

# The Discerner

"Hereby know  
we the spirit  
of truth and the  
spirit of error"

Volume 23, Number 2

April • May • June 2003

## AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL HERESY-EXPOSING QUARTERLY

Editorial .....	2
<i>William A. BeVier</i>	
Falun Gong .....	4
<i>William A. BeVier</i>	
Another Look at the New Evangelical .....	9
<i>Dr. George G. Houghton</i>	
The Two By Two's .....	13
<i>Jo Ann BeVier</i>	
Book Reviews .....	16
Responses .....	22

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## EDITORIAL

*By William A. BeVier*

**I**n each issue of THE DISCERNER we attempt to present the latest in developments in the areas of religions and cults, as well as present on-going developments in more familiar areas.

Within the last few years a new movement has entered the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. Its Chinese name is Falun Gong. The Chinese government has officially termed it “an evil cult.” Others outside China, and some within China believe it to be basically a new form of physical exercises and method of meditation. Without doubt, the movement has some characteristics that have come to be recognized as being cultic. In some ways, the movement is too new to finally determine its course. We will do well to keep an eye on this movement. Some of what is clearly recognized now as cults were not so perceived when they first appeared.

Our second article is by Dr. George G. Houghton, Th.D Dallas Seminary, 1970, and long time Dean of Education and Academic Vice President of Faith Baptist Bible College & Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa. The article is reprinted by permission from a Faith Seminary publication. We welcome Dr. Houghton to the pages of THE DISCERNER. His article reports what has happened in recent years in what were once Evangelical circles.

Our third article in this issue is a return to an older cult that still is attracting the attention of many people. The Two by Twos are a shadowy group to many people, especially when they first come into contact with it. It is hoped that this new presentation of the movement will be helpful.

Our issue this time also includes two book reviews. One is by Board member, Larry Sutherland, *Jesus in An Age of Controversy*, by Dr. Douglas Groothuis. The second book, by the Caners on Islam, has been made available to us by a long-time friend of RAS. His provision was termed by him as a contribution to RAS.

From time to time we receive notes or words of encouragement from readers of THE DISCERNER. We are always glad when a person takes the time and effort to share with us the blessing received from the publication. We conclude this issue by sharing with you some of these comments.

In recent issues of THE DISCERNER we have called attention to several new books. We now have limited copies of three of these books. They are “Battle for the Truth” by David Noebel (\$12.99 + P&H), “This Little Church Went to Market” by Gary Gilley (\$10.00 + P&H), and “I Just Wanted More Land –Jabez” by Gary Gilley (\$10.00 + P&H). These books are not listed in our new catalog. If you have not received your new catalog, please notify us.

We also have received a review copy of a new video titled “Israel, Islam and Armageddon,” with the subtitle “The Final Battle for Jerusalem.” It is narrated by Dave Hunt and is available from The Berean Call, PO Box 7019, Bend, OR 97708-7019, or tele. 1-800-937-6638. For those interested in Bible prophecy, this is an up-to-date, well-done presentation.

If your mailing label reads XXIII-2 or the front page reads Volume 23, Number 2, your subscription expires with this issue. We hope you will renew your subscription.

# FALUN GONG

*By William A. BeVier*

Recently RAS has received several inquiries about a movement named Falun Gong (also known as Falun Defa). Going to the Internet, a great deal of information about this movement was found.

Views about Falun Gong range from the official Chinese government policy that it is an “evil cult” to the view, especially by Westerners, that it is a movement based on harmless physical and spiritual exercises.

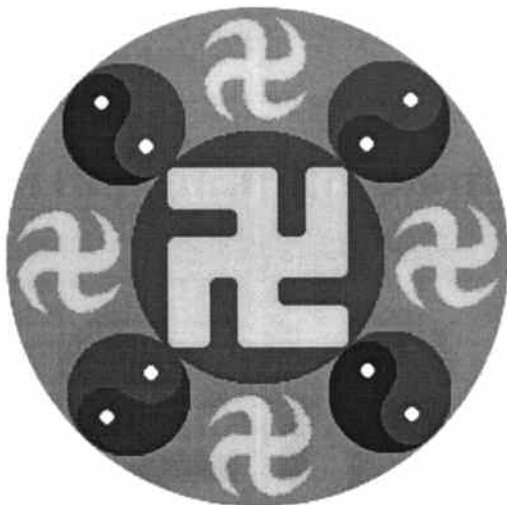
To understand the movement one should go to its own sources, but to evaluate these sources by the Bible.

Followers, i.e., “practitioners,” deny Falun Gong is a religion, but it clearly incorporates elements of Buddhism and Taoism, religions in China and elsewhere, plus physical and mental exercises that they claim have a “moral character.”

