

THE WAY INTERNATIONAL

A Paper

Presented to

Professor Alan Gomes

Talbot School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for

Cults of America

TCH 722/TPHR 722

by

Robert M. Sivulka

April 17, 1989

INTRODUCTION

The Way Biblical Research Center, also known as The Way International, is headquartered in New Knoxville, Ohio. It was founded by Victor Paul Wierwille, who was Chairman of the board until his death in 1986. It is currently directed by Craig Martindale, president of the organization.

Historical Background

Founder

Victor Paul Wierwille was born December 31, 1916, in New Knoxville, Ohio. He was raised and ordained in the Evangelical and Reformed Church, which is now the United Church of Christ. He received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Mission House (Lakeland) College and Seminary. He was a student at the University of Chicago, and then received a Master of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary. In 1948 he received a Doctorate of Theology from Pikes Peak Seminary.

*Nearly as last
as an honorary
doctorate!*

Educational Deceit. On the surface, Wierwille's education seems quite impressive. As far as his doctorate goes, though, a letter from an official of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education says, "Pikes Peak Seminary had no resident instruction, no published list of faculty, no accreditation, and no agency of the government supervised it. It offered its degree programs by 'extramural' methods, involving the sending of book reviews and papers by mail."¹ His doctorate was practically from a "degree mill."

¹ Herbert Diamond, "A Degree from Pike's Peak," Christianity Today. Nov. 21, 1975, pp. 19-20.

Wierwille is also quoted as saying, "I took everything I could take at the Moody Bible Institute, too, through their correspondence courses."² He may have taken them, but Moody has no records of Wierwille completing any courses. Obviously, Wierwille made this statement to mislead people into believing he had his share of respected, conservative Bible training.

The Formation of the Way's Theology

In 1942, shortly after suffering ^{TWO} ~~about~~ ^{WORDS} of spiritual depression, Wierwille claimed that God had spoken to him in an audible voice. God supposedly informed him that "He would teach me the word as it had not been known since the first century, provided that I would teach what He taught me to others."³ This is typical of the cults. Each claims to have been revealed the truth for these last days. Everyone else throughout the ages has perverted the truth given through the apostles in the first century.

J. E. Stiles. In the mid 1940's, Wierwille began a healing ministry. He became more and more interested in the gifts of the Spirit, so much so that he says, "For six years I prayed, asked, pleaded and begged God for this spiritual power. I literally traveled thousands of miles just to ask people about the Holy Spirit and the gifts."⁴ It wasn't until 1950 that Wierwille found the man who could make sense of the Scriptures dealing with the Holy Spirit. The man was Mr. J. E. Stiles from California, of whom Wierwille

² Elena Whiteside, The Way: Living in Love. New Knoxville, OH: American Christian Press, 1970, p.175.

³ 25th Anniversary Souvenir Booklet. New Knoxville: The Way, 1967, p. 9

⁴ Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1972, p. 39.

"x" IS BELOW THE "W" KEY, BOB! ☺

said, "Stiles led me into the manifestation of speaking in tongues...and from that day in 1950 my life and ministry began to change very rapidly."

Power for Abundant Living Class. Three years later, Wierwille started his Power for Abundant Living Class. This class was designed to teach students how to speak in tongues, which to them, is proof of one's salvation.

Present Background

Membership

The Way claims to have no membership, thus there is no record of the amount of people in it. It was considered to be one of the fastest growing cults up until Wierwille died.⁶

Decline. The past couple years have been very splintering to The Way Tree (in the late '60s, Wierwille instituted this symbolism as a hierarchy: "leaves" are believers, "twigs" are home fellowships, "branches" are areas, "limbs" are states, "trunks" are some countries, and "roots" are The Way bases of operation, especially New Knoxville). This is primarily due to a handful of top leaders, such as Peter Wade and John Lynn, who defected the organization and brought serious accusations against top trustees. Among these were Wierwille, his son Donald, Martindale, and Howard Allen. The four major accusations dealt with authoritarianism, plagiarism, practice and

⁵ 25th Anniversary Souvenir Booklet. Op. Cit., p.12.

