

# REVIEWS

## Taking the “Une” out of “Triune”

*Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, by Benny Hinn. Thomas Nelson, 1990.

Pentecostal pastor and television evangelist Benny Hinn has written an unusual book replete with novel ideas, most of which are not biblical. Regrettably, this book is poorly written, ricocheting between anecdotes, exhortations, Hinn’s biography, and assorted theological errors. He also repeats himself throughout, often reiterating the same stories and personal anecdotes. Hinn tries to be theologically sound by including Scripture in his writing, but more typically he stresses personal and even fanciful experiences. Alarming, and to the reader’s detriment, the book contains several serious errors, four of which will be addressed here.

In spite of the author’s habit of topic-hopping (including four lengthy chapters devoted to his biography), his main theme is evident: According to this book, the Holy Spirit is the neglected and aggrieved third person of the Trinity, wounded and offended by our failure to acknowledge His equality in the Godhead and longing to be worshipped in His own right. The book presents the Holy Spirit as the third of the Trinity, disregarded as a separate entity by the believers, the earthly representation of the Father and the Son, who have left Him alone and returned to the heavens. According to Hinn, the Holy Spirit is hurt that we prefer to worship and pray to the Father and Son rather than to Him; thus He often withholds spiritual power and victory from His inattentive believers. This thought has tritheistic implications.

The Scriptures do reveal a distinction among the Father, Son, and Spirit, but equally assert their oneness, hence the term *triune* (“three-one”); and on a few occasions Hinn acknowledges this oneness. Yet these token glimmers of biblical accuracy are overshadowed, if not nearly obscured, by his excessive emphasis of the distinction within the Trinity and his pressing of the term *third person* beyond scriptural equilibrium to a tritheistic extreme. Hinn begins, “I’d never spoken to the Holy Spirit. I never thought He was a person to be addressed” (12). Herein lie the thrust and mission of his book: Hinn would have the believer initiate an additional prayer life, one addressed uniquely to the Holy Spirit, independent of and separate from the Father and Son, thus compensating Him for our previous neglect and lack of attention. Curiously enough, though, the driving theme of his book is not to be found in the Bible. Scripture never instructs the believer to direct his prayer

to the Holy Spirit. Not only so, out of at least 650 recorded prayers in the Bible, not one is ever addressed to the Holy Spirit (see Lockyer’s *All the Prayers in the Bible*). In fact, what the Bible records is that the Spirit teaches us to pray, “Abba, *Father*” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6, emphasis added). When the Lord Jesus was asked to teach the disciples how to pray, He answered, “When you pray, say, *Father...*” (Luke 11:1-2, emphasis added). Furthermore, more than eighty times the Bible urges us to call upon the name of the Lord as Stephen did when he cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:59). Never are we told to pray to the Holy Spirit. Strangely, Hinn seems neither concerned nor even aware that he has written a book about something which the Bible does not mention even once.

What Hinn does offer the reader, besides a sprinkling of phrases conceding the essential oneness of the Trinity, is an inundation of tritheistic comments. Consider these:

Christ was giving them another leader [the Holy Spirit]. Another one to follow. (15)

God the Son is not on the earth. God the Father is not on earth. They are both in heaven this very second. Who is on earth? *God the Holy Spirit*. (50)

When God the Son departed, God the Holy Spirit came, and He is still here doing His work. (51)

Then I asked [the Holy Spirit], “How can I fellowship with You, but not with the Son?” And He responded, “That is exactly as it should be.” (53)

It wasn’t God the Father that spoke to him [Philip]—nor God the Son. It was God the Holy Spirit. He is a person with a will. (58)

In the Old Testament, Moses could go to the Father. In the New Testament, the disciples could talk to the Son. But when you and I have a need, where should we turn? To the Holy Spirit. (62)

No longer were God the Father and God the Son receiving all of my worship. (71)

Jesus was saying, “Stop following me. I’m leaving, but I’m now sending the Holy Spirit. You must now follow Him.” So why do we say, “I’m following Jesus!” when the only guide we have is the Holy Spirit. (75)

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Remember, since Christ departed, The Holy Spirit is “in charge” on earth. (79)

What happens on earth is the *Spirit's* doing. He's the representative of the Father and the Son. (121)

After reading in Hinn's book many other such statements, a new believer would be thoroughly inculcated with not only the *distinction* among the three, but even more, their *separation*. This is blatantly tritheistic. This separation is illustrated by Hinn as he describes a “phone call” between the Father and the Son, with the Spirit shuttling messages back and forth (136). The Scriptures never portray three separate Gods in either their substance or their work. The Bible reveals a God who is triune *both* in essence and in economy. The Spirit indwells us, yet at the same time Christ Himself indwells us; and while Christ indwells us, the Father also indwells us (Rom. 8:9-11; John 14:23). To see the Son is to see the Father (v. 9). This illustrates the Triune God's essential oneness. The Father sent the Spirit, yet the Spirit's coming was the Son's coming (vv. 16-18). This is the Triune God's economical oneness. Perhaps Hinn sees the Triune God's *essential* oneness, but he seriously errs in not realizing His *economical* oneness.