As with any movement, it is impossible to give a complete presentation of Falun Gong in one article. If a person is interested in pursuing the subject, the Internet has many entries, both pro and con.

Falun Gong is reportedly to have been founded in northeast China by Li Hongzhi, a one-time government grain clerk, in 1992. He began to publicly teach his ideas in China at that time. He has written at least two books, the primary one is *Zhuan Falun* (“Turning the Wheels of Buddhist Doctrine”). This translation means very little to most Westerners and Julie Ching, a Chinese-American, admits his books are not easy to read, even in Chinese.

In 1995, sensing trouble with officially recognized groups, such as the Qigong movement in which he was a teacher, he left China and eventually managed to enter the U.S., settling in New York. No



one seems to know publicly on what basis he received immigration status.

In April 1999 followers of Falun Gong staged a peaceful protest demonstration in Beijing. They claimed they were being harassed in various places. They wanted legal status and government protection. In July 1999 the Chinese government outlawed the movement, terming it “an evil cult.”

Falun Gong has adopted a symbol that causes uneasiness for many Westerners. The symbol is a combination of Buddhist and Taoist symbols. It depicts a swastika or “wan” in the center, four smaller spinning swastikas outside the center along with four yin-yang signs. Li Hongzhi claims the symbol describes the universe, with the swastika representing the rotating universe.

The Chinese government crackdown on Falun Gong followers brought protests in various Chinese cities, especially in Hong Kong, and elsewhere in the world. An estimated 100 followers protested in New York at the United Nations headquarters, claiming human right violation in China. In China thousands had been arrested, though most everyone, except known leaders, were soon released. Some were sent to “reeducation” sessions if they were Communist officials. Falun Gong literature, especially Li Hongzhi’s books, were seized and destroyed.

As many Falun Gong followers fled China they spread the ideas to the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Europe. The media took up the cause of these “persecuted” individuals. One claimed meaning of “Falun” is a “spinning body of energy located in the lower abdomen.” Performing the prescribed exercises stimulates this energy within the body [this might remind one of the New Age Movement].

Li Hongzhi clearly is a mystic and some say a pantheist in the Western sense, though he claims at times, that Falun Gong is not a religion. He does claim special gifts and status. The Chinese government has issued a warrant for Li Hongzhi’s arrest and requested the help of Interpol and sent a request to the U.S. government to send him back to China. Neither request has been honored.

In Western culture especially young people are accepting Falun Gong as an Eastern spiritual group. Most followers in China appear to be middle age (Li Hongzhi himself is now about 50).

Julie Ching states: “...whether it claims to be a religion or not, Falun Gong obviously has religious features.” The Chinese government reports many Falun Gong followers are refusing to see medical doctors because they believe Falun Gong (i.e., exercises and meditation) can heal illnesses.

One device Falun Gong advocates have used in China is to interrupt television broadcasts and send their own messages along with a

banner reading “Falun Defa is good” into Chinese homes. The government has responded by blocking and jamming Falun Gong Web sites as well as destroying the group’s books and tapes. In January of this year the Chinese police charged a Chinese-American with involvement in interrupting Chinese television and radio broadcasts to send Falun Gong messages. He was deported.

Followers of Falun Gong in this country have been interviewed numerous times. Some are Chinese nationals in this country, frequently here as students, as well as American “converts.” The testimony of some is that the exercises and mediation produce “inner peace.” Followers meet in a public place each Sunday in Madison, Wisconsin. Other of the group operates the Falun Gong Information Center in New York, and the Center has Web site links in 45 U.S. states. The followers communicate to each other round the world by Web site Internet, e-mail, and mobile phones. Li Hongzhi sends messages by these means, as well as organizing demonstrations.

Between May 11 and May 13 of this year Falun Gong followers and supporters conducted their “Fourth Annual Falun Defa Day Festivities” in 30 cities around the world. May 13, 1992 is held to be the day Li Hongzhi first taught Faun Defa, a.k.a. Falun Gong, publicly. The movement now claims 100 million followers, but with no claimed “membership” rolls, this number is difficult to substantiate. Most of the followers are in China.

Falun Gong originally started as a part of Qigong, which is legal in China. This is a type of physical exercises and mediation, much like tai chi (originally a method of self-defense). It was when Li Hongzhi left Qigong and started his own movement that it attracted government attention. This was in 1992, but it was 1999 before Falun Gong was declared illegal and subversive to good social order in China.

