

The Discerner

the voice of... Religion Analysis Service

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 27, Number 2

April • May • June 2007

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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Published Quarterly
Price \$10.00 for 4 issues
Foreign subscriptions extra

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NEW MAILING FORMAT

As of this issue we are dropping our Roman numeral dates for the modern Arabic expiration date. This change appears on our mailing labels. See example below.

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Note: The summer months are often slow months with subscriptions and gifts. Thank you for keeping the needs of this ministry in mind when you give.

DEAR READER

The presidential election race for 2008 has provided some interesting twists that impinge on our ministry. Mitt Romney, the present governor of Massachusetts, has thrown his hat into the ring as the Republican candidate. Few may doubt his political savvy for the office, but certainly many people have concern about his religious affiliation. He is unapologetically a Mormon, but promises that his religious background will not negatively influence his decisions were he to be our next president.

Over the years RAS has written much against Mormonism, and with justification. Just recently (January-March 2007) we included an article about the Mormon interpretation of the two sticks in Ezekiel.37:15ff. This interpretation is representative of their erroneous hermeneutics but also their arrogant self-appraisal. The one stick, according to Mormon doctrine, relates to the Bible and the other stick to the Book of Mormon. Following this logic, the Book of Mormon equals, and even at times, exceeds the Bible in authority. This is just one of their brazen and anti biblical assertions in their prolific writings. .

There have been certain overtures by Evangelicals toward Mormonism of late. For instance, recently Pat Robertson of Regent University, one of the esteemed Christian universities of our nation, asked Romney to deliver the commencement address to the graduates. Years ago this would not have been even considered. According to the newspaper reports, evangelical conservative Christians in Iowa have not resisted Romney as the Republican candidate for the 2008 presidential bid. On the other hand, there are still strong voices that oppose this rich and giant cult (now 12,000,000 in the whole world) and its desire for even more influence and power. In his forum of 2,400,000 internet readers, Bill Keller of Live Prayer based in Florida, writes: "The teachings of the Mormon cult are doctrinally and theologically in complete opposition to the Absolute Truth of God's Word. There is no common ground. If Mormonism is true, then the Christian faith is a complete lie.

Romney getting elected president will ultimately lead millions of souls to the eternal flames of hell.”

These are strong words from Keller, but God’s Word is also very strong against false doctrine: “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:1,2).

Let us pray fervently for biblical truth and righteousness to prevail in our nation and in the next presidential election. The words of Amos serve us well in this regard: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never failing stream” (5:24).

Sincerely,

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

It is always timely to assess the importance of weighty theological tenets as they bear on the contemporary scene. In our lead article, Steve Lagoon, RAS Board Member and president of the Christian Apologetics Ministry, submits an up-to-date analysis of current commentators who have written on the resurrection theme. Lagoon advocates the biblical and traditional resurrection account and goes to some length to substantiate it. The bibliography is extensive and very helpful. ...Our second article by Thomas Sheehey dares to expose Shepherd's Chapel and its preacher, Arnold Murray. No doubt many of us have seen and heard his programs on late night TV. What is this ministry? Who is Arnold Murray? Why should we be warned of Shepherd's Chapel? Sheehey's picturesque comments give us quick insight into this confusing eclectic teaching.

Our book review by Dr. Ron McRoberts, RAS president, takes on heavyweight Hank Hanegraaff, who is well known for opposing Dispensationalism. McRoberts, who has also written extensively on this eschatological position, successfully wrestles against the issues that Hanegraaff espouses.

Don't forget the Quiz! There are salient things that help us identify various cults or aberrant teachings/movements. Are we aware of them?

Laurence J. Sutherland

RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

When discussing a topic that is alleged to have occurred about 2000 years ago, one might assume that viewpoints are fairly well settled. But, in fact, the battle over the resurrection of Jesus Christ is still generating great debate among scholars today at the outset of the 21st century, with intense research occurring on all sides. Yet, it is obvious that many are still unaware of the controversies concerning the reality of Christ's resurrection. It is my hope that this article will encourage those who still believe that the central teaching of the Christian faith is not a fantasy or fairytale, but a historical fact.

