

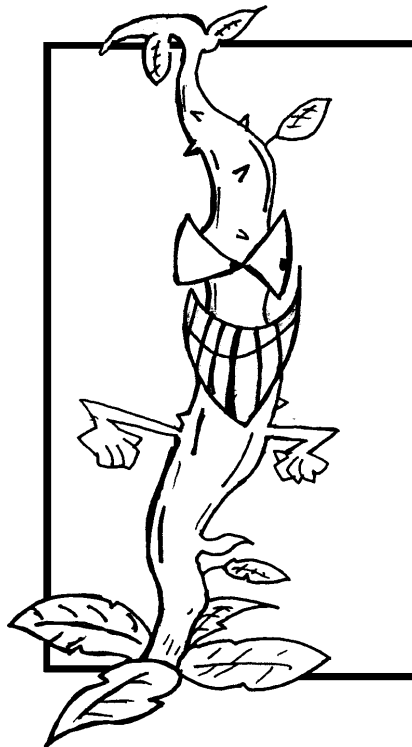
Beware The Rumor Weed

by Joy Veinot

Don't you just love the *VeggieTales* videos? They communicate deep truths to children in a way that is both comical and easy to understand. One of our favorites is *Larry-Boy and the Rumor Weed*. In the story, Larry-Boy, the large superhero cucumber, tries to save the town from a giant Rumor Weed. The Rumor Weed was sown by a small "little white lie" told about another character by two "kiddy-veggies," Junior Asparagus and Laura Carrot, but grew to monstrous and dangerous proportions as it was passed around "Veggie town," Bumblyburg. The moral of the story is that little "harmless" rumors can grow to be ugly and dangerous ones if they aren't "rooted out" when they are still manageable.

Since the beginning of time, it has been easy to get "inadvertently" caught up in gossip where real harm can be done to real people. In our day, however, it is easier than ever to get caught up in the rumor mill: through the talk shows that have become a ubiquitous feature of our modern cultural landscape or the high-tech gossip that flies to our e-mail boxes begging to be believed and forwarded. Not all rumors and hoaxes are "dangerous" by any means—many are just plain silly. The following is a tongue-in-cheek amalgam (author unknown) of some rumor-weed e-mails we have received:

"I was on my way to the post office to pick up my case of free M&M's (sent to me because I forwarded an e-mail to five other people, celebrating the fact that the year 2000 is 'MM' in Roman numerals), when I ran into a friend whose neighbor, a young man, was home recovering from having been served a rat in his bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken (which is predictable, since as everyone knows, there's no actual chicken in Kentucky Fried Chicken, which is why the government made them change their name to KFC).



"Anyway, one day this guy went to sleep and when he awoke he was in his bathtub and it was full of ice and he was sore all over and when he got out of the tub he realized that HIS KIDNEY HAD BEEN STOLEN. He saw a note on his mirror that said, 'Call 911!' but he was afraid to use his phone because it was connected to his computer, and there was a virus on his computer that would destroy his hard drive if he opened an e-mail entitled 'Join the crew!'

"He knew it wasn't a hoax because he himself was a computer programmer who was working on software to prevent a global disaster in which all the computers get together and distribute the \$250.00 Neiman-Marcus cookie recipe under the leadership of Bill Gates. (It's true - I read it all last week in a mass e-mail from BILL GATES HIMSELF, who was also promising me a free Disney World vacation and \$5,000 if I would forward the e-mail to everyone I know.)

"The poor man then tried to call 911 from a pay phone to report his missing kidney, but a voice on the line first asked him to press #90, which unwittingly gave the bandit full access to the phone line at the guy's expense. Then reaching into the coin-return slot he got jabbed with an HIV-infected needle around which was wrapped a note that said, 'Welcome to the world of AIDS.'

"Luckily he was only a few blocks from the hospital - the one where that little boy who is dying of cancer is, the one whose last wish is for everyone in the world to send him an e-mail and the American Cancer Society has agreed to pay him a nickel for every e-mail he receives. I sent him two e-mails and one of them was a bunch of x's and o's in the shape of an angel (if you get it and forward it to more than 10 people, you will have good luck but for only 10 people you will only have OK luck and

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“... Weed” (Continued from page 1)
if you send it to fewer than 10
people you will have **BAD LUCK
FOR SEVEN YEARS**).

“So anyway the poor guy
tried to drive himself to the hos-
pital, but on the way he noticed
another car driving without its
lights on. To be helpful, he
flashed his lights at him and
was promptly shot as part of a
gang initiation.

“Send THIS to all the friends
who send you their mail and you
will receive 4 green M&Ms — if
you don’t, the owner of Proctor
and Gamble will report you to
his Satanist friends and you will
have more bad luck: you will get
sick from the Sodium Laureth
Sulfate in your shampoo, your
spouse will develop a skin rash
from using the antiperspirant
which clogs the pores under
your arms, and the U.S. govern-
ment will put a tax on your e-
mails forever.

“I know this is all true ‘cause
I read it on the Internet.”¹

Gullible’s Travels

The foregoing satirical e-mail, while
humorous, pinpoints a problem. Each
individual element of the story was culled from
e-mails which millions of people received,
ostensibly believed, and forwarded to their
friends. A week does not go by that we do
not receive multiple e-mail myths, hoaxes, and
legends ranging from the almost believable
to the downright absurd. For example, we have
received numerous e-mails asking us to write
to the FCC to protest RM-2493, which is
supposedly Atheist Madalyn Murray
O’Hair’s attempt to ban all religious
broadcasting from the air waves.² This story
has been going around since the early 1970s
and was as untrue then as it is now. Here’s
where the story veers off into the absurd—
O’Hair is dead. She disappeared mysteriously
in 1995 and her remains were found in Texas
during January of this year—she had been
the victim of a murder-for-money scheme. Did
that stop the e-mail campaign in its tracks?
Not at all! It just evolved and was renamed:

**THOUGH SHE’S DEAD AND
HAS JUST BEEN LOCATED
AFTER 5 YEARS, THIS LADY
CONTINUES TO HAUNT US
FROM HER SHALLOW GRAVE.**

While she lived, O’Hair was indeed an
enemy of our faith and opposed to every-
thing Christians hold dear. But the woman
is dead, and the story is just plain false.
Humanly speaking, it is easy to believe and

pass on the worst about someone with
whom we so strongly disagree, but Chris-
tians, out of all people, must take care to be
accurate and truthful in what we say, even
about our enemies.

Even though this particular myth was
debunked years ago, the story is still
circulating on the net. It seems that human
beings don’t like the truth to get in the way
of a “good story.” The next example is a
reliable perennial that refuses to die.

Satanic Soap Salesman

Have you heard Proctor and Gamble is
just a front for the Prince of Darkness—
Satan? This ridiculous story came to life
when someone noticed, at the height of a
“satanic panic” that swept through our
culture, that the giant soap manufacturer
had the moon and stars in its logo. Thus
began the pernicious rumor that Proctor and
Gamble was secretly a satanic company that
showed the world its true colors by using a
satanic logo. Let’s just put on our thinking
caps for a second—if P&G were trying to
keep its affiliation with Beelzebub a *secret*,
would they really put a satanic logo on all
their products? Just how stupid are they? If
all Satanists are that dumb, they probably
pose little threat. ☺ Proctor and Gamble,
meanwhile, obstinately refuses to fess up,
insisting that the logo has no hidden
meanings or dark undertones.

“Procter & Gamble maintains that
the moon and stars in its logo
represents a picture of the ‘man
in the moon looking at the stars,
which represents the original 13
colonies,’ according to a 1982
Los Angeles Times article.”³

Well, everybody knows Satanists are a
bunch of liars anyway, so P&G’s denials largely
fell on deaf ears. Then, throwing fuel on the fire,
word went out on the net that the president of
P&G appeared on the *Phil Donahue Show* and
admitted, nay, *bragged* about his satanic con-
nections. No doubt, he and his stockholders
felt such an admission would help their bottom
line. More recently, this account was revised to
assert it was the *Sally Jesse Raphael Show* on
which the knave appeared. The problem? It
never happened! Neither the president of P&G
nor any executive of the company ever appeared
on either the *Phil Donahue Show* or the *Sally
Jesse Raphael Show*! In August of 1999,
Maurice Tunick, the executive producer of the
Sally Jesse Raphael Show, issued a statement
declaring:

“Anyone who claims to have
seen such a broadcast is either
mistaken or lying. It never hap-
pened!”⁴

Undoubtedly, we shall soon receive e-mail confirmation that Mr. Tunick is a Satanist also, and we shall be asked to sacrificially boycott a show we wouldn't dream of watching in any case.

Don't You Believe It!

“Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy, do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread...” (Isaiah 8:12-13, NIV)

Although the Internet makes spreading such slanderous rumors easier and faster than ever before, tale bearing always has been a popular pastime for the masses, and rumors of conspiracy seem to be the all-time favorite type of tale to bear.

It seems that no matter who you are, there is a conspiracy theory tailor-made to fit into your worldview. Many black Americans truly believe AIDS is part of a government conspiracy to wipe out their race. Nut-hatch extremists, both black and white (or something in between ☺), are convinced “the Jews” really “run everything behind the scenes” and are conspiring to take over the world. Or, perhaps, it is the Illuminati, the Masons, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Rothschilds or the Rockefeller, or the fill-in-the-blank who are conspiring to seize control. Many liberals seemed to believe a “vast right-wing conspiracy” was somehow responsible for the endless scandals that enmeshed the Clinton administration, while the right-wing Patriot movements were seeing black helicopters everywhere and believing UN tanks were fixin' to roll down Main Street. Scary tales.

Isn't it amazing how easy it is to spot a ridiculous conspiracy theory when it is leveled against one's own group or religion? And how difficult it is to carefully inspect our own beliefs for signs of imbalance or outright paranoia?

Ideas Have Consequences

Some may wonder what harm is really done by the conspiracy theories or popular rumors that make the rounds. Who gets hurt? Historically, this human penchant is *far* from harmless, with wars and genocide often the direct result of ideas that have put down roots. *Ideas are not harmless!* They play out in the real world. Karl Marx' brainchild of a Utopian “worker's paradise” was a *fine* idea—one that ended up in loss of freedom, gulags, death by starvation or the sword for countless millions in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, *everywhere* his fine idea was exported, death and destruction followed in its wake. Ever hear of the killing fields of Cambodia? Ever wonder why they had to build walls to keep the people *in* the “people's paradise?”