In November 1999 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution which said in part: “The Government of the People’s Republic of China should stop persecuting Falun Gong practitioners and other religious believers.” Note, the resolution refers to Falun Gong practitioners as “religious believers.” The Chinese government, as could be expected, “regretted” the resolution and claimed the U.S. was interfering with the internal affairs of China. However, Falun Gong is not limited to the “internal affairs” of China. The Chinese response included the words that Falun Gong had disrupted public order, undermined stability and spread “heretical” ideas such as belief in an imminent doomsday. It was claimed over 1,000 followers had died by refusing medical treatment [Shades of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Christian Science].

Those in the Western world who have been able to interview Li Hongzhi (though one report is that he speaks only Chinese) have

reported several unusual ideas he has. One is that he believes “aliens from other planets have invaded the human race and brought chaos to life on earth.” These aliens are the ones who cause wars and other conflicts. He further claims these aliens invented modern technology and cloning and that their goal is “to completely replace human beings.”

Li Hongzhi has written that he can personally heal diseases and his followers can stop speeding cars using the powers of his teachings. He also claims he and his followers can levitate (“fly”). In spite of this and other ideas, the verdict is divided whether or not Falun Gong is a cult.

Some say Falun Gong is a “shadowy organization,” with little known publicly about its finances, apocalyptic tendencies, and possible political aims. Others see nothing wrong with a grass-roots movement claiming as its objective personal virtues of “truthfulness, benevolence, and tolerance.”

Time magazine and the New York Times reported interviews with Li Hongzhi conducted in 1999. Perhaps the best way to evaluate Falun Gong is through the words of its founder and leader. It is admitted his books are difficult to understand even in Chinese. However, the interviews conducted in English should be more helpful, assuming the reports accurately state his words.

Li Hongzhi attributes the “chaos” in the world to two reasons. One is that people no longer believe in “orthodox religion” “They go to church, but they no longer believe in God.” [Remember, this interview was conducted in the U.S., not in atheistic Communist China, where most people have never believed in the God of “orthodox religion.”] The second reason is “...since the beginning of this century [the 20<sup>th</sup>], aliens have begun to invade the human mind and its ideology and culture.” These words in themselves should keep many people from accepting Falun Gong. Li Hongzhi believes the aliens “...come from other planets.” The aliens have produced “modern machinery like computers and airplanes.” “The ultimate purpose is to replace humans,” e.g., cloning. The aliens “...will enter earth and become earthlings.” Li Hongzhi never identifies which “planets” the aliens come from.

The following is from an interview with Time magazine:

TIME: “Are you from earth?”

Li: “I don’t wish to talk about myself at a higher level. People wouldn’t understand it.” [These words are typical of Li Hongzhi.]

TIME: “what do aliens look like?”

Li: “Some look similar to human beings.” [How can we tell they are aliens?]

Further, from Li: “Industry is creating invisible air pollution.” “The drinking water is polluted.” “I only tell practitioners [his followers], but not the public because they cannot comprehend it.” [Ancient Gnosticism taught much the same thing – only a few can understand.] “The only person in the entire world who knows this is myself alone.” “Aliens have already constructed a layer of cells in human beings.” [Li Hongzhi also does not explain this.] It supposedly relates in some way to computers

The terms “karma” and the “third eye,” Buddhist and New Age terms also occur in Falun Gong. One American-Chinese writer states Li Hongzhi shows “a certain pantheism,” that is, everyone has part of the Buddhist “primal spirit.”

One aspect of traditional cults is evident in Falun Gong, absolute veneration of the leader, in this case, Li Hongzhi, who by many followers is termed the “Master.” Falun Gong may deny it is a religion, but it clearly has religious features.

Will Falun Gong become a “cult” and be recognized as such outside China? Remember, Joseph Smith and Mormonism was not immediately recognized as a cult, neither was Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or Christian Science, to name a few. Time will tell about Falun Gong. To date it is only about a decade old. Whatever it is or becomes, it is not a movement for Bible-believing Christians.

#### Sources

All the sources in this article were taken from the Internet. Click on Falun Gong and one can go to numerous Web sites on the subject.



# ANOTHER LOOK AT THE NEW EVANGELICALISM

*By Dr. George G. Houghton*

In the late 1940's there was a move by some leaders within conservative Protestantism toward a new kind of evangelicalism. It expressed dissatisfaction with fundamentalism (note Carl Henry's book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, published in 1947, as well as Harold Ockenga's inaugural address at the founding of Fuller Seminary that same year). Its new evangelicalism differed from the older fundamentalism in several ways.

As their movement developed, some of these differences surfaced immediately and others more gradually. The overall difference could be noted as a change from recognizing the essential importance of doctrinal conviction and practice, with a call to defend the truth, to a less precise view of doctrine, with an emphasis upon personal relationships, and a softened attitude toward (or capitulation to) the world's way of thinking and doing.