Because Hinn overemphasizes verses which show a distinction among the three substances or “persons” of the Godhead, he conveys the notion of three separate Gods. For example, while describing one of his many audible conversations with the Holy Spirit, he says, “I asked, ‘How can you be distinct from the Father and the Son?’ And instantly He showed me Stephen being stoned and He said to me, ‘Stephen saw the Father and the Son and I was in him.’ Three distinct individuals” (56). While it is true that these verses indicate a distinction, many other verses indicate a synchronous oneness. For example, while Acts 7:55 does indicate that the Holy Spirit was in Stephen, Colossians 1:27 indicates that Christ was in Stephen, as He is in all the believers. Furthermore, Ephesians 4:6 proves that God *the Father* was also in Stephen. The Spirit's indwelling was also the Son's and the Father's indwelling. This is why Christians came to call Him the *Triune* God: He is at once both three and one, not only in essence but also in activity.

**W**hile Hinn's trinitarian deviation is the most serious error in the book, there is a second gross shortcoming. In all of Hinn's speaking concerning experiencing the Holy Spirit, the experience is usually described as taking place outside the believer. For example, Hinn routinely says that the Holy Spirit was *with* him, *by* him, *around* him, or *in* his bedroom, but rarely *inside* him. He hereby neglects one of the greatest truths of the New Testament—Christ, as the Spirit, indwelling the believer—and through this neglect he leads those who would follow him into a superficial if not spurious relationship with the Holy Spirit. When reading *Good Morning, Holy Spirit*, this superficiality is immediately

apparent in Hinn's predominantly physical, sensual, and often highly imaginative description of his experiences of the Spirit. His experiences are variously described as vibrating, shaking, a gentle and slow breeze, an audible voice, a visible mist, a roller coaster ride, a never-ending series of volcanoes erupting, someone pulling him off the mattress, a strange sensation, a warm blanket of power, a tingling all over, visions of Jesus walking in his bedroom, electric needles rushing through his body, numbness, paralysis, being frozen, strange dreams, people being knocked against the wall and flattened to the floor, and shaking bedroom walls. Not surprisingly, though still incredible, Hinn goes on to claim that the Holy Spirit has a body (84) and can make Himself look like Jesus and visibly appear to people (87): “I am convinced there is a point in your relationship with the Spirit when the anointing becomes so heavy on you—His presence so close to you—that you can look up and see a vision of God. That's how real He can become” (119). Such words can be misleading and may distract young believers from the inward and genuine experience of Christ as shown in the Scripture. Paul, in contrast, travailed over the Galatians, yearning that Christ would be revealed *in* them (Gal. 1:16), live *in* them (2:20), and be formed *in* them (4:19). He prayed “that Christ may make His home *in* your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17) and that we would be *inwardly* “transformed into the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18). The Bible consistently stresses the believers' inward application and knowing of Christ as the Spirit. The Bible would have Christ revealed *in you* (Col. 1:27), whereas Hinn would have one look up and see the Holy Spirit as a vision of Jesus in the sky. Hinn's attempts throughout the book to stir believers' spiritual hunger are commendable but negated by an emphasis on unusual experiences.

**A** third major shortcoming of *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* is Hinn's preoccupation with the believer's personal needs. He makes constant reference to turning to the Holy Spirit for our needs, since supposedly the Holy Spirit is supremely motivated to serve our personal wants and longings. What is missing here is a view of God's eternal purpose through the church, “which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). Christ, as the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b), does indeed meet our personal need, but for what intent? His good pleasure is to have His church, His Body. Hinn never even hints at this in his book. Rather, he emphasizes things such as healings and personal success in ministry. Furthermore, the book includes descriptions of the author's dream life, including nightmares, personal visions of Jesus with details of His outward appearance (although no one else knows exactly what He looked like), and visions of *himself*: “I can't shake the picture of me speaking in huge open-air rallies, in stadiums, in churches, in concert halls” (36). The writer's preoccupation with such matters may help us understand his view of the Holy Spirit. No wonder one of his favorite sayings is, “A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument” (98).