Then, there are often terrible consequences of rumors, myths, and fables. Hitler didn't dream up the “final solution” all by his little lonesome. The scourge of the twentieth century did not emerge from a vacuum. Myths and fables about Jews eating Gentile children and secretly committing other atrocities made the rounds for centuries and only *culminated* in this terrible holocaust. Adolf Hitler never could have wrought such destruction if so many “good” Germans had not bought into the ludicrous notion that International Jewry was dangerous, evil, and bent on world domination. Ideas do have consequences.

All of humanity is susceptible to believing false rumors that coincide with our particular worldview. American Christians are certainly not immune and have fallen for some outrageous lies told with straight faces to naïve and trusting audiences.

Satanic Panic

During the 1970s, a man named Mike Warnke came along and

convinced millions of Christians he had been a high priest of Satan who had converted to Christianity. Millions who bought his best-selling book *The Satan Seller* accepted his fantastic tale at face value. The Christian community really didn't question it. The seed was sown ... Warnke became an immensely popular speaker at churches and conferences giving his “testimony.” In the process, he influenced millions of people to believe there was a vast satanic conspiracy afoot in the land—hitherto unknown and viciously anti-Christian. The conversion tale was so exhilarating that no one stopped to ask, “Is it true?” Not only that, Warnke's book spawned others, every one more sensational and outlandish than the last. In July of 1993, Mike Hertenstein, from Jesus People USA, came out with his book *Selling Satan* in which he proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that Warnke had been perpetrating a hoax. He and co-author, Jon Trott, showed Warnke's facts and dates just didn't add up. *Cornerstone Magazine*⁵, in an article by Hertenstein and Trott, even published a picture of Warnke taken at his wedding, looking for all the world like a very meek and mild, close-cropped young man, just at the time when he supposedly had six-inch fingernails and waist-length, white hair!

The Ugly Rumor Weed Grows

Sadly, it seems books exposing popular figures and movements as frauds are not nearly as widely read nor as readily believed as sensational accounts of dangerous alleged conspiracies, and today, many Christians still are unaware of Warnke's hoax. Added to that, the movement within the Church Warnke, perhaps inadvertently, sparked soon developed a life of its own, impervious to Warnke's exposure as a fraud. His one lie quickly bred ten more, and fairly soon, Christian bookstores were well-stocked with first-hand accounts of people who were either claiming to have been highly placed Satanists (converted, of course) or horribly abused victims of Satanists. Loren Stratford told her “story” (a highly fictionalized account, it turns out) in her book *Satan's Underground*,⁶ but she was quickly outdone by *Rebecca Brown, M.D.*⁷ and others.

It wasn't long before these accounts (and others—both Christian and secular) spawned an urban legend that was widely believed—with the help of Sally Jesse Roseanne Geraldo Raphael—that black-robed bands of Satanists were routinely sacrificing children in wooded areas outside of nearly every town. Many thousands of children allegedly were kidnapped *every year* for this purpose. As the “rumor weed” grew, it became “common knowledge” that babies were being specially bred just to be sacrificed. It wasn't long before “everyone knew” that law enforcement agencies and the court system had been thoroughly infiltrated by these monsters. The detailed accounts of ritualistic abuse grew increasingly bizarre as the legend picked up steam, and fairly soon, ritual abuse victims were coming out of the woodwork. Therapists were astounded to “discover” how many apparently normal young women and men were harboring deep, dark secrets of long-repressed maltreatment at the hands of the people they trusted the most. No one could have predicted how much damage this beastly “weed” was about to inflict upon secular society and the Church.

A quirky confluence of events—psychiatric adoption of the highly controversial notion of “repressed memories;”⁸ cultural consensus formed by such secular best sellers as *Sybil*⁹ and *Michelle Remembers*;¹⁰ radical feminists searching for an abusive man behind every bush; large numbers of Christians suddenly convinced there was a vast satanic conspiracy; society's general embrace of victimology—spawned the Satanic Ritual Abuse

(Continued on next page)

“. . . Weed” (Continued from page 3)

movement. This horribly destructive phenomenon washed across the land like a hurricane and has yet to completely subside, although there are hopeful signs the tide may be turning back to sanity.

The Satanic Ritual Abuse movement stormed into the Church, destroyed many individuals and families in its wake, and we believe, will be seen one day (and rightfully so) as the “Salem Witch Trials” of the twentieth century. Fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, pastors, elders, and respected Christian leaders, were accused of heinous crimes by their own daughters and (less often) sons. Innocent men and women who loved their children were being accused of being secret Satanists—members of secret satanic cults—who had forced their own children to perform sex acts, or ritually murder babies, or both. The accusers themselves (the very people who supposedly had been horribly abused) were completely unaware of their dark past. They suddenly “recovered memories” of the abuse usually under the guidance of a helpful (often Christian) therapist whom they typically had gone to see to help them with an eating disorder (such as bulimia or anorexia). Sometimes therapeutic hypnotism or drugs were involved in the “recovery” of these alleged memories. Sometimes the power of suggestion alone, either from a therapist or gleaned from one of the numerous books churned out by the “survivor movement,” was enough to convert a loving daughter into an angry “abuse victim.”

Exposing the dragon

“John Proctor: There might also be a dragon with five legs in my house, but no one has ever seen it.

Reverend Parris: We are here, Your Honor, precisely to discover what no one has ever seen.”

—Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*¹¹

“If you don’t remember your abuse, you are not alone.” Many women don’t have memories, and some never get memories. This doesn’t mean they weren’t abused.”

—Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, *The Courage to Heal*¹²

Incredibly, their therapists and the “survivor industry” told these “victims” it was not necessary to *prove* they had been abused. They claimed that absolutely *no collaborating evidence* was necessary to bring charges or lawsuits against their alleged abuser or abusers!¹³ All they needed were their “memories”—even if these memories were “fuzzy,” “vague,” or even if *no “memories” were forthcoming*—no matter how hard the patient worked to “remember.” Incredibly, the victims were encouraged to hold onto their victimization, and go forward with lawsuits and accusations, even if subsequent inquiry into times and circumstances proved that these “memories” did not correspond to reality. For example, young women claimed to have given birth to a sacrificial baby or two, but no one in their life (teachers, friends, doctors, etc.) recalled them having been pregnant within the alleged time frame. Also, in these cases, there was no recollection by friends and/or family of the terrible abuse that purportedly occurred and no convincing evidence that the alleged abuse had marred the child’s personality or scarred his or her body. Meanwhile, law enforcement came up with no physical evidence to corroborate the accounts of the accusers.¹⁴

If mother or dad objected, or if aunts, uncles, teachers, friends, etc., tried to defend themselves or to simply set the record straight, they were often as not accused of being either “part of the conspiracy” or “in denial.” As memory expert Dr. Elizabeth Loftus states, in her excellent book, *The Myth of Repressed Memories*:

“Denial was the ever-present word, the inherent unalterable, indisputable truth. Survivors are in denial. Families

are in denial. Child abusers are in denial. ‘Denial’ is the answer to every question. If accused family members have nothing to say, it’s because they are guilty; if they claim innocence, they are trying to hide something; if they don’t remember an event the way the survivor remembers it, they are in denial. There was always an answer and the answer always involved the word ‘denial.’”¹⁵

Simply to attempt to persuade the accuser/“victim” that what he or she “remembered” did not correspond to reality often resulted in being cut-off from any relationship with them. Everyone was expected to “believe the victim” *without question*, and families were tragically divided—child from parents, sibling from sibling. Family members were often “forced to choose” who to believe, and who to “side with.” Often times, the “victim” ended up alone with their memories and with their therapists and/or support group, which only locked them more deeply into the sad delusion.¹⁶

We presume the majority of therapists and “care-givers” who are heavily involved in this tragedy are well intentioned, but sadly, often as deluded as their patients. I (Joy) talked to a Christian therapist who claimed her specialty was counseling “survivors” of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA). She earnestly told me that I just wouldn’t believe the type of people who are *really* secret satanic cultists, informing me that *most* were upstanding men and women in the community and church who gave no appearance of evil at all. Well, silly me . . . I asked her why, then, since they *seemed* so upstanding and righteous, did she *believe* they were, in fact, Satan’s minions? What type of *evidence* had she found to support her patient’s accusations of murder, rape, child molestation, and sacrifice? Her answer chilled me. *Evidence*, she asked? Well, whatever did I mean by “evidence?” I answered, well, you know—bones, blood, teeth, fingerprints, black robes, altars, eyewitnesses—the Perry Mason stuff. To which she replied, Oh no, there’s nothing like that. These people have connections within the police departments and judges, up to the highest levels in the nation. Evidence like you’re asking for will never be found. It was an astounding conversation, and one I will never forget. How do we know there *is* a conspiracy? Because there is no evidence!

Many people just don’t seem to recognize the danger to all of us in this type of thinking. Our judicial system, based upon the presumption of innocence, is the only thing that keeps us safe from the Inquisitions and pogroms of the past. Don’t people understand that if we once eliminate the “burden of proof” for reasons of expedience today, it will not be there tomorrow when *we* are unjustly accused? But that is exactly what the “survivor industry” has done.

Consequently, with nary a shred of evidence, and sometimes based solely on identification of alleged “symptoms of abuse” that could fit virtually anyone,¹⁷ the accused are sometimes imprisoned, often sued, with their careers, reputations, and families ruined. The worst aspect of all this is the emotional toll such egregious accusations take on innocent and loving parents. Words often cannot express the feelings of those so accused and shunned by their own children.

What’s the harm, anyway?

“Avoid being tentative about your repressed memories. Do not just tell them; express them as truth. If months or years down the road, you find you are mistaken about details, you can always apologize and set the record straight.”¹⁸

According to Renee Fredrickson, author of another popular “survivor” manual, it really is not such a *big deal* if your “memo-

ries” even turn out to be just figments of your imagination. So what if you happen to have accused your father, mother, grandmother or brother of being a satanic high priest who conducted orgies and murdered babies and small children? So what if you turned them in to the child protection authorities or made them the target of a police investigation? So what if they lost their job, their friends, their dignity, their reputation, and in some cases, their freedom... No worries... You can always “set the record straight” later. What is Ms. Fredrickson smoking? Who could POSSIBLY straighten out the mess that is now your family?

Part of the problem the Church has had in dealing with the issue of recovered memories and accusations of long-repressed abuse is that the victim’s stories are so heart-rending and compelling. It almost seems, well, unchristian to doubt any detail, no matter how bizarre.

Nevertheless, what hasn’t been heard is the voice of the accused—the people whose lives have been turned upside down and nearly destroyed by false accusations. Typical is the story of Alan Nash,¹⁹ a former Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) pastor from North Dakota. His daughter, Raydene, while on a trip to Canada in 1993, suddenly recovered “memories” that implicated him in appalling crimes. Raydene, a grown woman, suddenly “remembered” when she was child of 11, she and her 12-year-old brother (who, by the way, vehemently repudiated her story) had been present while Nash smothered a baby he had allegedly fathered with a 17-year-old girl. She also “remembered” her father had conducted orgies and sodomized young boys. The alleged crimes were reported to and investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police along with the North Dakota Child Protection Services.