It's not that historic orthodox doctrine was generally denied initially. Rather, there developed a more relaxed attitude, which tolerated doctrinal and positional variations. Thus Bernard Ramm could write an editorial in *Eternity* magazine (March 1974, p. 13) about "Green Grass Evangelicals" – "the new breed of evangelical Christians emerging today. These green-grass evangelicals are committed to evangelical theology but not committed to the older bromides of previous generations." Dr. Ramm describes these people by saying,

Green-grass evangelicals are not interested in doctrinal questions like "eternal security." To them such issues are too academic.... The real business of Christianity is living the Christian life.... [They] are not much interested in prophecy or the millennium or details about the tribulation. That is all future. It will be fulfilled as it will be fulfilled. So why so much concern about setting details about something that hasn't happened yet?

Furthermore, so much can be done for Christ it is a pity to waste time, energy and print over something yet to happen... [They] believe that debates over Scripture (infallibility, inerrancy) pay no great dividends. They are more experience-centered.

The New Evangelical theologian concludes his description of the new breed with this advice: "My recommendation is, Don't fight them! Try some of that old virtue, humility, to see what we can learn from this new breed of evangelicals."

And another example of this is noted in *Christianity Today* maga-

zine (August 18, 1978, 40-42) when it had a news article on ten evangelical Christians who spent a weekend of dialogue with Moonies at the Unification Theological Seminary in Barrytown, New York. The article states that when they met for their final session,

...Convener [Richard] Quebedeaux, in an emotionally charged speech, admitted that he had not been enthusiastic about his first encounter with the U.C. seminary students last March. But, said he, two visits to the seminary had changed his mind. "I've never seen a place where *agape* has worked out so well," he said. "Theologically, doctrinally, I think you're wrong. Emotionally, I think you're right.... You may be heretics – I'll let God decide that. But I love you, and I believe the world is a better place because of you."

A Moonie responded similarly, expressing respect and love for the evangelical participants. The gathering concluded with a period of spontaneous prayer led by Moonies and evangelicals alike.

One evangelical seemed to sum up the sentiments of a number of his colleagues as he offered a farewell comment: "I'm going back and telling everyone I found real Christian fellowship in Barrytown."

Specific issues where the new evangelicalism differed from the fundamentalism included:

- (1) Proclaiming a "gospel" which was social as well as spiritual.
- (2) Rejection of the traditional dispensational approach, which stressed the spiritual and evangelical aspects of the Great Commission as the defining duty of this age.
- (3) Dismissing the fundamentalist concept of separating from unbelievers and disobedient brethren in religious cooperation endeavors and stressing infiltration into the major denominations and cooperative ecumenical evangelism.
- (4) An enchantment with contemporary "scholarship" which desires respectability from the unsaved academic community.
- (5) A toning down of differences between contemporary leaders in science and the Bible's teaching regarding creation and the universal flood at the time of Noah, resulting in a toleration of evolutionary views of the earth's creation.
- (6) Rejection of fundamentalist emphasis on lifestyle standards and personal holiness, resulting in a "liberating" attitude toward (or caving into) the world's attitude toward contemporary cultural issues.
- (7) An embarrassment with the concept of Biblical inerrancy and the toleration of higher criticism.
- (8) The development of a neutral or positive attitude toward charismatic experience as noted in their broad acceptance and tolerance of the charismatic movement.

Today, as we are now in the twenty-first century, and a few generations separate us from the beginnings of the new evangelicalism, there are some from within fundamentalist circles who are saying, "New evangelicalism was at one time a reality, but today it is non-existent (or at least, not a formidable foe any longer)." Is this really accurate? The answer to that is an emphatic, "No!" The issue is not the term "new evangelicalism." Terms come and go. The question is, "Are the issues and attitudes raised by the new evangelicalism gone?" And again, the answer is an emphatic No!"

This is seen today in several areas.

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**Are the issues and attitudes raised by "new evangelicalism" gone? No!**