⁶ Walter Martin, The Cults Reference Bible. Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1981, p.73.

approval of adultery, and false teaching.⁷

The results of these dissensions are seen in several statistical areas. First, enrollment at The Way College in Emporia, Kansas, fell from 350 to 90 students.⁸ Second, the attendance at the 1987 Rock of Ages festival was down 3,000 (This was 12,000 below its peak of 22,000 several years ago).⁹ Third, the attendance at the 1987 "Corps Week" was attended by only 2,000 out of the 3,500 graduates (all Graduates are required to attend this meeting).¹⁰ Fourth, and last, the '86-'87 income fell to \$10 million which is far below their peak year of \$32 million.¹¹

AUTHORITATIVE WRITINGS

Everything that The Way prints is authoritative, as well as everything Wierwille had printed. The Way owns and operates American Christian Press in New Knoxville, Ohio. They have printed Jesus Christ our Passover, Power for Abundant Living, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today, The Bible Tells Me So, The Word's Way, The New Dynamic Church, Jesus Christ God's Magnified Word, and their most famous book, or should I say most infamous, Jesus Christ is not God. Wierwille also has written Are the Dead Alive Now?, which is printed by Devin-Adair Co. in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. The Way also prints booklets, a newspaper, and the bi-monthly The Way Magazine.

⁷John P. Juedes, "The Way Tree is Splintering," Christian Research Journal, Vol. 11 No. 2, Fall 1988, pp. 9-13.

⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

The Logic of Acceptance

The reason why all of these publications are accepted as authoritative is based on the presupposition that Wierwille was revealed the truth by God for these last days. If one is to accept this, he will naturally accept Wierwille's "stamp of approval" on his organization's publications.

Verification. As Christians, we need to "test all things, hold fast to that which is good" (I Thes. 5:21). This is only natural, otherwise we would be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). We need to beware of those who preach another gospel than that which we have already received (Gal. 1:6 - 9). Throughout the rest of this paper we will be examining the doctrine presented in these Way publications to see if it is in fact "another gospel."

THE WAY'S THEOLOGY

The Triune God

The Way International teaches that the orthodox concept of the Trinity is of pagan origin. Wierwille ^{lower case} Claims,

Long before the founding of Christianity the idea of a triune god or a god-in-three-persons was a common belief in ancient religions. Although many of these religions had many minor deities, they distinctly acknowledged that there was one supreme god who consisted of three persons or essences. The Babylonians used an equilateral triangle to represent this three-in-one god now the symbol of the modern three-in-one believers.¹²

This is a typical argument used by Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others against the Christian concept of God.

¹² Wierwille, Jesus Christ is not God. New Knowville: American Christian Press, 1975, p. 11.

Main Reasons for Rejection. This arguement^{of} of paganism, though, seems to be a smoke screen for why Wierwille really rejects the Trinity. He really rejects the Trinity because, first of all, he believes Jesus isn't God, and second of all, the Holy Spirit is really the Person of the Father. Thus there is only one Person of God; namely, the Father. This is basic unitarianism.

Jesus

True. But not all Unitarians equate the Father and the Spirit.
(e.g. some Unitarians say the Spirit is the person of God.)

Wierwille asserts that Jesus Christ was in no way God, or God the Son, but the Son of God. Christ could not be God since "There is only one God, and 'Thou shalt have no other gods.'"¹³ Only the Father could be God.

Other Factors. Wierwille also makes Scripture into a game to avoid the Deity of Christ. He finds 50 verses in the New Testament that refer to Jesus as the 'Son of God,' and then finds only 4 verses that refer to Him as "God." Then he claims, "By the sheer weight of this evidence alone, 50 to 4, the truth should be evident."¹⁴ The implication being that the title of the "Son of God" won out over the title of "God."

ugh!
Finally, Wierwille doesn't believe Jesus pre-existed. "Jesus Christ was with God (in His foreknowledge) before the foundation of the world."¹⁵ Such is the case in John 1:1 where Wierwille claims it really should read, "In the beginning was the Word (God), and the (revealed) Word was with (pros) God (with Him in His foreknowledge, yet independent of Him), and the Word was God."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁶ Walter Martin, The New Cults. Santa Ana: Vision House, 1980, p. 59.