The upshot? Nash’s life was turned completely upside down. Without Nash’s knowledge, the SDA administration conducted interviews with his daughter. Her “recovered memories” of his (supposedly ongoing) criminal acts were assembled in a file Nash was not even told about, much less given the chance to refute. One problem with secret files is that they have a way of going public. According to Nash, portions of that file were shared amongst SDA leaders across the nation. Some of this false information “leaked” onto the denominational gossip “grapevine.”

In May 1995, Nash was “downsized” out of the ministry. He was told this action was necessitated by financial considerations due to a short fall in the tithe income that paid pastor’s salaries. By this time, he was hearing the gossip about his daughter’s “recovered memories” but the administration denied her accusations were in any way connected to his termination. He lost his pastorate, and along with the pastorate, he and his family lost their home—they had to move out of the parsonage. For one year, this homeless family was forced to move in with his wife’s parents. During the ensuing months, Nash became painfully aware that some church administrators in Canada and the United States were shying away from rehiring him because of his daughter’s allegations. Nash’s wife, Lorinda, resumed her career as a RN to keep the family solvent. Nash waited in vain to be vindicated and reinstated to his pastorate. The call from his church never came.

Eventually, Raydene saw a different doctor (in a psychiatric hospital) and realized her “memories” were fabrications, and thankfully, she retracted her bizarre story. She called her father and told him, “I’ve come to myself.” But, as is the case in much of life, once a rumor is tossed into the wind, it is impossible to get the Genie back into the bottle—impossible to right the wrong and undo

(Continued on next page)

“Repressed and Recovered” Memories ...

The popular notion that the mind “represses” memories of traumatic events and can subsequently “recover” them—either spontaneously or in therapy—is the frayed thread upon which this whole ugly elephant hangs.

Contrary to this theory, memory experts tell us people are *far more likely* to remember traumatic events than non-traumatic ones. In fact, the more traumatic the event, the more likely human beings are to recall it and *not be able to forget it*, even if we should fervently wish to do so.

Consider this: If “repression” of memories is a valid phenomenon, WW2 concentration-camp survivors should have no memory of the horrible experiences they suffered at the hands of the Nazis. However, this is not the case—they agonizingly REMEMBER the abuse they endured.

Moreover, even if we lay aside our objections and accept that such a thing as “repressed memories” does in fact exist, can they be safely trusted to reflect reality? Are they reliable?

“The AMA considers recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse to be of uncertain authenticity, which should be subject to external verification.”

—American Medical Association,
Council on Scientific Affairs,
Memories of Childhood Sexual Abuse,
1994

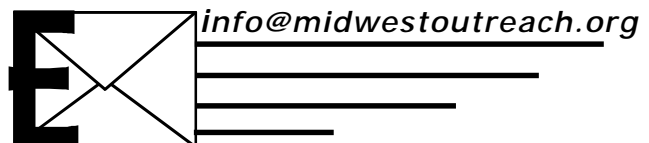
“It is not known how to distinguish, with complete accuracy, memories based on true events from those derived by other sources.”

—American Psychiatric Association,
Statement of Memories of Sexual Abuse,
1993

“Psychologists acknowledge that a definite conclusion that a memory is based on objective reality is not possible unless there is incontrovertible corroborating evidence.”

—Canadian Psychological Association,
*Position Statement on Adult Recovered
Memories
of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 1996

(Above citations are quoted from the brochure *Recovered Memories, Are They Reliable?* produced by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, 1955 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-5766, Phone: 215-940-1040.)



“. . . Weed” (Continued from page 5)

the injustice. His church never apologized; neither did it rehire him as a pastor. Raydene tried to make things right and printed a recantation. Copies were sent to the SDA leaders who were authorized to recommend that Nash be rehired, but no recommendations were forthcoming. As Nash himself puts it, “the recantation was dismissed beneath a load of ecclesiastical ‘baffleleg.’” Where does one turn for justice when one has been so grievously harmed?

I asked Nash what this whole episode had done to his faith in God. He answered me that his faith did not waver, but that it *was* put to the test. He said he and his wife eventually came to the realization they were “like Joseph, imprisoned on the basis of a false accusation, not knowing if they were to be executed tomorrow.”

Part of the “imprisonment” when one is accused of any type of child abuse is that the charge seems to carry with it the *assumption* of guilt. Think about it—whom would you tell that your own daughter or son had accused you of sexual abuse, much less Satanic Ritual Abuse? Who would support you and stand by you? Would your church friends be brave enough to hang around with an accused Satanist—an alleged child molester/murderer—even *without* evidence?

Nash’s story sounds depressingly like too many others I have personally heard or read about. Like Nash’s daughter, many former accusers are now recanting and rejecting their fabricated “memories” and are attempting to repair their broken lives and families. By the grace of God and as a testament to parental love, some families have forgiven and relationships have been restored. To put it mildly though, this type of emotional damage is not easily undone.

The Responsibility of the Church

“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother.” (Deuteronomy 19:15-19)

What is the Church’s responsibility regarding all of this? Even though the tide finally seems to be turning, should this injustice now be swept under the rug just because it is an uncomfortable truth that Christians had quite a hand in creating and perpetuating the myth? Christian counselors and well-known Christian mental-health clinics²⁰ have often led the pack in the “recovery of memories,” yet they have never admitted their guilt or been made to face up to the terrible consequences of the witch hunt they instigated. Christian churches often turned their backs on the falsely accused or had them put out of the church *without* making a “thorough investigation” to establish and verify all of the facts. Often the accused was found guilty on the testimony of *no* witnesses, as even the accusers’ only glimpse of the alleged event was in their “mind’s eye.”

“**Honor your Father and your Mother**” is the fifth commandment given to Moses. “**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**” is the ninth.²¹ It goes without saying, then, that any movement that dishonors parents and promotes false accusations cannot be good, friends.

It is important, at this juncture, to explain we do not deny the

reality of either sexual or physical abuse. It does happen, and it is undeniably a great evil. True victims of abuse deserve our sympathy. Pamela Freyd, co-founder of The False Memory Syndrome Foundation,²² told us she believes one reason so many churches leaped on the abuse bandwagon is because the Church, as a whole, had kept its head in the sand far too long concerning instances of true sexual and physical abuse. With every good intention, this time the Church was determined to support the victims who often had been ignored before. However, we cannot emphasize enough that the swing the Church took from one extreme to another has only created a whole army of *new* victims—those of the falsely accused! Meanwhile, *true* victims of sexual abuse who *always remember what happened to them* are not given the attention and compassion they deserve because their experiences seem tame by comparison to bizarre satanic ritual abuse claims.

As a Church, we may not be able to turn back the water that already has gone “under the bridge.” But we can speak out against the injustice that is still going on today, inflicted upon naive young men and women and their innocent families by Christian personalities, movements, and organizations. Although the tide of SRA accusations finally seems to be receding, many segments of the Church are keeping it alive. Neil Anderson²³ is a popular Christian author-guru riding this beast. The Theophostic Counseling movement²⁴ is a recovered memory therapy that seems to be *gaining popularity* among Christians.

How does this happen? How, especially, are Christians caught up in these destructive fantasies and the movements and trends that spring from them? Lack of discernment certainly is one culprit. Lack of healthy skepticism is another.

Faith vs. Skepticism

There is a common misconception among Christians that faith and skepticism are mutually exclusive. If one has faith, by definition, one is not skeptical. On the other hand, if a Christian has a skeptical mindset, he or she is viewed either as a “weak” Christian or not a Christian at all. This is dangerous, folks. It leaves gullibility as the only approved option, and sadly, a look at so-called Christian television programs leaves no doubt many believers are making that “sanctioned” choice. We are *supposed* to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16), not the other way around. Although faith and skepticism are different, they are not mutually exclusive. They work together. Part of the confusion over the issue results from a misunderstanding of faith. Faith is not a blind leap—it is a *rational* step taken in response to convincing *evidence*. Some Christians actually fear rationality as though rational thinking inevitably leads to unbelief! This attitude is quite bizarre.


In our discussions with unbelievers, we have found that people do not reject the gospel because it is irrational—they irrationally disregard the bountiful evidence for belief. Unbelievers ultimately reject Christ and Christianity because they do not *want* to believe it. They *unreasonably* suppose that if they refuse to believe it, it will not be true! Theirs is a false hope! Christianity is TRUE based upon abundant and irrefutable evidence which we need not abandon our minds to accept. We also need not—and dare not—abandon rational thinking when it comes to evaluating other truth claims.

Many Christians seem to assume we in the Church are somehow invulnerable to deception, that deception is something that traps cultists and people *outside* the gates. After all, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us. As long as we are “right with God” (the thinking

goes), we will be mystically protected from falling into grievous error. This tragically false thinking only encourages us to let down our guard and accept whatever our Christian friends believe or what well-known Christian celebrities assert is true. How many Christians believe Benny Hinn truly heals people, or that the Holy Spirit has an interest in pinning people to the floor or throwing them into uncontrollable fits of laughter? How many intelligent and rational Christians bought into the Y2K scare, when that pernicious “bug” was surely going to shut down the civilized world? The fact is that Christians (of whatever intelligence) are not immune to deception, which is why the Bible warns us time and time again *not to be deceived*. If we could not be deceived, why the warnings? (Matthew 24:4, Colossians 2:4, 8)

We are not “speaking down” as if we are personally invulnerable to deception. When Mike Warnke came on the scene in the late 70’s, we bought his book, read it, and passed it on! Just like so many others, we did not question his claims at the time. We didn’t think to check out his story. Why? Because we bought the book at a Christian bookstore, and it was published by a Christian publishing house. Moreover, Warnke claimed to be a Christian—would a Christian lie about his life? In addition, we believed in Satan, so it stood to reason he would be very active in the world. And so he is! The trouble was we had not yet recognized his activities often involve making monkeys out of naïve believers! We now more clearly see his works in the lives destroyed by false teachings, false accusations, and/or rumors. We are not so naïve these days, partly because we have been burned in the past, but we do not suppose that we are now completely incapable of being deceived. To be so complacent might be, well, naïve. ☺

It is very important Christians do not give credence to myths and “scary tales.” We need to be extremely skeptical about rumors and cautious about believing something just because we heard it on “Christian” television or radio, or because it is presented as truth in a book that sells at a Christian bookstore. If we do not follow the Apostle Paul’s counsel to “*examine everything carefully*,”²⁵ we will not only hurt innocent people—the last thing we as Christians desire to do—we will bring shame to the cause of Christ.