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Nevertheless, our experience must always be interpreted by the Bible's "argument."

**T**he fourth shortcoming of this book is that it is full of doctrinal errors and sloppy scriptural application. For example, Hinn says that the shepherds followed the star to the manger. (It was the wise men; the shepherds were directed there by an angel.) He makes the point that Noah worked at building the ark for 120 years. (It was at the most 100 years; see Genesis 5:32; 6:10, 13; 7:6.) Hinn asserts that you cannot "find the words, 'Grieve not God the Father' or 'Grieve not God the Son.' But throughout the Bible you find, 'Grieve not the Spirit'" (85). (Actually, it is found only in Ephesians 4:30.) In addition, Hinn says of Christ, "We know, for example, that he wore a beard and had long hair...Christ was also a Nazarite, from a city where the men customarily wore long hair" (83). Actually, a Nazarite was a person in Old Testament times who took a religious vow which prohibited (among other strict ordinances) cutting his hair. Jesus was *never* called a Nazarite. He was a *Nazarene*, from the city of Nazareth, which has no historical connections whatever to the Nazarite vow. In fact, Nazarenes were generally held in disrepute for their loose and slovenly character: "Can anything good be from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). These errors, along with numerous others, help illustrate how carelessly this book was constructed.

I do not believe that Hinn is consciously a tritheist. He seems to view the Bible and his experiences through Pentecostal lenses tinted and blurred by an emphasis on what many would regard as questionable experiences. I found *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* to be unworthy of recommending. At best, his book will go the way of most unhealthy teaching, into obscurity and rest forgotten on bookshelves. At worst, it will hinder seeking believers from knowing God in Christ as the Spirit in their spirit, distracting them from the genuine experience of the Holy Spirit into subconscious, if not conscious, tritheism. Ironically, Hinn's book potentially frustrates and nullifies the very experience of the Spirit among believers which he sets out to encourage. For the genuine experience of the Spirit, one should turn from Hinn's book to the divine revelation in the Word of God.

*Reviewed by Gary Evans*

### Concern Misguided

*Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism*,  
by Arthur L. Johnson. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.

When the topic of the subjective experience of God is considered, either as a norm or a minor category of Christian worship, reactions vary from enthusiastic acceptance to vehement rejection. Arthur L. Johnson's *Faith Misguided* is a representative example of the latter reaction.

Other examples include Gordon H. Clark's *Faith and Saving Faith* and Winfried Corduan's *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?* Johnson's effort is not the best treatment of mysticism available. In fact, it is not really a treatment of mysticism at all, either as to its historical role in Christian history or to its theological place in the development of Christian doctrine. Instead, it is an attempt to cast doubt upon the validity of any experience of God that is not immediately rational and objective. In this regard, his book is a fair representation of what can happen when concern about the subjective experience of God compels one to engage in a misguided defense of the faith.

In chapter one Johnson focuses on the nature of mysticism, seeking to provide a working definition that will enable him to discuss the more subjective aspects of mysticism, while avoiding the forms that could more easily be labeled as supernatural. To this end, he concentrates on the psychological aspects of mysticism as an experience, rather than on the philosophical aspects of mysticism as a set of beliefs. In summarizing his emphasis, he states:

Thus far I have been trying to describe the mystical experience itself. I have said it is a psychological experience, totally within the person, having an emotional tone, and that it often has a life-changing intensity about it that sets it off from other experiences. I have also said that the experience proper is totally subjective, and therefore is not open to others. (24)

**B**ased on this definition, Johnson expresses his concern that the pursuit of subjective experience often results in a lack of objectivity related to the "knowledge" that is gained from the experience itself. Referring to William James's notion of the "noetic qualities" of mysticism, presented in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Johnson sees as dangerous the "self-authenticating nature of the mystical experience," in which knowledge or insight that is gained from a subjective experience exerts a higher truth claim within a believer than the Word of God (28). Such concern is not misplaced, because it is possible to place such an emphasis on the instant leading of the Spirit that the guidance afforded by the written revelation of God, the Bible, can be diminished or even replaced. Balance is needed in the Christian experience because the Word and the Spirit perfectly balance each other. The Word defines the boundaries of the operation of the Spirit, and the Spirit never leads in a way that is contrary to the revelation contained in the Word.