Early Church Belief in the Resurrection

Heretics in the early church referred to belief in the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ as "the faith of fools,"¹ and that those who believed in it were "deluded by a 'very great error.'"² Yes, it is an amazing claim to suggest that Jesus, dead and buried for three days, was restored to life, rising triumphantly from the grave. The early church father Tertullian responded to the critics that it "must be believed, because it is absurd."³ Indeed, we who believe are fools for Christ (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Christians do not suggest that the resurrection relates to our normal experiences, but rather proclaim it as a fantastic miracle. However, it is not based on the kind of blind faith that Mark Twain spoke of when he said, "Faith is believing something you know ain't so."⁴ Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is among the best-attested events in human history. When judged by the same standards historians use to weigh the reliability of other historical events, the resurrection of Christ stands with solid support.

The apostle Paul preached that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the very foundation of Christianity. He said, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . But Christ has been indeed raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15: 14, 20). For Paul, belief in the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ was not an option, but a vital fact to be defended at all costs. This same conviction con-

tinued among the church fathers during the first centuries of the Christian Church. Elaine Pagels sums up the conviction of the church fathers in referring to Tertullian who “declares that anyone who denies the resurrection of the flesh is a heretic, not a Christian.”⁵

Christ’s Resurrection Non-negotiable

As there were believers and unbelievers in the literal bodily resurrection of Christ among professing Christians in the early church, the same situation prevails today. There are those who profess Christianity, and yet deny Christ’s actual resurrection. With Tertullian, we must say that all such denials are blasphemous heresy.

Errors of Marcus Borg

For instance, Marcus Borg stated, “By the pre-Easter Jesus, I mean, of course, Jesus during His historical lifetime: a Galilean Jewish peasant of the first century, a flesh and blood figure of the past. This Jesus is dead and gone—a claim that does not deny Easter but simply recognizes that the ‘protoplasmic’ Jesus isn’t around anymore.”⁶

Borg attempts a verbal sleight of hand trick, claiming to believe in Easter, while at the same time denying its very meaning. How can you claim to believe in Easter on the one hand, and on the other deny the central message of Easter, the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Borg further stated, “I see the empty tomb and whatever happened to the corpse of Jesus to be ultimately irrelevant to the truth of Easter.”⁷ To say that the Christ’s resurrection is irrelevant to Easter is like saying that the heart and brain are irrelevant to a healthy body!

Borg went on to say, “As a child, I took it for granted that Easter meant that Jesus literally rose from the tomb. I now see Easter very differently. For me, it is irrelevant whether or not the tomb was empty. . . thus, as a Christian, I am very comfortable not knowing whether or not the tomb was empty, Indeed, the discovery of Jesus’ skeletal remains would not be a problem.”⁸

It is tragic that Borg has lost the belief in the resurrection that he once held as a child. I do not have hostility toward him, but only sadness as of one who has lost his way. I pray that he returns to the path he trod as a child. That said, it

needs to be stated that if the enemies of Christianity at its founding had found the body of Jesus Christ, it would have been the end of Christianity. And it is just at this point that Borg et al flounder, for they fail to explain the very existence of the Christian Church, if in fact, Christ did not rise from the dead!

Lights, Camera, Action!

Borg does ask a very good question, however: “Are we to understand these stories [about Christ’s resurrection] as reporting the kind of events that could have been videotaped, if one had been there with a videocamera?”⁹ The answer for Bible believing Christians must be a strong YES! Let the Bible speak for itself:

The Witness of Scripture

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1).

“While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have’” (Luke 24:36-39).

“But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.’ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. . . . Jesus stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands, Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:25-28).

“He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living” (1 Corinthians 15:5-6).

The Bible clearly doesn't allow for the kind of sophistry employed by Marcus Borg and the like. It is straightforward in affirming the literal bodily resurrection of Christ. Accordingly, anyone who denies Christ's actual resurrection is a false teacher, period!

Errors of John Dominic Crossan

John Dominic Crossan laments in a similar vein to Marcus Borg, "It is that I know thousands of Christians for whom the bodily resurrection is equated with the resurrection. They've—how would I put it—reduced it to 'do you or do you not believe that Jesus came bodily out of the tomb?' and then that means a camera could have picked up Jesus, as it were. And that's all they want to talk about. If they take resurrection to mean just that, then they say I can't be a Christian. I think that is awful."¹⁰

I think it is awful that Crossan thinks it is awful. That is, I am amazed that Crossan is surprised or offended when someone doubts his orthodoxy when he is unwilling to affirm the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Tolerance has a place, but Christians cannot tolerate blasphemy directed at our Lord Jesus Christ.