Shortly before taking his final leave of the Ephesians, Paul solemnly charged the Church leaders in Acts 20:28-32 to shepherd God’s people and protect them from grievous error. He fervently warned them to be alert for “savage wolves,” false teachers, outside the Church or within, who would promote false teachings, myths, and fairy tales that would destroy the flock. As Christians, we must be conscientiously cautious about what we believe and extremely careful about what we pass on to others. 

ENDNOTES:

¹ Anonymous e-mail circulating under the title *It Must be True, I Saw it on the Internet*, cited on Citizen Link – A web site of Focus on the Family, <http://www.family.org/cforum/hotissues/A0007214.html>, August 4, 1999.

² A similar story claims O’Hair is trying to have the show “*Touched by an Angel*” removed due to the use of the word “God” on the show. This is also false.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jon Trott and Mike Hertenstein, “Selling Satan,” *Cornerstone*, Vol. 21, Issue 98, p8.

⁶ Stratford and her book were thoroughly researched and proved fraudulent by Bob and Gretchen Passantino and Jon Trott. Says Passantino, “Careful research, by us and *Cornerstone* editor Jon Trott, revealed that author Lauren Stratford was actually Laurel Rose Willson, a troubled woman from Washington State who spent most of her teen and adult life fabricating horrendous stories of victimization by a variety of people in a variety of settings ... Our

investigation, published in late 1989, was the first in-depth analysis of a particular testimony of Satanic Ritual Abuse. It provided the first concrete evidence that at least some such stories could be the result of troubled minds, bad therapy, and credulity regarding Satanism, and not the result of actual events. In the years since the discrediting of *Satan’s Underground*, Lauren developed a new story that put her in the midst of another survivor support community this one for actual survivors of a massive horror shamefully hidden by its perpetrators, but chillingly documented by overwhelming amounts of both eyewitness and historical evidence. Lauren Stratford became Laura Grabowski, child survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Polish Jew who was experimented on by the infamous Dr. Joseph Mengele, liberated to a Krakow orphanage at the end of the war, brought to the United States, and adopted by a Gentile couple at age nine or ten. Lauren Stratford: From SRA to Holocaust, www.answers.org.

⁷ Rebecca Brown, MD, has been likewise researched and proven to be fiction masquerading as fact in the article by G Richard Fisher, Paul R. Blizzard, and M Kurt Goedelman, “Drugs, Demons and Delusions,” *Personal Freedom Outreach Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1989.

⁸ Dr. Elizabeth Loftus, memory expert and recently elected President of the American Psychological Society, says she thinks there are serious questions about the authenticity of repressed memories. Loftus asks: “How can we determine if memories of childhood abuse are true or false? Without corroboration, it is very difficult to differentiate between false memories and true ones. Also, in these cases, some memories were contrary to physical evidence, such as explicit and detailed recollections of rape and abortion when medical examination confirmed virginity. How is it possible for people to acquire elaborate and confident false memories? A growing number of investigations demonstrate that under the right circumstances false memories can be instilled rather easily in some people. The finding that an external suggestion can lead to the construction of false childhood memories helps us understand the process by which false memories arise. Some mental health professionals encourage patients to imagine childhood events as a way of recovering supposedly hidden memories ... A procedure for planting “impossible” memories about experiences that occur shortly after birth has been developed by the late Nicholas Spanos and his collaborators at Carleton University. [Spanos’] findings confirm earlier studies that many individuals can be led to construct complex, vivid and detailed false memories via a rather simple procedure. Hypnosis clearly is not necessary ... False memories are constructed by combining actual memories with the content of suggestions received from others.” Elizabeth Loftus, Professor, University of Washington, *Scientific American*, September 1997.

⁹ The *Daily Herald* newspaper reported in 1998 that “a psychologist says tape recordings that lay forgotten in his desk for 25 years show that the popular story of Sybil, the woman with 16 personalities, is bogus. The newfound tapes suggest these personalities were actually created during therapy, through suggestions to a highly pliable young woman, says psychologist Robert Rieber of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.” *Daily Herald*, 8-17-98, Sect 1.

¹⁰ Mark Pendergrast, in his excellent book, *Victims of Memory*, writes “... the idea that someone could completely forget horrendous abuse, then suddenly recall it years later, had been popularized in *Michelle Remembers*, a 1980 account of how Michelle Smith, a depressed young woman of 27, sought therapy with psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder in the wake of three miscarriages. A Psychology major in college, she had a long history of nervous complaints, stemming in part from a childhood spent with an alcoholic father ... Under the charismatic care of Dr. Pazder, Michelle began to remember lurid scenes from her childhood under a type of auto-hypnosis ... Michelle eventually convinced herself and Pazder that she had repressed memories of grotesque abuse at the hands of a satanic cult, led by the devil himself, when she was five years old. Throughout her months of ‘remembering,’ Michelle disclosed that she had been held naked in a cage full of snakes, that the sadists had burned and butchered stillborn babies and fetuses in her presence, killed kittens, and forced her to perform lurid sexual acts ... *Michelle Remembers* fails to mention Michelle’s two sisters, neither of whom recalls any abuse. A family friend describes the mother as a woman ‘whose whole life was for her children. You couldn’t have a nicer, more charming person.’ Other claims fall apart when examined. For instance, a neighbor and former teacher recalls Michelle attending first grade regularly in 1955 just when she was supposedly locked in a basement for months at a time.” Mark Pendergrast, *Victims of Memory* (Hinesburg, VT: Upper Access, Inc., 1996) p35.

¹¹ As quoted by Dr. Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham *The Myth of Repressed Memory* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1994).

¹² Bass and Davis, *The Courage to Heal: a guide for women survivors of child sexual abuse* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1994) p81-82.

(Continued on page 14)

Blessed Are The

EX-PEACEMAKERS

Bill Fields' War on the Church

by Don Veinot

Back in the late 1980s, Joy and I were discussing a personal issue and felt the need to get some solid spiritual advice. We thought the input of a godly Christian professional would be helpful, so we asked our senior pastor for the name of a good Christian counselor outside the church. He referred us to Bill Fields, president of a small parachurch ministry called PeaceMakers, International. A few years earlier, Fields had co-hosted a local Christian radio program to which I had occasionally listened, and since our pastor now recommended him, I assumed he was trustworthy.

We arrived at Fields' office and explained why we were there. In short order, he declared himself a "prophet" and spoke and acted as though he had special knowledge far superior to the insights of average Christians like us. Joy is intelligent (but she married me anyway)—smart enough to resist people who force their opinions on her—and doesn't have much patience with prophet "wannabes." Fields was clearly irritated when she questioned his confident "insights."

Perplexed and dissatisfied with Fields' so-called "services," we obviously never went back, and thought that was the end of that.

It wasn't.

Soon afterward, Fields spoke with our pastor and shared specifics of our confidential "counseling" session with him. Fields said we were "very dangerous" people who needed to be watched. (Those who discourage independent thinking often say that about independent thinkers.) Our pastor didn't know what to make of this. He knew us quite well. We'd attended his church for four years, were very involved, and were part of the lay leadership.

So, we met to discuss the matter, and I expressed concern about Field's integrity as a counselor. He not only deliberately violated our confidence, but also broke state of Illinois confidentiality laws regulating counselors. I pointed this out to our pastor, and asked, "Is this the kind of person to whom you want to refer people in your church for counseling?"

He was obviously concerned, but he had no immediate answer.

Over time, we learned he'd referred others in the church to Fields, and we observed a pattern emerge. Vibrant Christians—who'd been active in the church—gradually became increasingly withdrawn as Fields "counseled" them. They resigned from responsible positions where they'd exercised their gifts and often disappeared altogether. Wonderful believers, once so happy, were now mired deep in depression, wallowing in guilt, and gradually fading out of our congregation after linking up with Fields.

Eventually Fields' relationship with the pastor soured, and he stopped referring people to Fields for counseling. We were relieved about this and assumed we'd heard the last of Bill Fields.

We were wrong.

Back to the Future

In 1994, cult researcher Dave Moore was surfing through an electronic Bulletin Board Service (BBS) run by the Jesus People

USA (JPUSA) and moderated by Eric Pement. The World Wide Web was so new that few people used it. For those with computer telephone modems, BBSs like JPUSA's were a popular way to communicate with others around the world on a variety of topics.

Moore noticed an ad on the BBS for Aaron Communications (which he knew was Fields' side business). He also knew about with PeaceMakers, International (PMI). Friends of Moore had a daughter who had joined PMI and subsequently cut off family ties for years before finally leaving the group. Moore sent Pement an e-mail charging that Fields was a cult leader. Pement wrote back requesting evidence.

Since Moore's conducted internal investigations for the U.S. Post Office, this was right up his alley. He contacted the Fewell family in southern Indiana who put him in touch with their daughter Missy. She was still so traumatized from her years in PMI, she wouldn't talk to Moore, but she gave him the number of another former member, Ron Henzel (now a senior researcher at MCO).

Henzel hesitated cooperating with the investigation, so I called him to reiterate what Moore told him: JPUSA would probably refer people to Fields for counseling if he remained silent. Understandably, Henzel wanted to put PMI behind him and get on with his life; but he knew, if he didn't help us, more people would suffer what he had.

Tip of an Iceberg

Henzel relented and put us in contact with other ex-PMI members and relatives of then-current members. Their tragic stories followed a typical pattern: someone would go to Fields for "counseling," join PMI, and eventually cut off all family ties. When relatives pursued the new member, he or she would refer them to Fields saying all communication had to pass through him, and/or the only way to re-establish contact would be to arrange a "family counseling" session with Fields in charge.

When relatives contacted Fields to get their loved ones back, Fields harangued them with charges of "abuse," sometimes implying parents had sexually molested their now-adult children. Families who went the extra mile and met with Fields and their estranged relatives found the endeavor totally futile.

Reconciliation through Fields is always elusive. There's always something else that must be done, something "wrong" with the families, something keeping their children, grandchildren, and siblings in PMI and just out of arm's reach.

Separation from truly abusive families is appropriate. However, it's odd that nearly all Field's clients require separation. Does he have some special talent that causes only abused people to seek his "care," or is he just good at persuading people they've been abused?

We presented our evidence to Eric Pement and waited.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along?

Fields teaches that Christians shouldn't take other Christians

to court. Therefore, you can imagine my surprise when I answered my telephone and heard a booming voice declaring, “I should *sue* you!”

It was Fields. Pement informed him of our investigation.

From that promising start, we launched into a conversation about the proper way for Christians to handle grievances with each other.