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- (1) The rapid rise of the church marketing movement from the early 1990s to the present with its emphasis upon relationships and experience, drama and contemporary music, to reach and hold people. The Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, has a Willow Creek Association of many other churches (into the hundreds), which are following the Willow Creek mold.
- (2) The positive response of evangelicals to the programs and ministry of Robert Schuller and his Crystal Cathedral.
- (3) The board acceptance (or at least toleration) of the Contemporary Christian Music movement and rejection of fundamentalism's personal separation standards, so that *Charisma* magazine (April 1997, 26ff) could write the "British Christians Use Techno-Dance to Reach Youth." Their article talked about alternative worship services, evangelistic nightclubs and "a revolutionary Christian dance movement." In describing this, the article said, "strobe lighting, smoke effects, DJs, dancers, Celtic music and tribal rhythms were served up for this worship feast. The trend can be found everywhere."
- (4) The influence of the apologetic writings and lecturing of Dr. Hugh Ross, who teaches that the earth is billions of years old, and began with a "big bang," that death and degeneration existed in the beginning and have continued for billions of years, and that neither the fall to sin nor the flood resulted in significant physical changes in nature.
- (5) The positive attitude of many evangelicals toward the charismatic movement, especially as it is seen in the signs-and-wonders movement.
- (6) The acceptance of religious teachers and institutions, which have not held the line on belief in eternal punishment. Fuller Seminary modified its doctrinal statement in this area, and individuals like

Clark Pinnock have opened the door to people hearing the Gospel after death and having a chance to respond positively, or hell being viewed as annihilation.

- (7) The hearing being given in evangelical circles to “the openness of God” concept which rejects His absolute foreknowledge, among other things.
- (8) The toleration by some evangelicals – especially in academic settings – of deviant sexual lifestyles, particularly homosexuality.
- (9) The willingness of evangelical publishers to publish works which allow for aspects of higher critical views of the Bible, including redaction criticism, in interpreting the life of Christ in the Gospel accounts.
- (10) The broad acceptance of the Promise Keepers, even though it tolerates working with Roman Catholics and has strong charismatic overtones.
- (11) The willingness of major evangelical leaders to sign their names to the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” document, and still others to sign the later statement entitled “The Gift of Salvation.” While recognizing traditional differences (including sacramentalism), there is the willingness to call each others “brothers in Christ.”
- (12) The belief by some evangelicals that the head of the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope, is an evangelical.

If those attitudes and issues do not seem to be of such concern today, it is only because the new evangelical position has become mainstreamed into many Bible-believing circles to the extent that speaking against them puts one in a rather small minority. Issues such as ecumenical evangelism are still very significant today, but we hear little about them because many whose voices might at one time have spoken out in opposition have been quieted by a changed or at least a relaxed position. The new evangelical attitude has become so prevalent that one may be tempted to tolerate it as inevitable and normal.

While speaking to doctrinal and positional issues is not all that Christian leaders should be doing, it is one important thing (note Paul’s admonition to the Christian leaders in Ephesus – Acts 20:25-31 and Jude’s comments in his brief letter – Jude 3-5, 7-21). So while specific terms and titles may change, there are always those from without and from within about whom the warning alarm needs to be sounded. This is Biblical militancy, and the issues and attitudes expressed by leaders within the new evangelicalism over the past 50 years are still important enough for Biblical fundamentalists to address today so that God’s people may be informed and educated, and that they may know where we as contemporary Christian leaders stand on these very significant topics.

[Reproduced with permission from the May/June 2002 issue to the Faith Pulpit.]

## **THE TWO BY TWO'S (COONEYTTES, CHURCH WITH NO NAME, ETC.)**

*By Jo Ann BeVier*

**T**his group is characterized by not having church buildings, no literature (except the King James Bible and hymnbooks), workers called “go preachers,” being ingrown, believing they are the only true believers and other distinctives.

The members of the group exist under extreme legalism and their True-Preachers have to be held as absolute truth and any questions or doubts are considered disobedience and those people are disfellowshipped. Since the Two by Two's (which name we will use to address them) believe salvation is only extended to those of their group, this would mean those who leave cannot be saved.

The above beliefs and practices are signs of a cult. They are also unclear in their teaching as to whether Jesus is God or not. Jesus to them is the perfect example, someone to build the pattern of their lives. Little attention is given to the shed blood and finished work of Christ – which is also a mark of a cult. Membership in the group is not so much receiving Christ as Savior but more outward conformity to their legalistic lifestyle. Salvation comes to us not through grace alone but works or self-effort is also needed. They say salvation cannot be a certainty until the moment of death and there is no hope outside the group. They have no statement of faith or doctrinal statement. Their outreach seems aimed at Christians and not the unsaved and the “preaching” has a mixture of truth freely sprinkled with error, which is the usual cult mixture.

Their workers go out in pairs, hence the title given them Two by Two's. They generally pair an older or mature worker with a younger worker. They are not paid a salary; they have no home or real possessions, and move from one member's home to another. Members of the group provide a car, housing, and gift of money to the workers. They have no theological schools or seminaries. They learn the Bible from older workers and overseers who have spiritual authority over them. They are trained never to enter into a prolonged discussion of what is right or wrong in Christian matters. The women all have long hair; dress in long dresses, and did wear black stockings (hence the name black stockings is used sometimes to describe the group). The women workers remain unmarried.