The early Christians believed in Christ's actual resurrection. This seems beyond dispute. The apostles nearly all died martyrs' deaths. It seems unlikely that they would all have been willing to die for a lie. One can argue that they were all delusional or mad, but one cannot deny that they believed they saw the risen Christ.

Further, not only do we have the testimony of over 500 hundred contemporary witnesses to the risen Christ, but we have the evidence of the empty tomb. As we have stated, if the enemies of Christianity could produce the dead body of Jesus Christ, Christianity would never have begun, let alone grow to the largest religion in the world.

But rather than producing the body, the enemies put forth a story claiming that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body, and made up the story of the resurrection. Never mind that Christ's enemies had placed a guard at the tomb to prevent the very thing from happening. But, as is so often the case, the law of unintended consequences results in Christ's enemies actually providing support for His resurrection. This is because even they acknowledge that Christ's tomb is empty.

Bishop Wright's Defense of Christ's Resurrection

At the forefront of scholars today defending Christ's resurrection is N.T. Wright, Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. Wright has done extensive historical research on the *Sitz in Leben*, that is, the historical setting of Christ's life. The results of his research are offered in his monumental study, "*The Resurrection of the Son of God*."¹¹ Wright described the purpose of this book as showing "that the normal historical proposals about the rise of resurrection faith in the early church, the normal proposals that try to explain things without the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus, simply won't work historically"¹²

For instance, says Wright, "I have shown against Gerd Ludemann that the idea of resurrection is not something which ancient people could accept easily, because they didn't know the laws of nature, whereas we moderns, with post-enlightenment science, have now discovered that resurrection can't be true. That is simply absurd [as a historical argument]"¹³

Resurrection vs. Visions

Wright continued, "I've shown against Greg Riley that the ancient pagan stories about people eating with the dead, or seeing the dead in realistic visions and so on, are completely different from the idea of the resurrection, and that the same ancient pagans who knew all about visions and the like continued to reject resurrection with scorn."¹⁴

In a debate with Crossan in March of 2005, Wright expanded this argument, "People in the ancient world had visions of people after they died, and that doesn't mean they're alive again—it means they're dead. That's the point. The ancient pagan writers were very clear about that. That's one of the reasons that you have these meals with the dead at the tomb, not to bring them back again, but as a way of making sure that Uncle Joe ain't coming back again . . . This is why Greg Riley is completely wrong in *Resurrection Reconsidered*—you wouldn't then say, well, this is basically the same thing as somebody being alive again. That's precisely what it isn't."¹⁵

When skeptics point to apparitions or visions of the dead to explain the disciples belief in Jesus' resurrection, they are just plain wrong historically. For instance, Antony G. N. Flew, in a debate with Gary Habermas stated, "My best suggestion

is that these were grief-related visions. Apparently, these are fairly common. People who have lost a husband, wife, or close relative and feel distressed about it suddenly have the feeling or seem to see the familiar person around the house and so on. I take it that these were grief-related visions, and there was nothing there that anybody else could have seen.”¹⁶

However, when one has a vision of Grandma shortly after her funeral, they don’t go and ask for a refund for her burial plot, and make preparations for her at the nursing home, because they still know (despite the vision) that they’re loved one is, in fact, dead. On the other hand, Christ’s disciples didn’t claim to have a vision of Him, but were actually with Him, walking, carrying on conversations, touching Him, eating with Him, individually and in groups (at one time up to 500 people!), over a period of 40 days. This is not the stuff of illusions and hallucinations. Further, no type of vision explains the empty tomb.

Resurrection vs. Cognitive Dissonance

Wright also claims that “I have shown that the idea of resurrection faith being generated by some kind of cognitive dissonance simply doesn’t work”¹⁷ This one is especially intriguing to me. The cognitive dissonance theory essentially states that we are uncomfortable when our actions are not in line with our beliefs and emotions.

In the case of the apostles, it is suggested, that they were so upset psychologically with Christ’s death, that it was easier to delude themselves into believing in His resurrection, than to face the fact that Christ was dead. That is, the apostles were so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and that He was going to set up a political kingdom, that when He died, they couldn’t face this contradiction to their beliefs, and so imagined that He was in fact yet alive.

Might we rather suggest that it was Christ’s enemies who in fact suffered this fate since rather than accepting the powerful evidence of the risen Christ and the empty tomb (something contrary to their beliefs), they made up a story that Christ’s disciples stole His body!