“No one has ever taken me through the Matthew 18 process,” said Fields, speaking of the Gospel passage about how to pursue reconciliation.

“Are you saying no one ever *tried* to take you through it?” I asked him.

Fields paused. “I’m not saying that,” he finally admitted.

We eventually discussed the meeting Joy and I had with him years earlier. I confronted him with his breach of confidentiality, and he retorted, “You signed all the same agreements giving me permission to talk to your pastor I had everyone else sign!”

“No I did not!” I replied. “Neither of us signed anything.”

Silence.

Henzel later informed me that Fields didn’t begin asking people to sign such documents until at least a year or two after we met him. Even if we had signed them, under Illinois law it’s impossible to relinquish one’s right to counselor-client confidentiality. The statute is extraordinarily specific. Before counselors can divulge private information, it must be put in writing with the identity of the person to whom it will be sent, and the client must give written permission to send it. The law also provides for damages, and has no statute of limitations.

While it’s humorously ironic that someone who threatened me with litigation was more legally vulnerable to me than I was to him, ex-PMI members find little to laugh about when they recall Fields’ intimidation tactics. But, I had an advantage they didn’t: I never confessed any of my deep, dark secrets to him.

Fields requires members to confess their sins in his group, no matter how personal, including those already confessed to God years earlier. He even solicits explicit details. In one case, he asked the women in the group what they fantasized about when they masturbated. Although embarrassed, many of them told him. He also told one of the women that he thought of her when he masturbated.

“I recall the whole episode,” remembers Henzel, “but I certainly don’t recall him asking this question of us men. I hid my shock, but in the end, I did what we all did in PeaceMakers: I assumed Bill was so spiritually advanced that I shouldn’t question him.”

In Henzel’s case, Fields demonstrated his willingness to use the information he’d collected on him as a weapon before Moore contacted him.

“Bill takes the same approach to sins we confessed to him that Harry Truman took to the atomic bomb: what good is just having it if you don’t show you’re willing to use it?” says Henzel. “While in PeaceMakers, I confessed things I thought I’d take to my grave because I thought I could trust Bill, and he convinced me it was a beneficial thing to do.”

Then Fields divulged one of Henzel’s most embarrassing confessions in a railing letter that he copied to someone in Ron’s new church.

Henzel recalls, “I requested a meeting with Bill and someone he called his ‘spiritual authority’ to address some issues, and he sent this humiliating letter. I tried to follow biblical procedure, only to see my extremely personal information copied to a third party—

someone I saw every Sunday. It was devastating.”

It was also a fresh memory when Moore called Henzel asking about PMI. Henzel knew sharing with us meant risking further betrayals, but didn’t want this to happen to others.

Unfortunately, his cooperation wasn’t immediately rewarded. After conducting its own follow-up investigation on Fields, not only did JPUSA leave his personal ad on their BBS, they gave him his own “PeaceMakers” sub-BBS!

While disappointing, certain factors made this understandable. First, Fields claimed to espouse a brand of practical theology similar to JPUSA’s, which made him seem trustworthy to them. Second, through his business sideline, Fields got JPUSA a deal on computer equipment, and they were appropriately grateful. Third, because Fields was convincing enough during JPUSA’s investigation, they decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Before long, Fields used his sub-BBS to violate the confidences of other people and generate ill-will among Chicago-area Christians. No discernible “peacemaking” took place, and things eventually got so out of hand that Pement posted a message rebuking Fields. Finally, in early ’95, JPUSA received a letter it couldn’t ignore from a PMI member’s brother. JPUSA’s leadership met in a lengthy session. Within hours, they removed Fields’ sub-BBS and replaced it with a terse statement indicating the removal was by mutual agreement.

Peace At Last?

At that point, we couldn’t see much reason to take further action regarding Fields. His group was tiny, and he’d alienated so many people in his Wheaton, Illinois area, it seemed unlikely to attract new members.

Fields also thrived on controversy, displaying a high aptitude for manipulating it to his own advantage. We thought writing about him could give him a platform for recruiting new members, and so we decided against it.

By the mid-’90s, Fields’ group was so small it no longer could support him financially. He had to get a regular job. He interpreted his increasing isolation as evidence of his “prophet” status, although his concept of prophet-hood was closer to the crude, in-your-face style of trash-TV Host Morton Downey, Jr. than to Scripture. Using 20/20 hindsight, it seemed obvious he’d been heading toward self-imposed exile from Christianity for decades.

Fields (now age 55) claims he worked for Bill Gothard during his early 20s, until he was fired after confessing to adultery. Neither Gothard nor anyone else with whom we checked among current and former staff at IBLP remembers him.

In the early ’80s, some breathed a sigh of relief at Youth For Christ’s (YFC’s) national office when Fields left and took his confrontational relationship style with him. While there, however, he’d earned a reputation for successful fund raising. This attracted the attention of the executive director of Metro Chicago YFC (MCYFC), where Fields relocated until he was fired during a dispute with the leadership. He portrays the executive director—who later was forced to resign—as the villain in the conflict, but MCYFC was experiencing a great deal of turmoil back then, and assessment of blame varies greatly depending on who offers it.

Gary L. Gulbranson was chairman of the MCYFC board. He now pastors Westminster Chapel in Bellevue, Washington. “We had staffers who were dissatisfied with the executive director, and this created a void in the leadership which Bill [Fields] tried to fill,” says Gulbranson.

Fields’ attempt to exploit the situation led to his termination.

(Continued on next page)

“Ex-Peacemakers” (Continued from page 9)

The way he explains it, he was the scapegoat until the board later realized the executive director was the real culprit, and they then forced him out.

“No,” says Gulbranson. “Those were two completely separate issues.”

However, Fields claims the following on his web site:

“Within weeks the Chairman of the Board, other board member(s) and several staff representatives came to my home and before me and my wife, repented of their firing of me, cleared my name and gave me a check for my continued caring services to staff at Metro Chicago Youth For Christ and told me they had fired/forced the resignation of [...] the Executive Director.”¹

“No,” says Gulbranson, “If that actually happened, I’d remember it.”

He noted that if the board he chaired had “repented” of firing Fields, they would have hired him back. Just to be sure, Gulbranson asked us to check with another long-time board member, Bob DeJong, who was a board officer when Fields was terminated.

“Absolutely not!” said DeJong of the meeting Fields described, “It never happened.”

Regardless of who’s right about his termination, Fields’ authoritarian style was clearly headed for more trouble. Stan Lambert, a Judson College student from 1978 to 1982, worked part-time at MCYFC. “Bill helped me work through some very difficult issues,” said Stan. “Back then, he was a powerful and positive influence in my life.”

Over the years, Lambert occasionally contacted Fields for advice or to offer support. “Not until we met in 1999 did I detect trouble,” said Stan. “I wanted to renew our friendship and offer significant financial support, but got more than I expected.”

Throughout the meeting, he sensed Fields trying to manipulate him into self-doubt. Afterward, Lambert e-mailed him expressing concerns and offered to work together to address them. Fields’ answer was a curt, “No thank you.”

“Based on all he taught me years ago, I knew what he wanted,” said Lambert. “He used to say, ‘The first person to respond in a challenge loses.’ I’m sure he wanted me to pursue the conversation, but that would have played into his game. He also said, ‘Once I find a person’s vulnerability, I control the relationship.’ That’s what he was looking for, and I didn’t want to help him.”

Lambert adds, “Bill ‘wins’ arguments through exceptional cleverness, and claims it’s a biblical victory. For years, I wouldn’t believe it, but the abundant evidence and my own experience leave no alternative. It saddens me deeply. Bill’s preeminent ability to manipulate conversations and relationships makes him his own worst enemy. He ‘wins’ battles but loses the proverbial war. He dismisses those who can help him as insincere, incompetent, or ungodly. If he can’t dominate, he won’t participate.”

After MCYFC, he used his fund-raising abilities to support his new PeaceMakers, International organization (incorporated December 10, 1984). He’d attracted a devoted following at MCYFC and brought some of them over to PMI.

Fields played football in college and his large frame and distinctive speaking voice give him a commanding presence in any room. Some find him exceptionally charismatic, which he encourages by allowing his followers to praise his “great discernment” and do much of the work of promoting him.

Even after the Wheaton Evangelical Free Church excommunicated him in 1986, he retained loyal supporters. The

church ejected Fields in a congregational meeting after he renounced the elders as spiritual authorities because he was dissatisfied with their response to yet another dispute he was having—this time with the pastor. A staff member recalls that at one point, Fields proposed the pastor and elders resign and the church come under *his* “authority.”

Some close to the situation believe the church badly mishandled it—that it became a turning point in Fields’ life and marked the beginning of his descent into cultism. Others believe it simply made obvious the path he’d already chosen.

Giving PeaceMakers A Chance

In the late ’80s while he did not attend church, Fields lured Christians into one of several “counseling groups” he operated. As his alienation from the evangelical community increased, his groups shrank, eventually merging into one. He still had contacts from his days in mainstream evangelicalism who served as an informal referral network. When people they knew needed counseling, they unwittingly referred them to Fields.

Ron Henzel was referred to Fields the same way I (Don) was: through my pastor. In mid-’87, he left a church ministry position and looked for counseling help for some friends. He and his wife met with Fields, and within an hour Fields persuaded Henzel *he* was in need of counseling.

“It was a depressing time for me, and Bill has a remarkable ability to read people” says Henzel. “My ministry job ended badly, I had some heavy spiritual struggles, and now I realize this made me a prime target for cult recruiting. To Bill, I was a ‘bird in the hand’—easier to get than my friends. Soon I was attending my first group meeting.”

Under Fields’ direction, Henzel and other group members cut off ties with their friends. Fields told one woman to drop out of a volleyball league where she had supportive friends. When a local pastor disagreed with Fields’ advice to a couple from his church, Fields got them to leave the church and treat his group as their “church.”

“It wasn’t a church in any biblical sense,” recalls Henzel. “We sat in a group therapy-style circle, read books on co-dependency that were popular then, and were supposed to bring our ‘issues.’ In the beginning, this meant stories of how we’d been ‘abused’ in our families.”

Sowing Discord Among Brothers

On weekdays, Fields “counseled” church members, deacons, elders, and pastors. Some were struggling with serious sins. While Fields usually didn’t name them, he didn’t hesitate to share their stories in evening group sessions, portraying the people in the most negative light.