The group claim to have no beginning, no history and say they are a continuation of Christ's work on earth, quoting Acts 1:1 and

protecting this claim by having no historical papers or diaries. There is a history, which is known and has been written about in the book, Reinventing The Truth, by Kevin Daniel, a former Two by Two.

The background is: At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the evangelical Faith Mission sent William Irvine to lead work in County Tipperary, Ireland. He gathered converts and held meetings in local Methodist churches. Irvine began denouncing all other denominations. He began teaching his followers the principles of Matthew 10, going out in two's, living with only one change of clothes and no money. Irvine taught his followers to break away totally from the world. This in itself sounds fine, but his converts felt because of their obedience to the "Jesus Way" they were the only ones able to fulfill the pattern of the original disciples on earth hence they had to be the only true church. As a result, they should have no name and so names were assigned to them by others (none were used by the group itself) such as: two by two's, black stockings, go preachers, Cooneyites, No Name Church, and others. Although the group emphasizes it used no name, it is registered with the U.S. Federal government as "the Christian Conventions" to allow members to claim conscientious objector status in the military. That name refers to the annual conventions held in each state or region.

Going back to the background, Irvine's following grew and he developed a system of overseers, and he was their leader, speaking to scattered conventions of "believers." Followers sold all they had and gave the proceeds to Irvine.

Edward Cooney became an assistant to Irvine. He was zealous and made attacks on other churches. Irvine developed strange doctrines (partly from Seventh-day Adventists), even believing he was one of the two witnesses in Rev. 11. In 1914 Irvine was excommunicated which threw the movement in turmoil. It was then that Cooney (and others) took control. However, in 1928 even Cooney was disfellowshipped. This all led to a cover-up of how the group started and today followers are discouraged from investigating the early history of the movement.

In November 2002, there was an article written in the religion section of the St. Paul Pioneer Press, in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Some of the material in this article is from that information. The article also stated that the group started in Great Britain and mentions William Irvine. There are reportedly many house churches meeting in the U.S., maybe 100,000, and perhaps as many as 500,000 around the world. [With no historical records, they probably don't really know how many followers there are.]

There are a number of books and other materials written on the two by two's. Some were written in Northern Ireland, Australia, and Norway. Religion Analysis Service carries eight books on this group.

There are other organizations with information and assistance. CRI (Christian Research Institute) in California and Canada; MacGregor Ministries in Washington and British Columbia; Breda Centre in Northern Ireland; and Research and Information Services in Bend, Oregon (whose Web site is <http://www.workersect.org>), all dealing with the two by two's.

One of the important follow-ups with those leaving or having left this group is to study the Word of God for themselves. Most importantly:

1. That they understand that salvation is a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for sin (1 Cor. 15:1-6; Jn. 3:16-18; Gal. 3:22, 26-29; Rom. 3:23, 24, 28; 10:9, 11, 13) and it is by Christ alone, apart from the law or works, that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16, 17; Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 2:8, 9),
2. It is also written in His Word that we should study (2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 1:9; 2:1-7, 10),
3. Especially the doctrines (teachings) set forth in Scripture (Heb. 6:1; 13:9; 2 Jn. 9), and
4. To forsake not the assembling together with those of like precious faith (Heb. 10:25; 2Pet. 1:1; Rom. 12:5, 6; Gal. 6:9, 10; Eph. 2:19, 22; Col. 1:1-14).



## **BOOK REVIEW**

Jesus in An Age of Controversy

By Dr. Douglas Groothuis

*Reviewed by Larry Sutherland*

**T**his book is an up-to-date answer to the age-old question: “Who is this man Jesus?” Professor Douglas Groothuis begins his inquiry by reviewing the strong internal and external witnesses to the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus and concludes that the evidence completely supports the crucial tests of “integrity, authenticity, and veracity” (p. 65).

In his investigation Groothuis defends the historical, biblical viewpoint of Jesus Christ as contrasted with the New Spirituality represented by New Agers such as Thomas Moore, Deepak Chopra, and John White. According to Groothuis, New Agers have invented a “cosmic Christ” similar in many respects (Groothuis mentions eight similarities, pp. 70-76) to Buddhist and Hindu teachings. Groothuis likewise examines Gnosticism, in both its ancient and modern varieties; from the Nag Hammadi texts (that include Gnostic thought from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) to the present variations proffered by Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Rosicrucians, etc. Gnostic texts, according to Groothuis, portray Jesus Christ as a dispenser of secret wisdom, self-knowledge, and spiritual illumination, rather than that of the crucified and risen Christ of orthodox Christian faith. The church fathers, Polycarp and Irenaeus, repudiated the Gnosticism in their day (p. 92) and biblical scholars such as F. F. Bruce, Groothuis himself, and others have challenged the more recent versions of Gnosticism (pp. 97-101).