Changes from Jewish to Christian Resurrection Beliefs

Wright focuses on the great differences between Jewish beliefs and expectations concerning resurrection hope before

Christ, and the beliefs of Christians following the resurrection of Jesus. Wright calls these differences mutations (he outlines six of them). I will mention two important ones here.

Wright states that, “Resurrection as an event has split in two. . . First centuries Jews expected the resurrection . . . [to be] . . . a single event. But [for] Christian writers . . . the resurrection is now a two stage event . . . Christ the firstfruits, and then at his coming, those who belong to him.”¹⁸ Wright believes that Christ’s resurrection is the only reasonable explanation for the rise of this view among first century Jews.

A Crucified Messiah?

Wright strikes at the heart of critics of Christ’s resurrection with his (6th) mutation, in which the Jewish expectation of the Messiah as one who would establish a political kingdom and bring about a golden age is replaced by the Christian idea of a crucified and risen Messiah.

Wright states, “Nobody expected the Messiah to be raised from the dead, for the simple reason that nobody in Judaism at the time expected a Messiah would die.”¹⁹

Further, says Wright, “The disciples, at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion, were completely devastated. Everybody in their world knew that if you were following a prophet or a Messiah or a leader or whatever and that person got executed by the Roman authorities, it meant you had backed the wrong horse. Since everyone knew that a crucified Messiah was a failed Messiah, the only thing that explains why they said Jesus was the Messiah is that they really did believe He had been bodily raised from the dead.”²⁰

Wright drove this point home in a recent debate with Crossan in which he compared the followers of Jesus to a similar situation. “Supposing, three or four days later [after the death of a Jewish Messianic figure in A.D. 70], some lucky Jew who managed to escape with some friends and be hiding out somewhere saying, ‘You know, I think Simon really was the Messiah, You know, we felt God’s power at work when he was leading us. I really think he was and is God’s Anointed One.’ His friends would say, ‘You must be crazy. The Romans caught him; they killed him, just like they always do. You know perfectly well what that means. It means that he couldn’t possibly be the Messiah, because we all know that when the pagans execute somebody—celebrating their triumph over him—that

shows that he couldn't have been the Messiah.' So, without something happening next, all of that stuff goes down the tubes. I think that scene in Luke 24 . . . is spot-on in terms of first century Jewish perceptions: 'We had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel,' but the implication is, we know that the fact that they killed him shows that he can't have been. Without something to reverse that, they would say, 'we've just been living in a wonderful dream, but now it's all over and we've woken up.'"²¹

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, there may have been a movement among His faithful followers, honoring His teachings and example, such as occurred with John the Baptist after his death, but as N.T. Wright so powerfully argues, without Christ's resurrection, His followers would not have traveled to the ends of the world proclaiming Jesus as Messiah, along with the proclamation of the resurrection itself.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that just as in the early church, there are those today who take the name of Christian, and yet deny Christ's resurrection. We take no pleasure in standing against those who deny Christ, but stand we must: with Christ and against false teachers.

I want to end this article with an interesting story concerning belief in Christ's resurrection.

"About 1930, the Bolshevik, Bukharin, journeyed from Moscow to Kiev. His mission was to address a huge assembly. His subject- atheism. For a solid hour he aimed his heavy artillery at Christianity, hurling argument and ridicule. At last he was finished and viewed what seemed to be the smoldering ashes of men's faith. 'Are there any questions?' Bukharin demanded. A solitary man arose and asked permission to speak. He mounted the platform and moved close to the Communist. The audience was breathlessly silent as the man surveyed them first to the right, then to the left. At last he shouted the ancient orthodox greeting, 'Christ Is Risen!' The vast assembly arose as one man, and the response came crashing like the sound of an avalanche, 'He Is Risen Indeed!'"²²

Steve Lagoon

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ARNOLD MURRAY AND THE TEACHINGS OF SHEPHERD'S CHAPEL

Ever since 1985, Arnold Murray has been broadcasting from a small church in Gravette, Arkansas to thousands across the nation via television. If you have had trouble sleeping at night, or woke up early in the morning, and had the TV on, you may have come across him sitting at a desk, reading and commenting on the Bible, verse by verse. He regularly refers to the King James Version of the Companion Bible and Strong's Concordance. Beyond these, Murray shows a profound lack of scholarship.