In chapter two Johnson speaks of the challenge and the allure of mysticism. The challenge of mysticism is the extent to which Johnson sees it as an infiltrating influence in evangelical, Protestant Christianity. As an example of this infiltration, he points to the prevalence of teachings which have "little real biblical basis" (45). He cites the tendency to bifurcate knowledge into "head knowledge" and

“heart knowledge,” with a corresponding tendency not only to place a greater value on the latter but also to reject the former. In an effort to disabuse his readers of this concept, Johnson rightly points out that the Scriptures, instead of drawing a sharp distinction between mind and heart, commonly associate these two terms. Referring to Mark 2:6, Johnson shows that the mind is a function associated with the heart. Given this association, Johnson argues that there is no basis for seeking knowledge that originates from the “heart” as opposed to the “head.” He also points those with an inclination toward “heart knowledge” to Jeremiah 17:9, which says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else / And is desperately sick; / Who can understand it?” This would be an effective argument against relying on “heart knowledge” instead of the rational processes of the mind, if Johnson had not so effectively demonstrated the lack of this distinction in Mark 2:6. For the sake of discrediting “heart knowledge,” Johnson wants to eliminate the distinction between heart and head. But for the sake of promoting his vision of rationality, Johnson wants to maintain it. In between both of these positions, there is the balance of the scriptural prescription to be renewed in the spirit of the mind (Eph. 4:23), which is a result of the inner operation of the indwelling Spirit. It is unfortunate that this is ignored.

Chapters three and four speak of the allure and antidote of mysticism. The allure of mysticism is identified as a vaguely defined desire within many Christians to have spiritual experiences. Out of this desire, a spiritual person is regarded as someone who is “not concerned with the everyday, mundane affairs of this world. Sometimes he is seen as a high-principled, introspective person, and usually one who pays serious attention to his own subjective urges, impressions, and states” (55-56). As a consequence of this psychological orientation, emotions gain prominence in determining the efficacy and direction of one’s spiritual development. Johnson believes that this is contrary to a life of faith, which is founded on belief and trust in the promises of God, both of which require the exercise of rationality. Given this reliance on rationality, it is no surprise that Johnson regards the antidote to mysticism as being a return to reason. He provides a rather tortured defense of rationality as opposed to the rationalism associated with the Age of Reason. He defines rationality as “the ability to understand and think according to the rules of logic” (70). Beneath Johnson’s elevation of reason, however, there is a fundamental error: He ignores the effect of the fall on the totality of man, including man’s reasoning ability. He clearly sees the unreliability of our emotions, but it seems as if he fails to see any danger in a total reliance on the unrenewed faculties of the mind. In truth, every part of our soul must experience the transforming work of the Spirit: Our mind must be renewed, our emotions must be calibrated, and our will must be softened toward God. Paul’s charge

to be transformed by the renewing of the mind indicates that our mind requires the most fundamental readjustment. This readjustment will occur only as the Spirit is bountifully supplied to us, rather than through the functions of the mind perfecting the thoughts of the mind.

In chapters five and six, Johnson speaks of the recurrence of mystical influences and gives an example of mysticism. He places the cause for the recurrence of mystical themes in Christian history upon the search for guidance within the Christian life, and he cites those who promulgate such pursuits as examples of mysticism. As his example, Johnson singles out Watchman Nee, labeling him as a “voice of misdirection” (89). In support of his contention, Johnson draws heavily upon three books by Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man*, *Spiritual Reality or Obsession*, and *The Release of the Spirit*. It is instructive to note that most critics of Watchman Nee tend to rely on these books, especially the first and the last, and often ignore the complete and balanced body of Watchman Nee’s work. A clear example of this balance can be seen in his introduction to *The Normal Christian Church Life*:

The leading of the Spirit is precious, but if there is no example in the Word, then it is easy to substitute our fallible thoughts and unfounded feelings for the Spirit’s leading, drifting into error without realizing it. If one is not prepared to obey God’s will in every direction, it is easy to do things contrary to His Word and still fancy one is being led of His Spirit. We emphasize the necessity of following both the leading of the Spirit and the examples of the Word, because by comparing our ways with the written Word we can discover the source of our leading. The Spirit’s guidance will always harmonize with the Scriptures. (15)

In this passage Nee displays a profound reverence for the Word of God and an equally profound reverence for the working of the Spirit. It is unfortunate that Johnson’s critique is not based on a more thorough examination of the writings of Watchman Nee.

