to sort through all the heresy and nonsense. And, teachers like Moore express an air of authority and boastful pride ("I had been serving God with every ounce of energy I had."<sup>76</sup>). And, as noted above, there are many other biblically solid, and humble teachers of the Word available. Time would be better invested sitting under the teaching ministries of these men and women and not have to sort out Moore's aberrations and heresy.

### Endnotes:

1. Corrie Cutrer, "Breaking Free," *Today's Christian*, January/February 2003. Article available at: [www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2003/001/1.18.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/tc/2003/001/1.18.html).
2. Reader survey poll, *Today's Christian Woman*, March/April 2003.
3. Maureen D. Eha, "Her Redeemer Lives," *Charisma*, July 2003, pg. 47, italics in original.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 44.
5. "Breaking Free," op. cit.
6. "Her Redeemer Lives," op. cit., pg. 44.
7. *Ibid.*, pg. 46.
8. Beth Moore, *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002, pp. 60-61.
9. *Ibid.*, pg. 52.
10. *Ibid.*
11. See Job 4:8; 5:3; and 15:17.
12. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 53.
13. *Ibid.*, pg. xi, parenthesis and italics in original.
14. *Ibid.*, pg. xii.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 36.
16. *Ibid.*, pg. 220, italics in original.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 23.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. xiii.

19. *Ibid.*, pg. 124.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 36, 123, 124, 145, 204.
21. *Ibid.*, pg. 75.
22. *Ibid.*, pg. 159.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. 41.
24. *Ibid.*, pg. xi-xii.
25. Ron Rhodes, *Christianity According to the Bible*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2006, pp. 25-26.
26. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. xv, italic in original.
27. Jay E. Adams, *Grist from Adams's Mill*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1983, pg. 69.
28. For a biblical refutation of the self-esteem doctrine, see David M. Tyler, "The Gospel of Self-Esteem - Are We Really Better Than We Think?," *The Quarterly Journal*, January-March 2004, pp. 1, 17-19.
29. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 144.
30. *Ibid.*, pg. 61.
31. *Ibid.*, pg. 113.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 114.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 139.
34. See G. Richard Fisher with M. Kurt Goedelman, "Experiencing Mysticism - Critiquing the Teachings of Henry Blackaby," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 2003, pp. 4-16.
35. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 69.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 72.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.
39. *Ibid.*, pg. 290.
40. "From the Editors" notation added to the posting of the original article, "A 'Coward' Who Stayed to Help." The article first posted on *Christianity Today's* web site on Oct. 6, 2005. The editorial note was added and the article reposted on Oct. 10, 2005.
41. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 290.
42. See further, J.D. Douglas, editor, *Twentieth Century Dictionary of Christian Biography*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1995, pp. 63-64.
43. *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace*, PBS Presentation, June 17, 2000.
44. David Becker, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer Rejected Classical Christology," *The Christian News*, June 5, 2000, pg. 7.
45. *Ibid.*
46. "Her Redeemer Lives," op. cit., pg. 43.
47. Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe, *Televangelism: Power & Politics on God's Frontier*. New York: Henry Holt Company, 1988, pp. 125-126.
48. Draper retired on Jan. 31, 2006, after serving 15 years as president of LifeWay Christian Resources.
49. "Evangelist James Robinson's Ministry Split Over Teaching on Healing and Exorcism," *The Sword of the Lord*, July 15, 1983. This article was condensed from three

- articles that appeared in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 6 & 7, 1983.
50. "About Beth," LifeWay Christian Resources web page. The url for this page is: [www.lifeway.com/lby/lby\\_about\\_beth/0,2202,,00.html](http://www.lifeway.com/lby/lby_about_beth/0,2202,,00.html).
51. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 9.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Beth Moore on *Be Still*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006, 15:02 of the "Contemplative Prayer" chapter.
54. Peter Kreft, *Ecumenical Jihad*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, pp. 86, 98.
55. Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978, pg. 27.
56. "Official Statement from Beth Moore" in response to Ingrid Schlueter of Slice of Laodicea. Contents of the letter posted on Emergent No web site and is found at: <http://emergentno.blogspot.com/2006/06/update-on-beth-moore-contemplative.html>.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Kenneth Barker, General Editor, *The NIV Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985, pg. 789, annotation of Psalm 4:4-5.
59. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 149.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. xiii-xiv, italics in original.
61. *Ibid.*, pg. 226.
62. *Ibid.*, pg. 243, bold italics and ellipsis in original.
63. "Breaking Free," op. cit.
64. David Kirkwood, *Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare*. Library, Penna.: Ethnos Press, 1994, pp. 91-92, italics in original.
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 99, endnote.
66. *Ibid.*, pg. 97, italics in original.
67. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 217.
68. *Ibid.*, pg. 185, italics in original.
69. *Ibid.*, pg. 186.
70. *Ibid.*, pg. 187, italics in original.
71. In modern translations, such as the NKJV and NIV, two other instances of the word "oppressed" may be found in the New Testament: The Lord's reading from the book of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18) and Stephen's narration of Pharaoh's oppression of the Jews in Egypt (Acts 7:19). However, neither of these passages use the Greek word *kata-dunastewo* (oppress).
72. Jay E. Adams, *A Thirst for Wholeness*. Woodruff, S.C.: Timeless Texts, 1988, pp. 28-29, 37, 38, ellipses in Augustine statement in original.
73. *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, op. cit., pg. 148.
74. *Ibid.*, pg. 195.
75. *Ibid.*, pg. 249.
76. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.