Over 250 stations carry his program, although both Arbitron and Nielsen cannot give any specific numbers. Roughly 250 people attend his chapel in Gravette, Arkansas.

Murray's Appeal

Perhaps part of people's attraction to Arnold Murray and The Shepherd's Chapel is that it is the antithesis of many other TV ministries. His church, The Shepherd's Chapel, looks more like a pole barn than a crystal cathedral. Rather than a huge statue of Jesus, or a statue of Murray himself, the largest thing sitting outside The Shepherd's Chapel is a satellite dish. Murray never holds any revivals, rallies or crusades.

Nor does he speak in stadiums before thousands such as Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn. Instead of seeing charts that are 15 feet high (as does John Hagee), a 30 foot golden globe spinning in the background (as does Osteen), or 60 foot screens projecting the image of a preacher's face behind him (as do many), there are only flowers, flags and eagles behind Mr. Murray. He speaks behind a large wooden desk (perhaps bought at a local garage sale) within a sparse TV studio.

People seem drawn to his simple straight talking folksy way. Part of his charm may be his belligerent manner of attacking those he disagrees with, calling them things like "yahoos" and "yo-yos" and ministers he disagrees with he calls "revolving reverends" and "one verse Charlies," while their parishioners are called "pew potatoes." Even country superstar Loretta Lynn is a follower.

Occasionally, Murray's son, Dennis, hosts the program. But he doesn't have the same charisma as his father. We wonder what will happen to "The Shepherd's Chapel" after Arnold Murray passes away. Murray is reportedly over 80 years old, and it appears that Dennis Murray doesn't have the same following as his father.

Verse by Verse Teaching?

Murray claims to be unique in his "chapter by chapter, verse by verse" Bible teaching style (known also as expository preaching). Is he not aware of the many great expository preachers such as John MacArthur? When one listens to him rail against other Bible teachers, one might surmise that Murray is the only one who really knows the "truth." He often notes that most churches aren't really churches, but places where they follow "the traditions of men," rather than God.

For all the emphasis on verse by verse teaching, Murray does not always strictly practice what he preaches. For example, in Murray's teaching on James chapter 3, Murray went from James 3:1-4, jumped over verses 5-11, and went immediately to verse 12 (February 27, 2006 broadcast). When it comes to his favorite doctrines Murray can play "biblical hopscotch" just as easily as the "one verse Charlies" he criticizes. Just when you find one book, Murray moves to another. This is true especially when it comes to mentioning the Kenites, or "the fly away theory," Murray's term for the rapture.

"You're in Church"

Christians should be concerned about Murray's influence on his followers. One by one, they are leaving churches and following this "homespun hillbilly" where their "church" attendance is marked by turning on the TV and watching Murray. As Murray likes to point out frequently on his program, "You're in church when you watch us." While we understand that some are unable to attend traditional church services because of health issues, God's best will is regular attendance and fellowship in a local church (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Further, Murray brags about the fact that he never begs for money. He doesn't need to. Those that send money to Murray have often quit going to church, and instead send their "tithes and offerings" to him.

According to Wikipedia, Murray has a Board of Directors,

but no names are given, nor is the board mentioned in any of his monthly newsletters. Nor does Murray or The Shepherd's Chapel belong to the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA). He doesn't even release an annual statement of his income and expenditures. His own sheep don't even know where his money goes. He mocks those who "beg for money," but still never releases a statement of the finances of The Shepherd's Chapel.

The Only End Time Messenger?

In his "Answer to Critics," Murray says: "Some 'researchers' say that I claim to be God's exclusive messenger for this era. I never thought this, much less claimed it. Such a claim is another outright lie. Those 'researchers' cannot prove it because I have never said this." Or did he?

In the April 13, 2007 broadcast, a listener related in a letter that "I was listening to another preacher..." Before proceeding any further, Murray immediately jumped in and quipped: "Shame on you" to the letter writer. Murray's response seems to suggest that listening to preachers other than Murray is wrong. According to Murray, the list of those who are qualified to be "God's messenger" gets shorter. But when asked to name the names of various other end time messengers, Murray is silent, and just says "there's not many — a few, but not many."