With equal candor and perspicacity Groothuis deals with the so-called “lost years of Jesus,” the notion that Jesus journeyed to India, and the revelations from the Dead Sea Scrolls. For Groothuis, it stretches credulity to accept these notions afloat relating to Jesus’ young adult years. He castigates Notovitch’s description of Jesus’ teachings gained through His assumed trip to India, Nepal, and Persia as a “theological hodgepodge” (p. 132) of Buddhism, Gnosticism, Judaism, Christianity, and Hinduism. Again, the Jesus Christ of the Bible and history does not fit either the Essene community culture as depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls or, for that matter, other first century secondary sources (p. 164).

Groothuis concludes his tome with a presentation of the orthodox biblical view of the Christ of the Gospels. He obviously believes that



the best way to know the counterfeit is to examine the genuine carefully. He does this concisely and methodically. There should be no doubt in our minds as to the “real” person of Christ when we studiously and honestly examine and weigh all the evidence. Where there are still questions and knowledge gaps we submit ourselves to the “obedience of faith.” The words of a medieval church leader are also appropriate at this juncture: “credo ut intelligam” (I believe in order to understand).

We should thank God for professors and researchers as Groothuis who so ably defend and present Jesus Christ in all of His historical, biblical reality. He is indeed the Son of God and the Son of Man.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### Unveiling Islam

By Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Feithi Caner

Kregel, 2002, 256pp

*Reviewed by William A. BeVier*

**T**his book has the subtitle “An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs.”

Ergun Caner and Emir Caner are brothers, who along with a third brother, were converted from Islam to Biblical Christianity. Both Ergun and Emir are now professors at Baptist schools in this country. A mosque leader raised them as Sunni Muslims.

The book repeatedly shows the primary differences between Islam and Christianity. Muslim terms in the Qur’an are given their current meanings, not those frequently presented by Western media and politicians.

The authors also present a strategy Christians can use to open a dialogue with Muslims.

The authors begin their book with references to their father, a devout Muslim. When all three brothers were converted to Christianity, their father disowned them. It was seventeen years later, when he was on his deathbed, that the sons again saw their father. Fortunately for the sons, they and their father were living in the U.S. when the sons were converted. Had they lived in a Muslim dominated country, they could have well been killed. All “religions” are not the same, as this book again proves.

The men’s father and mother met in Sweden, where the father was attending a university. Two of the sons were born in Sweden before the family immigrated to the U.S., settling in Ohio. The marriage ended in divorce (the mother not being Muslim). The sons continued to practice Islam after the divorce.

While in high school, Ergun accompanied a friend to “revival” services, which turned out to be “evangelistic” services for him. Ergun led his brother Erdem to Christ.

A year later the third brother, Emir, accepted Christ. It was November 1982. This was when their father disowned all three sons. They write it could have been worse, according to Hadith 9.57 they should have been killed.

Beginning in 1982 Ergun and Emir began preaching and later prepared themselves for teaching on the graduate level (Ergun an earned Th.D. and Emir an earned Ph.D.).

Their book was already in the planning stage before September 11, 2001. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon hastened the completion of the book. A videotape by Bin Ladin only confirmed what the authors were publicly telling people about Islam and silencing many who were trying to defend the religion.

The book includes numerous endnotes (unfortunately, not “footnotes”), a detailed Index, and four appendices (“Topical Index to the Qur’an”; “Free Will, Fatalism, and the Qur’an”; “Christianity and Islam: A Comparison of Beliefs”; “Glossary of Arabic Islamic Terms”). The appendices are worth the price of the book. The endnotes provide a limited bibliography.

The authors point out the Qur’an contains contradictory statements, e.g., Sura 2:193 and 2:256. This allows Muslims who know the Qur’an to cite one Sura (chapter) to one person and a contradictory Sura to another person. Non-Muslims need to be aware of this.

The book contains 16 chapters with titles such as: Mohammad: the Militant Messenger, The Story of Islam: A Trail of Blood, Sunnah and Hadith: The other Books, Fundamentals: The Five Pillars, Women: Love, Marriage, and Property, Salvation: Mathematical Righteousness, Islamic Sects and Splinters, The Bloodshed of Jihad, Jesus According to the Qur’an, Inside the Muslim: Earning a Hearing and Winning a Soul.

The only genuine hope a Muslim has to go to Paradise is to be killed in battle while fighting for Allah. As a “works salvation,” no Muslim can be certain of salvation while in this life.