The Holy Spirit

As mentioned before, The Way believes there is no distinction between the Person of the Father and the Person of the Holy Spirit. Wierwille arrived at this conclusion by deducing that since God the Father is both holy and spirit, He is the Holy Spirit.

The Other Holy Spirit. When man becomes regenerated, God gives him a spirit. This is referred to as the gift of a “holy spirit.” Wierwille claims,

The giver is God, the Spirit. His gift is spirit. Failure to recognize the difference between the giver and His gift has caused no end of confusion in the Holy Spirit field of study as well as in the understanding of the new birth. . .

The gift is holy spirit, *pneuma hagion*, which is an inherent spiritual ability, *dunamis*, power from on high. This gift is ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’ with all its fullness.¹⁷

This will become clearer as we look at the next section on man’s nature.

Anthropology

The Way teaches that man, before the fall, was created with a body, a soul, and a spirit. The distinction between the soul and spirit is that the soul is the breath or life of an individual, whereas the spirit is that part of the individual that communicates with God. Since the fall, man is no longer born with a spirit.¹⁸ It wasn’t until Pentecost (Acts 2) that believers were given the gift of the “holy spirit.” Now, in this New Testament age, can a person have a spirit upon belief in Christ.

¹⁷ Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today. Op. Cit., pp. 3-5.

¹⁸ Wierwille, Power for Abundant Living. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1971, pp. 258 & 270.

Spirit From Satan. The Way also teaches that a person can receive a spirit from Satan, and thus become a born again satanist.¹⁹ They do teach, though, that it's possible for a person not to choose either God or Satan.²⁰ This person is, in a sense, an "orphan."

The Fate of Man. The Way doesn't have any formalized eschatology, so man's fate is very unclear. We do know that the Way teaches a doctrine known as "soul sleep."²¹ This teaches that man's soul is unconscious at death until the resurrection. Wierwille, though, only applies this to the dead believers, and he never admits to any everlasting judgment.

Thus we can only speculate. The person who died with a spirit from Satan may be unconscious until the resurrection of the unjust, in which case they would be the only ones to incur eternal judgment. The person who never made a choice between God or Satan to receive a spirit would never incur eternal life or eternal judgment, since he doesn't have a spirit to be "awakened" into fellowship with his maker (God or Satan). Then again, "eternal punishment" may be used as Jehovah's Witnesses use the term: annihilation of the life. In such a use, both "the child of Satan" and the "fence-walker" incur "eternal punishment."

Soteriology

The Way **I**nternational is one of the few cults that teach the only requirement for

¹⁹ Wierwille, The Word's Way. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1971, p.58

²⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

²¹ Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? Old Greenwich, CT: Devin-Abair Co., 1973, pp. 21-49.

salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. Some may argue that they require a person to speak in tongues in order to be saved, but this is not technically correct. Wierwille says, "The only visible and audible proof that a man has been born again and filled with the gift from the Holy Spirit is always that he speaks in a tongue or tongues."²² Thus tongues are an evidence of one's salvation and not a requirement for salvation.

AN EVALUATION OF THE WAY'S THEOLOGY

The Triune God

Faliacies. First of all, just because x derives its origins from y, which is corrupt, doesn't necessitate that x be corrupt also. The Way is guilty of using the fallacy of "guilt by association" in its theory that the concept of the Trinity is derived from pagan sources. In order for The Way to be consistent, they would have to be condemned for believing in a Deity since the pagans also believed in a Deity. Second of all, the Trinity isn't derived from pagan origins; in fact, no pagans ever taught the unique concept of the Trinity. Pagans commonly taught that ~~there were many~~ ^{THREE} gods (most of the time: a father, a mother and a son) formed a supreme godhead.