Murray's Eclectic Theology

Arnold Murray has picked from a theological buffet of various cultic and occultic doctrines, and comes up with his own brand of religious stew. For example, Murray takes his modalistic view of the Godhead from the Oneness Pentecostals and Emmanuel Swedenborg. He takes his views of annihilation (as opposed to a literal Hell) from the Jehovah's Witnesses. Murray takes the view that all mankind had spirit bodies in the pre-existence from the Mormons. His views about British-Israelism come from Herbert W. Armstrong and Mary Baker Eddy.

From the world of the occult and paganism, Murray takes the idea of an incubus and succubus, namely, that Eve (flesh) had sex with Satan (spirit) and gave birth to Cain.

Murray's View of Holidays

Like many cults, Murray criticizes the celebration of holi-

days. For instance, when discussing Easter, Murray springs into a diatribe about “Ishtar,” and asks where do we find Easter bunnies and Easter egg hunts in the Easter story. What he fails to notice, or at least mention, is that many of the Jewish festivals coincided with many of the pagan holidays. Both were regulated by the lunar calendar, which happened to be the most precise “calendar” that they had prior to digital time clocks, global positioning satellites and daylight savings time. Just the same, when we celebrate Easter as Christians, we are focusing on the resurrection of Christ, and are not distracted by the worldly trappings associated with it.

Murray uses the same warn-out arguments against the celebration of holidays that cultists such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have used for a long time, and it would not be surprising if Murray stole his ideas from them. Murray has never really been much of an original thinker in regards to the Bible. Instead, he has cleverly picked up his beliefs from a mish-mash of ideas that various cults have served up before at their “theological buffet table.” Murray just peppers it with his own brand of special spiritual poisoned seasoning.

Christmas is another target of Murray’s. But Murray has an unusual twist on Christmas. He insists that December 25th is the date of Christ’s conception rather than His birth. This allows him to appear to honor Christmas along with others, while in actuality, he gives it this strange twist.

Murray’s Support of the Companion Bible

Murray’s support for E. Bullinger’s Companion Bible (Murray loved the Companion Bible so much that he even copyrighted his own interpretation of it called: “The Shepherd’s Bible” {Registration number TX-42-142}). This creates an interesting dilemma for Murray. This is because of Bullinger’s support of the rapture belief (a belief that Murray regularly castigates) that suggests that those who believe it have the ‘mark of the beast.’ On the September 13, 2006 broadcast, a viewer said she had read three books on Bullinger and found out that he (Bullinger) believed in the rapture. In other words, the viewer’s point was, since Bullinger accepts the rapture theory, he has (according to Murray) the “mark of the beast.” She then asked Dennis Murray about this troubling dilemma, to which no real answer was given.

Is Murray Really a Former Marine?

On numerous occasions, Murray has claimed to be a former Marine who fought in the Korean War. No broadcast seems to go by without Murray referring to himself as “this old Sergeant” or “this old Marine.” In fact, he claims to be one of the “chosen few” who survived a fierce battle with the Chinese during the Korean War. Is this true?

As a U.S. Navy veteran, (both active and reserve), with 24 years of military service, I’ve noticed a few things that just don’t seem right when I watch his program. For someone who claims to be as “gung ho” as Murray (once a Marine, always a Marine), he offers no proof of his military service. He only asks the viewer to take his word for it.

For example, while he displays an American flag, a white flag, flowers and two statues of a bald eagle, the viewers of “The Shepherd’s Chapel” never see any of Murray’s military awards. Even his Honorable Discharge or his DD 214 is never displayed within the range of the TV cameras. Not even on the wall behind him. Or did he leave the service under other than honorable conditions? There are also no medals, ribbons, patches, uniforms, photos, plaques, insignias, emblems, crests, seals, certificates, shadowboxes, flag boxes, or jackets. Not even a Marine’s hat sitting on top of his desk, or a Combat Action Ribbon, or a souvenir from an enemy combatant. What about the Marine’s ring, garrison cap or a sword? Not even a key chain or a pin on his lapel.

Murray claims to have been wounded in Korea, but displays no Purple Heart. How about some kind of a military jacket or hat when Murray shows clips of himself on various archaeological expeditions? He also makes no mention of belonging to any veterans groups, such as the VFW or the American Legion. Somewhat strange for someone who claims to be one of our country’s “Devil Dogs!”

Since Murray is allegedly a Veteran of a Foreign War, namely the Korean War, I contacted the VFW and asked about Murray’s status with the VFW. Certainly Murray’s service in Korea would make him eligible to be a member of the VFW. However, according to Matt Nute, Membership Eligibility and Processing Coordinator of the VFW, Murray is not a member of the VFW. Of course, as Mr. Nute says: “This

does not mean that he was never a member, but simply that we do not show him as a current member.”