“Bill constantly gave the impression that the church was so corrupt there was nowhere for us to go,” says Henzel. “He used the word ‘evangelical’ in a disparaging sense—as though it signified something evil. It took time, but eventually we all started thinking like him.”²

Fields was prone to angry outbursts, and the accompanying cuss-words also took some getting used to. If “evangelical” was a bad word to him, four-letter words weren’t. One pastor referred parishioners to him, and one-and-all were outraged by his use of “the f-word.” PMI members jokingly referred to the extended middle finger as “the PeaceMakers salute.” All this further contributed to a sense of isolation from the rest of evangelicalism.

Soon Henzel noticed that others in the group were cutting off ties with their families. In a one-on-one session in mid-’88, Fields

used the “salute” to indicate to Henzel that he should do likewise.

“I was one of the last people to go along with this,” says Henzel. “Bill called our families ‘dysfunctional’ and ‘abusive,’ but in most cases, he’d never met them.”

During one group meeting, Fields wrote “Heaven” on one side of a dry-erase board and “Hell” on the other. He then drew an arrow going from “Hell” and toward “Heaven.”

Pointing to Henzel, he said, “Until recently, you were moving in this direction.”

Then he put a U-turn in the arrow, pointing it back toward “Hell,” and said, “But lately you’ve been moving in this direction.”

“It upset me to hear that,” admits Henzel, “but I sat there quietly, waiting for him to explain. He finally did.”

In slow, measured words, he confronted Henzel; “You have not said *one* negative thing about your family!”

“This confused me at first,” said Henzel, “but deep down I knew what he meant. It seemed everyone in group was following his example in this area except me.”

In January 1989, Henzel yielded to the pressure and wrote a letter to his mother (who lived only a few miles away) that informed her he would no longer attend family gatherings, call, or write.

“Not Peace, But a Sword”

“It’s one of the worst things I ever did,” Henzel now says. “Bill justifies family separations by appealing to Matthew 10:34-37 as if those verses were about turning your back on family to follow Christ. That’s an absurd interpretation. Verse 21 shows it’s really about non-believing family members turning their backs on believers—not the other way around.”

Henzel was fortunate: he was only separated from his family for about three years. As of this writing, there are some in PMI who’ve been separated for nearly 15 years!

At that time, members went through a process of increasing isolation that paralleled the one in Fields’ life. While they were cutting off their family ties, Fields was alienating his last shred of true accountability: his board.

Until 1989, his functioning board consisted of four people who struggled to hold him accountable on various issues. Fields practiced marital counseling, but his own marriage was in shambles. He taught that people with eating disorders had “undealt-with issues,” but he was dangerously overweight. They were concerned about his involvement in a dispute between *Focus on the Family*’s James Dobson and his former co-host Gil Alexander-Moegerle. In addition, they had a lot of questions about what was going on in his groups, but found him very stingy with answers. When one board member expressed his fear that the groups were becoming a cult, Fields exploded in rage.

During this tumultuous period, Fields added two of his MCYFC cronies, Russ Knight and Pete Sjoblom, to the PeaceMakers board. They met with the other board members only once, for introductions, but discussed no official business. Knight and Sjoblom say Fields shared nothing with them about the problems the rest of the board had with him.

Finally, the other four board members resigned in frustration on the same evening, after Fields accused them of harboring sin in their lives. Fields persuaded one of them to remain so he could satisfy Illinois requirements for non-profit corporations; but a year later, he was gone, too. So were Knight and Sjoblom.

Fields re-staffed his once-legitimate board with group members he controlled. He told the group little about the resignations. What he did share cast the departing board in a poor light. When Knight

and Sjoblom finally left, he informed the group “they weren’t really my friends” because “they didn’t want a real relationship.” Of course, Fields’ definition of a relationship involved them confessing their sins to him.

Before they left, the Dobson versus Alexander-Moegerle dispute attracted the Christian media’s attention. It appeared resolution was possible until Fields wormed his way in as the Alexander-Moegerles’ advocate. Since then, Fields has milked the dispute on the Internet, denouncing Dobson for refusing binding arbitration. That’s ironic since Fields now denounces arbitration.³ Sam Ericsson was with the Christian Legal Society at that time and worked hard to get both sides to the table.

“Both sides insisted on their way or no way,” says Ericsson.

Ericsson cautioned everyone involved against legal action, but Fields supported the Alexander-Moegerles when they sued Dobson. A writer for *The Door* magazine interviewed Fields, Knight, and Sjoblom about it.

“I sat through the entire interview,” says Henzel. “A lot happened that didn’t make it into print, including instances when Bill dug into the interviewer’s personal life. I won’t say the man compromised his journalistic integrity, but if I was him I’d have thought twice about writing anything critical after Bill’s interrogation, considering what Bill could later use against him.”

Henzel notes the irony in what Fields told *The Door*.

“Everything he condemned in the interview, he did in PeaceMakers,” he says. “He complained that his YFC director controlled people by keeping them divided, which *he* did with his own board! He charged Dobson with violating the Alexander-Moegerles’ confidentiality, which *he* did to us in the group! He complained about Christians who sacrifice people on the altar of ministry, but *he’d* publicly rip the heart out of anyone who questioned *his* ministry.”

At the time, however, it all sounded so good. Fields knew how to say things that appealed to Christians who felt something missing in their Christian lives. Nevertheless, it turned out to be a classic bait-and-switch with horrific results.

“I sat by and watched Bill drive people into nervous breakdowns,” says Henzel. “Then it was my turn.”

I’m Okay—You’re Not

Chris G. now has his own computer business, but at one time doctors told him he’d probably never work again. That’s a serious diagnosis for a man in his early 30s.

“I can’t blame Bill for my breakdown,” says Chris, who quickly adds, “but he certainly didn’t help.”

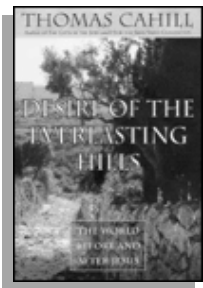
Chris’s roommate introduced him to the group. As soon as Fields saw him, he knew Chris was in trouble. He hadn’t slept for days and was experiencing anxiety attacks. Fields arranged for Chris to visit a local doctor who prescribed tranquilizers for him.

“If there’s one gift Bill has,” says Henzel, “it’s crisis counseling. Some say he’s one of the best they’ve ever seen. The problem is, that’s the only way he knows how to relate to people. He always kept us in some sort of crisis—a family crisis, guilt crisis, a crisis of self-doubt, or what-have-you—so we’d always need him.”

After the typical honeymoon period for newcomers, Fields tightened the screws on Chris.

“My psychiatrist prescribed medication, I saw a psychologist for therapy, and I also attended the group,” Chris says. “After a while, I was overwhelmed by a flood of emotions I didn’t know what to do with and became increasingly frightened and paranoid,

(Continued on page 14)



Lacks To Explain The Facts

Examining Thomas Cahill's book,

Desire Of The Everlasting Hills: The World Before And After Jesus

By Jonathan K. Miles

Recently, *Christianity Today Magazine* endorsed Thomas Cahill's *Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World Before and After Jesus*,¹ calling it "A fresh and energetic look at the 'historical Jesus'—who he was in history and what he's done for history."² High praise indeed. Cahill's book about Jesus follows his very successful *How the Irish Saved Civilization* and *The Gifts of the Jews*. For readability and vivid anecdotes about historical figures, Cahill has few equals. He manages to strike a chord with both scholar and layman alike—a most difficult task. He lays the foundation of the lives of historical figures with the skill and precision of a painter.

When it comes to books about the "historical Jesus," Cahill's book is better than most. He is not so quick to dismiss classical Christianity as John Dominic Crossan or the other members of the Jesus Seminar. He berates John Shelby Spong's assertion the Apostle Paul was a frustrated, closet homosexual as "without probative evidence of any kind and based on egregious misinterpretation and wild conjecture."³ He also cautions die-hard skeptics who are ready to latch on to any theory to explain away Jesus' miracles that none of the proposed explanations account for the data. Indeed, he begins to sound like an apologist:

"... but we cannot, it would appear, brush aside the miracles of healing as old wives tales. The people who witnessed them believed they had occurred. At least some of the people, like Mary Magdalene, who experienced them found in this extraordinary attention reason to devote themselves permanently to Jesus' mission."⁴

In all of this, Cahill offers something new to those who have dined on the bevy of portraits of Jesus that inundate the shelves of upscale bookstores like Barnes and Noble.

Cahill stops short of conceding these miracles actually happened. He, instead, punts to the easily defended or easily dismissed "fideism," which is the idea that, when it comes to our faith, evidence is useless. He quotes John Lefarge, son of an American painter: "For those who believe in God, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not, no explanation is possible."⁵ Presumably, this is his explanation for the resurrection, which he describes in detail, but he never actually asserts it happened.

Cahill has been called the "single-handed re-inventor of intellectual history."⁶ He is meticulous in weaving his historical backdrop for the life of Jesus. With anecdotes and tidbits of data, we find detailed portraits of Nero, Alexander, and Herod that make these men seem to come alive. However, when it comes to Biblical scholarship, it seems Cahill's historian sensibilities fail to look at all the evidence. Without any mention of the various views on authorship, he assumes Isaiah was written by three different authors during three different time periods. This takes the teeth out of Isaiah's prophecy of Cyrus the king who freed the Jews from their 70-year captivity. The thinking behind the so-called "deutero or trito Isaiah" theory is that Isaiah, a prophet in the eighth century BC, couldn't possibly predict the name of the man who would rescue Israel from its captivity two centuries later. Such a miracle would make Nostradamus' predictions look like fortune cookies. Therefore, chap-

ters 40-66 of Isaiah must have been written after the captivity by another writer. According to eminent Old Testament scholar, Gleason Archer, this is the primary reason most scholars have posited two or three "Isaiahs" as authors of the book we call Isaiah. They presume Isaiah simply couldn't predict something so precise as the fall of Jerusalem, the 70-year captivity, and the name of the man who would end that captivity.⁷

Cahill also accepts the idea of the "Q" document (which has never been discovered) in which Matthew and Mark (and possibly Luke) borrowed from some anonymous source of Jesus' sayings. (Q is short for the German word "Quellum" which means, "source.") Now I will admit, the idea of "Q" has become very popular in many circles (even evangelical circles). Despite this, there is no evidence this document ever existed. It is predicated on the assumption that since Matthew and Mark are so similar in their wording, they *must have* borrowed either from each other or from "Q." Former liberal-scholar-turned-Evangelical Etta Linneman wrote a book entitled, *Is There a Synoptic Problem: Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*.⁸ Linneman reasons the amount of actual overlap between what Matthew cites and that cited in Mark is negligible. It certainly is less than would be needed to assert a common source for both Gospels.