Good
point

A Biblical Defense. This is a far cry from the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity which states: Within the nature of the One true God, there simultaneously exists three eternal Persons; namely the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the Persons is called God throughout Scripture. The Father is called God in Romans 1:7, The Son in Colossians 2:9, and the Holy Spirit in Acts 5:3 & 4. Yet throughout Scripture we are told there is only one true God (Isaiah 43:10). The only conclusion we can logically

²² Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today. Op. Cit., p. 148

come to, without contradicting Scripture, is that the three Persons are somehow the one true God. This is strict monotheism, in contrast to pagan polytheism.

Jesus

Fallacies. First of all, just because Scripture teaches there is only one true God and we should have no other gods, doesn't necessarily mean that the Father is the only Person of God. It all depends on what Scripture teaches as to whether God is a singular Person, or is a plurality of Persons. Just maybe God is an entirely different being than you have concept of. Don't let your pride stand in "the way" of knowing God. We must humble ourselves before God's Word in order for Him to show us who He is.

Second of all, the "50 to 4" game is completely irrational. If this is true, then Jesus is striped of all godly attributes. For example, He is called the Son of David 16 times throughout Scripture, The Son of God 50 times, and the Son of Man 88 times. If Wierwille is to be consistent, then Jesus couldn't be the Son of David (88 to 16) or the Son of God (88 to 50)! Jesus could only be the Son of Man.

A Biblical Defence. Scripture teaches that Jesus existed before the foundation of the world, in fact, His "goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). Notice this doesn't say that God the Father's foreknowledge of Him is from everlasting. Jesus is! This is why Jesus said in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." The Jews knew He was quoting Exodus 3:14, making Himself out to be God, and that's why they took up stones to stone Him.

Wierwille's use of John 1:1 is totally uncalled for. Its solely based on his presupposition that Jesus Christ is not God, and hence he could not have pre-existed. The word is clearly identified as Jesus, and not the Father (Jn 1:14). Thus "Jesus was God" in the beginning.

The Holy Spirit

A Biblical Defense. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of God, who is separate/distinct from the Father. Just because God the Father has the characteristics of being both spirit and holy, doesn't mean that He is the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Just what does Wierwille do with such a passage as Matthew 28:19; "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"? He overlooks all the manuscript authority, all of which attest to this verse, by claiming that the Church father Eusebius of Nicomedia never quoted "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" the 18 times he quoted Mt. 28:19.²³

This clearly shows Wierwille's brilliance at its best. Just because one man, who died almost 200 years after the New Testament was written, doesn't quote part of a verse doesn't mean the part left unquoted doesn't belong in the Canon. Whether a verse belongs in the Canon or not is determined by other factors that are all taken into account. But with Mt. 28:19, there is no question among legitimate New Testament Greek Scholars. It is a part of the Canon. Besides all this, in a letter to his diocese, Eusebius wrote, "As also our Lord, sending forth His disciples for the preaching, said, 'Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'"²⁴

Anthropology

²³ Kurt Van Gorden, The Way: Is it God's Way? (Tract) Orange, CA: Jude 3 Missions, P.O. Box 1901, 1983.

²⁴ Schaff and Wace, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 4, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953. *p. 74*

He was an Arian heretic! No wonder he didn't quote it!

↓

not to mention the fact that it's an argument from silence!

page?

A Biblical Defense. The Way's theology on the "holy spirit" of man falls apart in a couple areas. First, Scripture does teach that man had a spirit before the Pentecost in Acts 2. Mary cried, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior" (Lk. 1:46 & 47). There are many more examples throughout the Old Testament in which the spirit is distinctive from the soul. good

Second, Wierwille is flatly contradicting Scripture by saying, "The gift from the Holy Spirit."²⁵ Scripture instead always teaches the gift is from (para) God of the (to) Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33 & 38). As Christians we receive the gift *to* Holy Spirit Himself. We don't need a spirit, we need the third Person of God in our lives to renew that spirit we already have.