But for someone who wears his military service on his sleeve as does Murray at every turn — or in his case every program — Murray’s absence from groups like the VFW seems tantamount to dereliction of duty. If he’s so proud of his military service, why doesn’t he serve as an honor guard for military funerals, or serve as an Officer for the Sea Cadets or Civil Air Patrol?

While some might say that those who fought in earlier wars were silent about their battles, consider those who survived the attack on Pearl Harbor and D-Day. Their hats are full of pins signifying their survival in combat. They proudly speak of their friends in combat and visit memorials, reunions and anniversaries almost with religious fervor. They may never speak a word, but they always display their military pride. But not Arnold Murray!

It was also reported earlier on Wikipedia that the white flag behind Murray is the flag of the United States Marine Corps. However, this is false. The Marine Corps flag is primarily red, and has very little white in it at all. When I brought this up to the editors of Wikipedia, the statement soon disappeared.

On one program, Murray was heckled by a member of the studio audience who cried out “blasphemy.” Murray responded by asking someone to “take a 9mm to that boy” (December 28, 1998 broadcast). This was certainly not behavior honoring to his professed service in the marines or to God. On another occasion, Murray lashed out at a listener. In a program from April 26, 2007, a listener questioned Murray’s teaching, and Murray in anger responded by saying: “This old Marine Sergeant would like to have you aside for five minutes. If you’re gonna try to correct the old Pastor, I would like you to know what you’re talking about, because you certainly do not.” Murray then ended this blistering attack on the listener by adding, “I say that with all loving kindness.”

For the record, like other writers in various countercult publications who have attempted to obtain information from either Arnold Murray or the Shepherd’s Chapel, we have all been met with absolute silence. I have also spoken with Murray’s son, Dennis, and have been told to write down my

questions and send them to Dennis Murray. They were not answered.

Thomas D. Sheehey

Thomas Sheehey, a graduate of Crown College, served for 24 years in the Navy Reserve and distinguished himself as being deployed for a record 154 days aboard the USS Nimitz. He writes from time to time on countercult themes. His email is Sheehey@yahoo.com

BOOK REVIEW

THE APOCALYPSE CODE¹

By Hank Hanegraaff

Reviewed by Ronald E. McRoberts, PhD

The primary thrust of Hank Hanegraaff's new (2007) book, *The Apocalypse Code*, is an attack on dispensational eschatology. The author, better known as the host of the Bible Answer Man radio broadcast, has been reluctant to declare his allegiance to a particular eschatological system, but his statements place him squarely in the partial preterist camp. Partial preterists regard the events of the book of Revelation, with the exception of the last two or three chapters, as having occurred during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and/or the fall of Rome. Further, they regard Matthew 24, Matthew 25:31-46, and the book of Daniel, as also referring to events that occurred in the first century AD. Partial preterists, however, still generally hold to a bodily return of Christ to earth at a future date. Thus, readers of *The Apocalypse Code* should be aware that the author is essentially a partial preterist, albeit a covert one, and that the basic tenets of partial preterism are directly at odds with those of dispensationalism.

This review focuses on four areas: (1) the book title, (2) the target of the attack, (3) the author's interpretive methods, and (4) ethical thresholds. In the first sentence of the Introduction to *The Apocalypse Code*, Hanegraaff states, "In 1997 Hal Lindsey published *Apocalypse Code*." Lindsey, of course, is the author of numerous popularized versions of dispensational eschatology beginning with *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. Thus, from the very outset Hanegraaff exploits Lindsey's book with the titles differing only by inclusion of the word, *The*. Despite the exploitation of Lindsey's title, the brunt of Hanegraaff's attack is borne by Tim LaHaye, author of the *Left Behind* series. Hanegraaff's rationale for the attack on LaHaye is that the latter has assumed the role of "standard-bearer for Lindsey's brand of eschatology." One can only wonder, however, why Hanegraaff focuses his attack on a fiction writer rather than on modern dispensational stalwarts

such as Walvoord, Pentecost, and Ryrie. In fact, Ryrie, who literally wrote the book on dispensationalism², is not mentioned even once.