(continued from page 2)

Maybe there is more to the story than we will ever know. Maybe Beckwith was never really convinced of the absolute sufficiency and authority of the Word of God. Maybe he was not aware that when one turns from the truth one can turn to fables and myths, no matter how sharp or how brilliant.

Perhaps Beckwith's conversion — or reversion — is a "sign" that anyone can be deceived and that we are in an age of deception and confusion. Maybe it's a "sign" that we had better stick close to Scripture and make sure we can demonstrate and prove that our choices line up with truth — not the next phone call.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

family of a Believers' Voice of Victory supporter, Bonnie Parker, stated that Parker had donated "tens of thousands, and possibly hundreds of thousands of dollars," believing that she would one day be healed of cancer. But she wasn't and she died. Parker's husband said that she had died believing she hadn't contributed enough. Additionally, Parker played the lottery and had written notes stating that if she were to win a prize, she wanted her money to be given to the Copelands' ministry.

A petition by the television station to see the ministry's annual tax filings was refused on the grounds that the ministry operates as a church and therefore is not required to disclose that information.

—AMG

**CERULLO HEADS TO COURT**

Nearly two years after being indicted on tax evasion charges, faith healer and prosperity teacher Morris Cerullo finally began seeing his day in a San Diego court. In March, Cerullo's legal team presented to Judge Roger T. Benitez a *Motion in Limine*, which would allow certain evidence to be excluded. Another court appearance is scheduled for August.

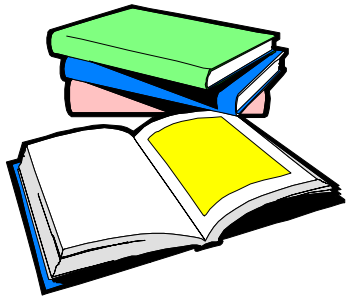
In 2005, Cerullo was charged with lying on his personal income tax returns between 1998 and 2000 by omitting \$550,000. Cerullo argues that the charges are without merit and will be proven false. According to a Charlotte, N.C., television news report, "the federal prosecutor said that the money in question came from offerings at breakthrough rallies and speaking fees. The feds tells [sic] us Cerullo used that money as his own."

A verdict against Cerullo could cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and land him in prison for up to nine years.

—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

## A THIRST FOR WHOLENESS

by Jay E. Adams

Timeless Texts, 142 pages, \$9.99

It has been said that the book of James is the “Proverbs” of the New Testament. And in *A Thirst for Wholeness*, Jay Adams furnishes a wealth of biblical wisdom all from the book of James. This book was first written in 1988 and later republished. Its contents and instruction will never dull with time, but rather becomes even more strategic for the believer.

In the book’s 15 chapters, Adams outlines how a believer can face trials with joy, resist temptation, conquer doubt, pray effectively, master desire, overcome anger, be a peacemaker, remain faithful, learn patience, handle sickness, and more.

Adams writes that we are inundated with “a babble of voices,” as confusion reigns from the world’s experts — and even from many within the Church — who speak to an understanding of the inner life and wellness of human beings. It is critical that we have a biblical worldview. Adams not only points us in the right direction, but he also provides the counsel necessary to help make spiritual progress.

To be a mature Christian — one who is “complete” by resisting and overcoming sin, whose prayers are effective, and who can endure in life with an unwavering faith — should be the earnest desire of all who have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. That goal may seem lofty and unattainable, but *A Thirst for Wholeness*, with all its biblical wisdom gleaned from James, shows that it is not.

This book is a wonderful antidote for the plethora of misguided and even lethal diagnoses and remedies of today’s pop psychologists and theologians. It’s also a tribute to the enduring wisdom and instruction of the Word. Once you start reading this volume, you won’t want to put it down — and you shouldn’t until you’re finished.

—MKG

## TEN QUESTIONS TO DIAGNOSE YOUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

by Donald S. Whitney

Navpress, 141 pages, \$10.99

Donald Whitney has written a book that every Christian needs to read. Its purpose is to lead Christians to a deeper relationship with the Lord through a series of questions and constructive disciplines to a life of growth in godliness. While believers might be actively engaged in serving their local church, they often are spiritually busy but not spiritually healthy. The two are not the same.

Spiritual disciplines are the means to godliness. We live in a day when both discipline and godliness are sorely lacking. Whitney reminds us that “All who consider themselves Christians are exhorted in Hebrews 12:14 to ‘Pursue ... holiness’” and that “His holy presence and holy ministry within us cause us to love holiness, to long for it, and at times to grieve over our lack of it” (pg. 94).

Believers may often grieve for a variety of reasons. Unfortunately, lack of holiness tends not to be something for which we grieve. Whitney repeatedly exhorts his readers to a life of devotion and growing in grace through disciplines and reminds us that a “discipline neglected is a blessing unclaimed” (ibid.).

Some of the chapter titles include: “Do You Thirst for God?”, “Are You Governed Increasingly by God’s Word?”, “Are You More Sensitive to God’s Presence?”, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines Increasingly Important to You?”, and “Do You Still Grieve Over Sin?”

Each thought-provoking chapter contains subtopics to help the reader evaluate his or her walk with the Lord. And with the majority of prayer requests focusing on physical needs, this work sheds wisdom on how believers can pray not only for oneself, but also for loved ones as they grow in their Christian walk.

In this day and age of spiritual deficiency, this work is a wonderful guidebook for the believer’s process of biblical sanctification. Get it, read it, digest it, and make it part of your daily life.

—AMG

**Editor’s Note:** The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.