The remaining two chapters offer little development of Johnson’s thesis, other than to try to provide Christians with some assurance that it is possible to have a relationship with the indwelling Spirit simply through the rational assimilation of the thoughts of God as they are communicated through His written Word. If one tried to be led of the Spirit in this manner alone, the black and white letters of the Bible would render such an effort fruitless and unfulfilling. Consider, for example, Proverbs 26:4-5. Verse 4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, / Lest you also be like him.” This admonition is clear, and it provides ample justification for not allowing oneself to be drawn into the folly of a particular moment. However, verse 5 says, “Answer a fool as his

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folly deserves, / Lest he be wise in his own eyes.” This admonition not only requires more direct engagement on one’s part; it is in direct contradistinction to verse 4. From the close juxtaposition of these verses, it should be obvious that it is impossible to construct a rigid code of conduct for such situations. In addition to the Word, we will always need the balanced leading of the Spirit.

Many of Johnson’s points are valid, but his conclusions are often overburdened by his misplaced emphasis on faith as an issue of purely rational processes. Johnson’s defense of the faith against subjective experience rests upon two points: The first relates to the Bible being the sole source of revealed truth, in contrast to the Word and the Spirit working together in harmony to bring the believers into all reality. The second relates to the mind being the instrument for the illumination of revealed truth, as opposed to the inner working of the Spirit to renew the mind.

Relying upon a very specific definition of the nature of the Evangelical approach to the Word of God, Johnson argues that the Bible is the sole source of revelation and spiritual guidance:

Evangelical Christians maintain that the Bible is the only standard for faith and practice—the only and ultimate criterion in all matters concerning our spiritual life (2 Pet. 1:2-4; 2 Tim. 3:16). If this is so, is there any place for such extrabiblical sources of knowledge as mystical experiences in the Christian’s life? (29)

Johnson rightly gives prominence to the Bible; it is indeed “profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), but his narrow insistence that it is the “only and ultimate criterion in all matters concerning our spiritual life” creates problems on two levels, both of which undermine his thesis. On one level the Bible does not limit the instruction of a Christian to just the knowledge that can be gained from studying the Bible; it also speaks of the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Given the truth of the indwelling Holy Spirit within the Word, it is doubtful whether most Evangelicals would be as willing as Johnson is to deprive the Spirit of His power to operate in our daily lives. For example, the Bible teaches that we need to abide in Christ (John 15:4), but the Bible also says that we are taught to abide in the Triune God through the inward anointing that abides in us (1 John 2:20-27).

On a different level, Johnson undermines the integrity of his argument. He vigorously defends the primacy of the Bible so that he can argue against the noetic quality of mystical knowledge and the notion that “special revelation” can be gained from subjective experience. He states this concern in the introduction: “Being convinced by

their own experiences that a mystical approach is valid, these persons have interpreted Scripture to fit” (15). In the very next sentence, however, he undermines the epistemological and hermeneutical basis for his claim by stating that a mystical approach “often gives a meaning to the written Word that may be nearly the opposite to that intended by the Holy Spirit” (15). Johnson eschews subjective experiences, yet at the same time argues that it is possible to discern the intentions of the Spirit. Without being mystical or subjective, that is, without an inner confirmation and testimony of the Spirit, how can Johnson discern and validate the intentions of the Holy Spirit? Unwittingly, Johnson has proven that, in fact, the Word reveals the Spirit and that the Spirit must confirm the Word, making it living and operative.

As much as Johnson would like to relate all Christian growth and development to the exercise of the rational faculties of the mind in a review of the revealed revelation in the Bible, his attempt ultimately fails because the Bible is not so narrow. He states, “The mind is the indispensable, divinely ordained tool of spiritual growth” (92). However, the two most significant prayers in the Epistles indicate that the spirit is the starting point of both enlightenment and experience. In Ephesians 1 Paul prays that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened to know the hope of His calling. Immediately prior to this, however, Paul prays that the Father of glory would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him (vv. 17-18). Wisdom and revelation begin in the spirit and ultimately enlighten the eyes of our heart, including our mind. In Ephesians 3 Paul prays that we would be strengthened into the inner man (our regenerated human spirit) so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (including our mind) through faith (vv. 16-17). The spirit and the mind in a Christian are inextricably linked. It is not possible to truly grow through just the growth of our rational faculties, because the revelation of the Bible is ultimately concerned with the growth of God in our entire being (Col. 2:19).

It is regrettable that in attempting to uphold the pure Word of God, a model for spiritual growth is advanced that has little bearing on the overall revelation of the sacred Scriptures. Johnson’s methodology of spiritual growth deprives the believers of the essential means for true growth—a living and vital relationship with the indwelling Spirit, whose purpose is to bring the believers into all the reality of the Triune God in their experience.

*Reviewed by John Pester*

#### Works Cited

Nee, Watchman. *The Normal Christian Church Life*. Living Stream Ministry: Anaheim, 1980.