The framework for the book is constructed around the principles of Hanegraaff's hermeneutical methodology which he calls Exegetical Eschatology or e². He organizes these principles using the letters of the acronym LIGHTS: L refers to the literal principle, I refers to illumination, G refers to the grammatical principle, H refers to the historical principle, T refers to the typology principle, and S refers to the principle of scriptural synergy. Although the author deserves credit for a useful acronym, only four of the principles refer to interpretive methods, and none of the principles may be originally attributed to him.

A considerable portion of the book is devoted to describing these exegetical principles, although there is little actual exegesis. Hanegraaff's assertions used to illustrate these principles seem specifically designed to challenge dispensational eschatology; for example: (1) there will be no pre-tribulational rapture (p. 55) and no 7-year tribulation (p. 61); (2) the fulfillment by Israel of any national destiny as a separate entity following the Rapture and Tribulation is "the by-product of a fertile imagination" (p. 54); (3) the great harlot of the book of Revelation is Israel (p. 119); (2) there is no biblical precedent for God favoring Jews over Palestinians, particularly pertaining to the land promised to Abraham's physical descendants (p. 181); and (5) God's promise to David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne was fulfilled when Christ ascended to Heaven (p. 200). One could only wish that the author had been as diligent in articulating a coherent partial preterist eschatology as he was in criticizing dispensational eschatology.

Scholarly debate concerning the principles of exegesis and the fundamental tenets of theological systems they yield is entirely legitimate. However, Hanegraaff meanders dangerously close to ethical thresholds if, in fact, he does not actually cross them. Three examples suffice. First, as previously noted, Hanegraaff has shamelessly exploited Lindsey's title. From the perspective of this reviewer, who makes his living publishing in scientific journals, this exploitation is, at the very least, marginally unethical. Second, Hanegraaff charges LaHaye with racial discrimination on the basis of the latter's

acceptance of Scripture's division of people into Jews and Gentiles (p. xx). Third, on two occasions (p.40, 43), for no relevant reason, Hanegraaff links J.N. Darby, regarded by many as having systematized dispensationalism, with Charles Darwin, whose books led to the concept of evolution. The only known connection between Darby and Darwin is that they lived in the British Isles at the same time in the 1800s.

In summary, *The Apocalypse Code* describes Hanegraaff's hermeneutical principles, although none of them is original or unique to the author and little new insight is provided. The most disappointing feature of the book is that it makes no attempt to develop a viable, well-articulated alternative to the system it criticizes. From a scholarly perspective, about the only utility of the book is that it identifies preterist challenges to dispensational eschatology.

References

- ¹ Hanegraaff, H. 2007. *The Apocalypse Code*. Thomas Nelson, Nashville.
- ² Ryrie, C.C. 1995. *Dispensationalism*. Moody Press, Chicago.

QUIZ - Identification of the Cult or Aberrant Group/Movement

1. E-Meter and Thetans
 - a. Transcendental Meditation
 - b. Satanism
 - c. Scientology
 - d. Christian Science
2. Telesstial/terrestrial futures
 - a. Mormons
 - b. Bahaiism
 - c. Jehovah's Witnesses
 - d. New Age
3. Lodges
 - a. Kabbalah
 - b. Armstrongism
 - c. Hare Krishna
 - d. Freemasonry
4. Mass marriages
 - a. New Apostolic Church
 - b. Unification Church
 - c. Theosophy
 - d. Oneness Pentecostalism
5. Russian background
 - a. Yoga
 - b. Bahaiism
 - c. Freemasonry
 - d. Theosophy
6. New World Translation
 - a. Secular Humanism
 - b. Jehovah's Witnesses
 - c. Armstrongism
 - d. New Age
7. Jewish Mysticism
 - a. Bahaiism
 - b. Christian Science
 - c. Hare Krishna
 - d. Kaballah

8. Reincarnation

- ___ a. New Age
- ___ b. Atheism
- ___ c. Mormons
- ___ d. Swedenborgianism

9. Yoga

- ___ a. Gnosticism
- ___ b. Theosophy
- ___ c. Transcendental Meditation
- ___ d. Christian Science

10. Beth Sarim, California

- ___ a. Unification Church
- ___ b. Eckankar
- ___ c. Jehovah's Witnesses
- ___ d. Freemasonry

Answers: 1. (c); 2. (a); 3. (d); 4 (b); 5. (d); 6 (b); 7(d); 8 (a); 9. (c); 10(c)

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