The authors present the development of Muhammad from a young boy to receipt of his first “revelations,” through his battles and conquests, to his marriages to 11 wives (one Jewish, one “Christian,” one as young as age 9 at marriage), and finally his conquest of Mecca, though he died in Medina (June 8, 632).

A chapter is devoted to the historical rise of Islam, the affect of the Crusades, the decline of Islam in world affairs, and its most recent resurgence.

A short chapter presents the Qur’an, the primary authority in current Islam. There are seven different accounts of how Muhammad received the Qur’an. At one time, 24 different variants of the Qur’an existed, but Uthman, Caliph AD 644-56, ordered all but one copy destroyed. The remaining copy became the existing Qur’an. The Bible, both O.T. and N.T., are frequently cited in the Qur’an. The Qur’an is considered by Muslims to be the final, complete and exact revelation of Allah. The authors point out some of

the clear contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an. Contradictions within the Qur'an also are documented.

A chapter is provided on the Sunnah and Hadith, other Muslim books. These also are considered authoritative and give the detailed rules for daily Muslim living. Being ignorant of these can cause Christians to unintentionally offend devout Muslims.

The authors contribute a chapter proving God and "Allah" are not two words for the same being. There is, of course, an explanation of the "Five Pillars" of Islam, the five fundamentals every Muslim is required to do. The authors do not mention that during the month of Ramadan (One of the Five Pillars) many Muslims while fasting during the day (and sleeping) spend most of the night in joyful reveling (having been in Jerusalem once during Ramadan, I know this to be the case). Later in the book the authors point out Muslims eat two meals during the darkness hours of Ramadan.

In one chapter the authors show the contrast between the position and treatment of women in Islam and in Biblical Christianity.

In Islam salvation, if it comes at all (it depends on the will of Allah), is based on good works, not faith in the redeeming Son of God.

Islam has its own calendar and celebrations, which Christians should understand, but not accept.

From the Caners' book is learned the various sects and splinters in Islam, what Protestant Christianity might call "denominations."

The Caners make the point that the Crusades and persecutions by professing Christians is not the same as Muslim jihad, or "holy war." When Muslims persecute they are obeying Muhammad and the Qur'an. When "Christians" persecute they are disobeying Jesus and the Bible. "Love your enemies" is not part of Islam. Politically, Islam does not practice tolerance or give religious liberty in any country that it controls.

A vivid description of jihad (holy war) is given with documentation from the Qur'an and the Hadith and why a Muslim man would want to practice it. Death in a jihad is the only guarantee a Muslim has for Paradise.

The authors repeatedly emphasize the essential differences between Islam and Christianity and deal with the faults of professing Christendom as viewed by Muslims.

Jesus is mentioned 25 times in the Qur'an, but the authors point out, it is not as the Lord is revealed in Scripture.

In their concluding chapter, the Caners give "relational land mines" Christians should avoid in sharing the Gospel with Muslims, then give positive approaches to use.

I have recently read several books presenting Islam. This is one of the best, and in some ways, the best.

RAS has limited copies of this book and it is our privilege to offer it for \$10.00, plus \$1.75 P&H.

I'm thankful that Dr. Larsen sent me my first issue (of THE DISCERNER). I look forward to it.

# RESPONSES

J.A.  
Milaca, MN

Dear Friends,

Your articles in THE DISCERNER are so helpful in keeping aware of and discerning false teachings.

God bless you with increasing wisdom and discernment! You are His watchers for all who read what you write.

E. N.  
Duluth, MN

The Market-Driven Church by Gary Gilley is very good! I look forward to the next part of the review on it.

P. S.  
Eugene, OR

Thanks so much.... Great service to the Body of Christ.

K. S.  
Oldsmar, FL

... This hiding of a church's identity and changing methods to reach "today's culture" is strong in California and growing among the younger and older generations. We need "DISCERN"ment!

Thanks

M. J.  
Pleasant Hill, CA

I want you to know THE DISCERNER is greatly appreciated, what a tremendous contribution you are making to "strengthen the things that remain."

The Lord will certainly remember your faithfulness to His Word. I am in my 89<sup>th</sup> year and almost blind but am able to witness as he enables.

F. E.  
West Liskeard,  
Ontario

God bless you and your ministry team for the work and info, which you provide. I look forward to each issue to see what is happening, spiritually speaking in the Christian and non-Christian world.

J. H.  
Raymond, MS

...You and your co-workers are to be commended for how you have preserved the integrity and orthodoxy of RAS. God richly bless you and yours in these harrowing days.

D. L.  
Deerfield, IL

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