The "Q" document, like deutero-Isaiah, is one of those ideas that gets publicly bandied about until everyone assumes it must be right. This was made clear recently when a friend of mine was asked how he could believe the New Testament, "After all, wasn't it written about 200 years after the events?" This is a popular opinion, but when challenged to give one shred of hard evidence that the New Testament was written 200 years after the fact, the response usually is, "Well, its just the consensus of virtually all Bible scholars," as if that explained it. This is what we call a logical fallacy—the *ad populum* fallacy. It's an argument that rests its validity on the number of people who believe it.

This particular version is the most dangerous of all, because it harbors two hidden assumptions. The first assumption is that "all Bible scholars" means the most publicized Bible scholars are the "correct" scholars. The Jesus Seminar and their ilk do get many books published, but the Best Sellers' List is not a criterion for truth. What it neglects to consider is that there really are two kinds of Bible scholars: those who are liberal (mainly characterized by their disbelief in the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture) and those who are conservative (who do hold the Bible as the Word of God). Although the conservative scholarship is getting smaller everyday, what this assumption doesn't take into account is that virtually *all* conservative scholars (and even a small group of liberal scholars) maintain that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written *before* 70 AD and not after 200 AD. The second hidden assumption is that, since "virtually all scholars" believe the Bible was written 200 years later, the reason for this belief is some scientific evidence—some hard, indisputable truth. It ignores the possibility these scholars might have a *philosophical* predisposition to date the Gospels so late—namely their view regarding miracles. If

we allow 200 years after the events, the Gospel accounts of miracles and resurrections can be categorized as mere legends that infiltrated a core historical account of Jesus. Anti-supernaturalism (the belief miracles are impossible) is at the core of such dating, in my opinion. Such scholars have a real aversion to any kind of miracle. Ever since Rudolph Bultmann, in the early twentieth century, said belief in miracles was the product of a pre-scientific culture, liberal Bible scholars have worked long and hard to be “scientific” and, by Bultmann’s definition, against miracles.

When I read Cahill’s book, I expected some evidence of “Q.” As a historian, I expected him to give some historical evidence for it. Sadly, Cahill gives none; but to be fair, he really can’t, because there isn’t any. All that exists is speculation and philosophy—hardly the territory of a historian.

However, what Cahill does to the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is dwarfed by his treatment of John’s Gospel. The problems with Isaiah, “Q,” and his broad brush of Biblical scholarship are minor compared to a statement that appears almost two-thirds into the book:

“None of the believers that we have encountered so far—neither Mark nor Matthew, neither Paul nor Luke, none of the apostles and none of the disciples who gathered around Jesus and then formed the early Church—considered Jesus to be God. This would have been blasphemy to them. Their belief in Christ was, after all, a form of Judaism; and Judaism was the world’s only monotheism. God had raised the man Jesus and made him Lord. Even though he is now the Name by which we are saved, he did not raise himself—such an idea would have been unthinkable. By the end of the first century, however, the Fourth Gospel, the one attributed to John, had reached its final form; and here we find, for the first time, Jesus acclaimed as God.”⁹

Not only is this bad theology, it’s not even good history. Cahill interprets all the titles—Messiah, Son of Man, and Son of God—as merely referring to some supreme prophet. Cahill asserts to proclaim Jesus as some kind of God would destroy monotheism. The problem with this view is that it cuts both ways. For I maintain that *if* the Gospel writers were not claiming Jesus was God (and proclaiming a new understanding of the nature of God as triune), but instead trying to fit Jesus’ nature into the established mold of Jewish monotheism, then they were, indeed, blasphemous already. For in the Gospels, we repeatedly read about Jesus doing things that Jews considered as reserved solely for God. Consider Mark 2:7 in which the Pharisees made the comment, “**Who can forgive sins but God alone?**” Jesus’ response was to forgive sins. I think such actions by Jesus would be construed as claiming to be God. If the Gospel writers didn’t want to communicate this, they certainly could have chosen other stories to relate about Jesus. However, time and again, they picked just the stories that would communicate this “audacious” claim of divinity!

One story that is especially true of this is a miracle recorded in all four Gospels (the only one that does this I believe). The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. The Old Testament implications would seem to be clear: Jesus provides bread in the wilderness. He heals the diseases. All of this technically takes place outside the Promised Land (on the other side of the Jordan), and then Jesus hovers over the water and gets in the boat. Jesus and the disciples miraculously cross the sea and arrive safely on the other side after the storm is stilled. This is Old Testament imagery of Exodus, and many a Jew or Gentile familiar with the Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) would have realized it. God feeds the people in the wilderness (Ex. 16:31), Jesus does the same (Luke 9:16-17). God heals in the wilderness (Ex. 15:26), so does Jesus (John 6:21). God hovers over the waters (Genesis 1:2) so does Jesus (Mark 6:49). God provides a way to safely cross the sea, so does Jesus.

We also find this kind imagery in Mark 6, where the description of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is matched almost phrase-for-phrase from Psalm 23. The implication is that Jesus is the LORD (YHWH) of Psalm 23. So, throughout the New Testament (not just in the book of John) we find ascribed to Jesus the things most any Jew would consider blasphemy since they are the things solely reserved for God. Things like people being baptized in the name of Jesus, forgiving sins in his name, driving out demons in his name, etc.


Besides these subtle references, we have the explicit words of Paul. I honestly don’t know how Cahill can ignore “**For in Him [Jesus] all the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form**” (Colossians 2:9), which he admits Paul wrote, or “**... looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.**” (Titus 2:13).

I don’t know if Cahill’s selective reading is deliberate or just negligent, but it reminds me of something C.S. Lewis wrote in the *Screwtape Letters*. In the book, Screwtape (a senior demon) gives Wormwood (a lesser demon) advice on how to destroy the soul of a human. He talks about the various demonic strategies he has to undermine Christianity. Lewis’ book was written in 1943—long before the Jesus Seminar reared it’s heretical head—but Screwtape’s strategy sounds like an explanation for Cahill’s omission:

“In the last generation, we promoted the construction of such a “historical Jesus” on liberal and humanitarian lines ... the advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every 30 years or so, are manifold. In the first place, they all tend to direct men’s devotion to something which does not exist, for each “historical Jesus” is unhistorical. The documents say what they say and cannot be added to; each new “historical Jesus” therefore has to be got out of them by suppression at one point and exaggeration at another, and by that sort of guessing ... on which no one would risk ten shillings in ordinary life.”¹⁰

Lewis’ words have become a sort of prophecy because this is exactly what seems to be happening. Liberal scholars and apparently well meaning historians are: creating their own “historical Jesus’ ” out of whole cloth by suppressing some aspects of the Gospels and exaggerating others. For John Dominic Crossan, Jesus is a cynic philosopher. For Robert Funk, he is a grass-roots revolutionary more like Marx than Mark. The point is that all these different portraits are the result of ignoring certain parts of the Gospels as “additions or redactions” and emphasizing other aspects with a complete disregard for context.

Cahill may dismiss Bishop John Shelby Spong as being speculative, but he has more in common with Spong than with orthodox Christianity. Cahill may be less skeptical of New Testament history than John Dominic Crossan, but his theology would fit more comfortably in the Jesus Seminar than it would in an Evangelical seminary. It is true I found several things in Cahill’s ideas I could use as an apologist, but so could any liberal theologian in a debate about the historical Jesus!

Christianity Today called *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* “fresh and energetic,” but Cahill proves these terms are not always synonymous with balanced, investigative scholarship. It misses the mark when it comes to who Jesus was in history. Cahill’s history may be new and exciting, but it falls short in the most crucial area: it doesn’t explain the facts. 

Endnotes:

1. Thomas Cahill, *The Desire of the Everlasting Hills: The World Before and After Jesus*, (New York: Random House, 1999.) 154-155.
2. Ibid., 1st page of book.
3. Ibid., p155.
4. Ibid., p212.
5. Ibid., p213.
6. *Religion News Service*, from the inside cover of the book.
7. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), p337.
8. Etta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?: Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).
9. Cahill, op-cit., p257.
10. C.S. Lewis, “The Screwtape Letters,” *The Best of C.S. Lewis: The Christianity Today Edition*, (New York: Iverson Associates, 1969) pp81-82.

“... Weed” (Continued from page 7)

¹³Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, who together authored *The Courage to Heal*, considered by many to be the “bible” of the survivor movement, write, “If your memories of the abuse are still fuzzy, it is important to realize that you may be grilled for details. You are not responsible for proving that you were abused.” Bass and Davis, *The Courage to Heal*, p127.

¹⁴Elliott Miller of Christian Research Institute writes: “Despite the tens of thousands of reports of satanic crime and abuse that have blanketed therapist’s couches, television talk show stages, and the pages of [Neil] Anderson’s books, there has been no corroborative documentation that there is any widespread, multigenerational, multifamily, organized, nearly undetected, almost invincible satanic conspiracy propagating murder, mutilation, cannibalism, and other criminal activities. Investigation by law enforcement agencies, mental health professionals, journalists, academic researchers, and historians here and abroad has conclusively shown that the satanic alarm of the 1980’s and 1990’s was a hysterical myth, a genuine witch hunt.” Elliott Miller, *CRI Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4, p13.

¹⁵Loftus & Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False*; p24.

¹⁶Bass and Davis admit the process they recommend as necessary often destroys marriages and intimate relationships ... The authors clearly want their readers to embark on a very painful journey. Only when all their fundamental assumptions are destroyed, when their family relationships lie in ruins, will they develop their new identity as Survivors. Pendergrast, *Victims of Memory*, p41.

¹⁷Ibid., p35-39. “Symptoms” include feeling powerless, different from other people, lack of motivation, seeking perfection, fear of success, feelings of inadequacy, alienation or loneliness, depression, confusion, addictions or eating disorders, insecurity or failure in relationships ...”

¹⁸Renee Fredrickson, *Repressed Memories: A Journey to Recovery from Sexual Abuse* (New York, NY: Fireside/ Parkside, S&S, 1992) pp161-162, 203-204.

¹⁹Nash is in the process of writing a book about his experience titled, *Recovered Memories, Deprived Lives*.

²⁰Minrith-Meier New-Life Clinics were heavily involved in the “recovery” of repressed memories, not only of child sexual abuse, but of so-called Satanic Ritual Abuse. Dr. Paul Meier, a guest on the *Focus on the Family* radio program stated, “We have a Chicago clinic that specializes in Satanic Ritual Abuse where we help people who have been victimized by that ... there are Satan worshipping cults all around the country that are [sacrific-

“Ex-Peacemakers” (Continued from page 11)

so I pulled back from sharing thoughts and feelings with others to the extent I had been. To my psychologist, this was a normal reaction to the stress overload, but Bill treated it like some kind of sin. He gave me an ultimatum: either stop seeing the psychologist or leave the group.”