Thus a man doesn't receive a spirit from Satan either. He may be his child if he doesn't know Jesus (Jn. 8:44), but this doesn't mean Satan gives him a spirit any more than God giving His children spirits upon regeneration.

You are either a child of Satan or you are a child of God. To not choose to live for Christ is to choose. You are either with Jesus or you are against Him, thus doing exactly what your father wants you to do (Mt. 12:30).

The Fate of Man

A Biblical Defense. There is no doctrine of soul sleep taught in Scripture. Instead, when a person dies his spirit returns unto God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). 2 Corinthians 5:6 - 8 says,

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

²⁵ Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today. Op Cit., pp. 3-5.

This is the believer's hope.

The unbeliever have nothing to look forward to but eternal judgment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). This is an actual place as pointed out in the story, not parable, of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke chapter 16. This is a place where you aren't unconscious, but you are gnashing your teeth and wailing (Mt. 13:12).

STRATEGY FOR EVANGELIZING

However the Holy Spirit leads you to witness to The Way International, be as "wise as serpents and as gentle as doves" (Mt. 10:16). God may lead you to find out where "twig" meetings are being held and to go evangelize them. This may simply entail passing out tracts to them afterwards, or actually attending their meetings.

Jude 3 Missions is willing, provided we have enough people interested, to send a team back to New Knoxville, Ohio in the summer to witness at their Rock of Ages festival. If you would be interested in this, or possibly going to Utah or even Brooklyn, NY at the Watchtower Headquarters, our address is P.O. Box 1901, Orange, CA 92668.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Scripture continually cries for us to "beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mt. 7:15). Victor Paul Wierwille is one of those false prophets. He has taught "another gospel" (Gal. 1:8 & 9), "another Jesus", and "another spirit" (2 Cor. 11:4).

We need to know the true God and Jesus of Scripture. Only They give eternal life (Jn. 17:3).

good
Commercial
for
Jude 3!
😊

COMPARISON CHART

The Way

The Bible

The Trinity

"That defines the doctrine of the Trinity, and this I do not believe the Bible teaches" (Wierwille, Jesus Christ is not God, p.5).

"Goye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mt. 28:19)

The Father

"God is holy spirit and God can only give that which He is; therefore, the gift from the Giver is of necessity holy and spirit" (Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today, p.5).

"And now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me" (Isa. 48:16).

Jesus

"I am saying that Jesus Christ is not God" (Wierwille, Jesus Christ is not God, p.5).

"And Thomas answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:28).

The Holy Spirit

"God is holy spirit and God can only give that which He is; therefore, the gift from the Giver is of necessity holy and spirit" (Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today, p.5).

"And now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me" (Isa. 48:16).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Herbert Diamond, "A Degree from Pike's Peak," Christianity Today. Nov. 21, 1975.

John P. Juedes, "The Way Tree is Splintering," Christian Research Journal. Vol. 11 No. 2, Fall 1988.

Walter Martin, The New Cults. Santa Ana: Vision House, 1980.

_____, The Cults Reference Bible. Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1981, p.73.

Schaff and Wace, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 4, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953.

25th Anniversary Souvenir Booklet. New Knowville: The Way, 1967.

Kurt Van Gorden, The Way: Is it God's Way? (Tract) Orange, CA: Jude 3 Missions, P.O. Box 1901, 1983.

Elena Whiteside, The Way: Living in Love. New Knowville, OH: American Christian Press, 1970.

Wierwille, Are the Dead Alive Now? Old Greenwich, CT: Devin-Abair Co., 1973.

_____. Jesus Christ is not God. New Knowville: American Christian Press, 1975.

_____. Power for Abundant Living. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1971.

_____. Receiving the Holy Spirit Today. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1972.

_____. The Word's Way. New Knoxville: American Christian Press, 1971.

Good paper. Please note my comments regarding composition.

Paper 96 = A

Oral = 97 = A