It wasn’t a good time to lose any of his personal support system, but Fields forced Chris to choose, and he chose his psychologist.

“Then Bill told my roommate not to talk to me,” said Chris. “I’d come home, and he’d be totally silent. This just confirmed in my mind that I was terrible and made me go downhill even faster.”

Chris soon found himself out of the group, out of a job, and homeless. After an excruciating ordeal spanning several years, he’s now doing fine. It’s a good thing he got out before it really got bad.

“The Beatings Will Stop When The Morale Improves”

Missy is glad she got out of PMI and restored her relationship with her family, especially because both of her parents have died since then. But, her departure came at a terrible price.

“Toward the end, I was like a zombie,” says Missy. “I had two children to take care of, including a blind son, and I could hardly take care of myself.”

“When Missy finally left group—or should I say, crawled out?—Bill came unglued,” says Ron. “Here we’d all watched him accuse and browbeat her for months on end about something for which he never gave a shred of evidence, and now he acts like he can’t figure out why she left!”

Once Missy was actually a leader in the group. Fields had put

ing babies].” When Dr. Dobson pointed out that the FBI has on file only one confirmed case of a ritual murder, Meier responded, “We have interviewed a couple of police chiefs from major cities who have found human skeletons and things of that nature, so I know it does exist, and it does happen, but it does get over-dramatized for sure.” How much more over-dramatization do we need than Meier’s own statement that Satanists are murdering babies all over the nation, when he presents for evidence that he has talked to “a couple of police chiefs.” Did he examine the evidence? Did he check every supposed fact thoroughly? Does the FBI or other law enforcement agencies concur with the opinion of these anonymous “couple of police chiefs.” What has happened to the patients that the clinic has treated for SRA, and what has happened to their families?

²¹Exodus 20:12 & 16

²²The False Memory Syndrome Foundation, 1955 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103 stands ready to help the falsely accused. They can be contacted at 1-800-568-8882

²³Neil Anderson is the author of best seller *The Bondage Breaker*, Harvest House Publishers, 1993, and *Released From Bondage*, Here’s Life Publishers, 1991. In *Released from Bondage*, Anderson devotes a chapter to so-called dissociative disorders, repressed and recovered memories, and Satanic Ritual Abuse. Anderson goes off on a long diatribe about what is involved in Satanic Ritual Abuse, how Satanists are murdering (sacrificing) babies and children, etc. He offers NO proof for his slanderous assertions. For example, on page 225, we find, “In Satanic Ritual Abuse, children are often forced to do the killing themselves.... children are forced to kill because it forces them into secrecy. People are not about to tell the outside world that they killed an innocent child or animal.... Most satanic rituals are ripping, banging violent sexual orgies, not sex as normal humans would experience it. The ultimate high is sexual orgasm at the time of the kill.” Thanks to Anderson and others, many people are now telling the outside world they sacrificed innocent children and animals. These tales, however, are false.

²⁴The Theophostic Ministries web site claims “thousands of Pastors, Professional Counselors, and Lay Counselors” have benefited from their training program. Anton Hein’s excellent apologetic web site critiques TheoPhostic Counseling and calls it “Agnes Sanford’s inner healing in a new jacket.” www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/c55.html.

²⁵1 Corinthians 5:12

her in charge of group meetings in the rare event of his absence. However, when the winds of his caprice shifted, so did his treatment of Missy. He verbally pummeled her until she was a shell of her former self, dropped out of the group, and moved to southern Indiana to be near her parents after separating from them for years.

“Bill whined endlessly in the group, saying ‘I spent *thousands* of hours with her on the phone, and *this* is how she treats me!’” Henzel says. “Recently I asked Missy, ‘Was Bill exaggerating about that? Did he really spend *thousands* of hours on the telephone with you?’”

“I didn’t have to think about my answer,” volunteered Missy, “‘Sure!’ I told Ron, ‘It could easily have been thousands of hours.’ He was astounded.”

Little wonder. Henzel pointed out that just one-thousand hours spread out over a year is nearly 20 hours per week.

“I think some weeks it probably did come to about 20 hours,” says Missy.

“I asked Missy, ‘Doesn’t that seem a little inappropriate?’” Ron continued, “‘I mean, you’re single, he’s married. His marriage is miserable. You live only a few blocks from him ...’”

“Of course, *now* I clearly see how it’s wrong,” clarifies Missy, “but everyone in group trusted Bill implicitly. He convinced us *we* were all messed up, but *he* was this model of righteousness.”

Then one summer day, Missy made a mistake—although she still can’t figure out how. She sat her blind son, Tyler, in a red wagon, pulled him along the sidewalks over the few blocks separating her house from Fields’, and rang his doorbell. Fields answered, but he told her he was busy. In the next group meeting, however, he accused her of trying to sexually seduce him during the visit.

“Over the years I’ve gone over it so many times,” says Missy, “I have *no* idea how he read that into it. It was the farthest thing from my mind!”

Yet, one thing all members know: when Fields charges you with a sinful motive and you deny it—well, that’s just evidence you’re “in denial.” So no one came to her defense, but watched passively over the following months as she roasted under the hot light of Fields’ accusation. The pressure mounted until one day images came to her mind—images of a family member raping her as a child—and she shared them in the group.

Fields welcomed this. He, too, claimed to have “recovered memories” of being sexually molested in childhood. He said Missy’s “recovered memory” explained her sin, though such a notion is more consistent with the Pelagian heresy that we sin because of others’ sins than with the biblical teaching that we sin because we’re sinners by nature (cf. Rom. 3:23). Eventually, Missy started questioning these “memories.”

“Now I realize they were caused by Bill’s intense pressure,” confides Missy.

When she expressed her doubts to the group Fields went ballistic, intensifying his pressure on Missy. The only person to stick up for her was a woman named Beth.

“I just don’t see how Missy did anything wrong,” Beth told Fields and the group one night after Missy left.

At which point another woman lashed out at her, faithful to Fields’ training: “That’s because *you’re* guilty of the same thing!”

Beth never returned.

Fields harassed Missy by telephone until she’d no longer talk to him. He reminded her of troubles he’d helped her through. He listed favors he’d done for her. He shoved her nose in sins she’d confessed.

“You’re *nothing* without me!” Fields bullied Missy. For a long time after she left, she wondered if it was true.

Healing the Wounds

“When I finally contacted Missy in early 1994, she, my wife, and I were still basket-cases,” says Henzel. “When Missy answered the phone, I was afraid she’d hang up—so I quickly assured her I was no longer in group, and I was terribly sorry for watching silently as Bill abused her. She broke down and wept for a while. So did I.”

Henzel told her how Fields turned his guns on him. After Missy left, Fields accused him of harboring “anger against women.” He later accused him of “adultery” after Henzel discussed a real estate transaction over the telephone with another woman in the group.

“I don’t want to be mean or anything,” clarifies Henzel, “but I wasn’t even remotely attracted to her.”

It was an impossible situation. Fields was the “prophet” with “great discernment,” and it was up to Henzel to figure out how his accusations were true. Fields wouldn’t help—that would only “encourage hypocrisy.” If Henzel didn’t “repent,” Fields would suggest he probably wasn’t really a Christian, per his usual pattern.

“I got really sick,” remembers Henzel. “I lost 20 pounds in six weeks. My wife Wendy’s non-Christian co-workers expressed concern for my health, but the group didn’t. Sweat poured down my back in my air-conditioned office as I cried out to God to let me ‘see my sin.’ My biggest fear was that I’d make a false confession.”

Fields placed Henzel “under discipline.” He could only stay for the first 15 minutes of group meetings, and then he had to leave so the rest of the group could “enjoy real fellowship,”—as Fields put it. He repeatedly showed up to be repeatedly sent away. This humiliation lasted several weeks until Henzel found a way to “see” his sin. Only then did Fields lift the “discipline.”

“But I still felt I was on a spiritual treadmill,” recalls Henzel. “So I asked Bill to let me take a ‘time-out’ from group, something I and others had done before. He gave permission on a Monday but withdrew it that Friday without explanation. I’d already made up my mind: *I needed a break!*”

Wendy stayed in the group, and Fields tried to drive a wedge between her and Ron. He told her she had “a marriage problem” and sent a letter to Ron’s new pastor accusing Ron of spouse abuse and fleeing from “church discipline.”

“It was surreally absurd—like a Kafka novel,” recalls Ron. “He really believed he could put me ‘under discipline’ just for leaving his little kingdom, and that somehow, God took it seriously!”

Wendy finally left in March 1993. She still struggles with the spiritual scars Fields inflicted on her.


A Tangled Web

For years, Fields and his followers receded into the black hole PMI had become. Members’ relatives received little news about their withdrawn loved ones, who also shunned ex-members, thus sealing their isolation.

Moreover, just as celestial black holes emit violent blasts of radiation—although no light escapes from them, so also Fields hurls ferocious streams of denunciation over his web site (www.peacemakers.net). From this virtual soapbox, he continues his quixotic crusade against Dobson, occasionally charging at other evangelical windmills along the way.

Fields was one of the first to jump onto the Web, causing no small amount of confusion among people looking for the excellent and widely respected Peacemaker Ministries, of Billings, Montana (www.HisPeace.org). Fields’ web site also proved an effective replacement for his informal referral network. In the mid-’90s, it didn’t seem PMI would grow, but the Web changed that.

Fortunately, some have learned that a web site with Christian literature on it is no substitute for good personal references. In one recent case, a man suffering emotional problems discovered the PMI site and eventually met with Fields. His family had reservations about Fields’ methods but thought he might be able to help their relative. After “counseling” with Fields, the man cut off ties with his family. A short time later, he signed over his family inheritance to PMI. Fields then sent a taunting e-mail about it to the man’s family.

Eventually, the man rescinded the gift, but the tragedy continues. As Isaiah wrote concerning the PMIs of his day: “The way of peace they do not know ...” (Isa. 59:8a, NIV). 

ENDNOTES:

¹ As I’m writing this, this is located at <http://www.peacemakers.net/answers.htm>, under “Answer: #2.”

² At <http://www.peacemakers.net/unity/caution.htm>, Fields writes, “Since 1983 when both the professing Church and Para-church organizations were so filled with corruption Bill Fields founded PeaceMakers International ...”

³ “Biblical Rebuke,” <http://www.peacemakers.net/peace/peacemakerministries.htm>, under “A Brief Summary of PeaceMakers International’s practices ...,” point 4.

Editor’s Note

Due to various reasons, the Summer 2001 issue of the Journal was not completed in a timely fashion. Therefore, the Journal staff decided to combine the summer and fall issues into one Summer/Fall 2001 issue. Thank you for your understanding and patience.



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 - Galatians 4:16 -

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