

SPIRITUAL DEVIATIONS

Hannah's Heresies

Spiritual Deviations, a new department in *Affirmation & Critique*, will examine deviations from the norm of genuine Christian spiritual experience unveiled in the New Testament. In brief, this norm is that, based upon God's judicial redemption accomplished in Christ and applied to the believers by grace through faith in Christ, the believers are regenerated in their spirit and thus embark upon a course of growth in the divine life leading to spiritual maturity—a process involving sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. In the economy of God, the goal of this process is the corporate expression of Christ through the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.

We open this department with an article on the deviations of Hannah Hurnard, author of the widely read *Hind's Feet on High Places*. So popular is this book that its United States publisher (Tyndale) now has a *Hind's Feet* calendar featuring "daily meditations from Hannah Hurnard about the yearnings of God's children." The front page of the Barbour Book reprint edition says:

The High Places of victory and union with Christ can be reached by learning to accept, day by day, the actual conditions and tests permitted by God....

The lessons of accepting and triumphing over evil, of becoming acquainted with grief, and pain, and of finding them transformed into something incomparably precious; these are the lessons of the allegory in this book.

The word *union* is emphasized by Hurnard in "Preface to the Allegory," where she speaks of "unbroken union," "deep union," "perfect union," and "the High Places of victory and union" (11). In her view this union once existed but, having been broken, needs to be restored. Thus, she talks about "the desire implanted in every human heart, to be *re-united with God Himself*" (11, emphasis added). "To learn the secret of victorious living has been the heart's desire of those who love the Lord, in every generation" (10). "Victorious union" and "unbroken union"—these may sound good to the undiscerning reader of *Hind's Feet*. Some readers might have a change of heart if they knew that the lessons of sorrow and suffering that Hurnard urges her readers to accept and glory in are based not on fundamental biblical doctrine but rather on the doctrine of reincarnation. Hurnard specifically presents

this teaching in *The School of Earth Experiences*, a book that exposes Hannah's heresies. The word *heresies* is appropriate because in this work Hurnard teaches "another Jesus" and "a different gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4). The heretical teaching in *The School* is so serious and extensive that it would take a small volume to examine it thoroughly. This article must be limited to Hurnard's belief in reincarnation.

R reincarnation—the notion that "spirits [human beings] return more than once to earth in mortal bodies" and in this way learn "different and vital lessons through many different earthly experiences"—is the underlying concept of everything in *The School* (11, 5). "The Bible very clearly does teach, from beginning to end," Hurnard insists, "that spirits need more than one term in the earth schoolroom" (6). According to her opinion Exodus 34:6-7 means that "the fathers who commit the sins in one lifetime must be born again as the children in the third or fourth generation, and return to earth to reap the harvests of misfortunes which have sprung up as the result of their former wrong doing" (12). She even says that in John 9 "the Lord, in the plainest possible way, confirmed His own belief in the Old Testament teaching concerning the necessity for human souls to visit the earth school more than once," and that "Jesus did accept the current belief concerning reincarnation and did teach that congenital and hereditary diseases are connected with experiences and behaviour in an earlier lifetime" (17). Furthermore, she maintains that belief in reincarnation can bring "comfort...to people who are suffering in crippled bodies" and to "the parents of congenitally diseased or crippled and handicapped children" (25, 26). For Hurnard, therefore, the "High Places" rest upon the bedrock of belief in reincarnation.

In Hurnard's theology reincarnation is necessary "in the light of the Biblical teaching that we are all fallen spirits" who "are being brought up from a horrible pit" (5). In her opening sentence she declares: "WE HUMAN BEINGS are all spirits who have come to the School of Earth in order to learn immensely important lessons" (1). For Hurnard, human beings do not have a spirit created by God; they *are* spirits, and preexistent spirits at that. These fallen, preexistent spirits have somehow come to earth, which is regarded as "the School" where they learn important lessons before they can "graduate" into "eternal life" (7). These "spirits" may have to repeat certain grades in "school" before they can be promoted to the next

level of self-development. Hurnard explains: "We are all at school here on earth and it is impossible that everything can be learnt in the course of one brief term in the earth school" (5). In light of this supposed fact, Hurnard claims that it "becomes clear that more than one lifetime in the great school of earth is needed" (6). But Christ has come, Hurnard asserts, to help us learn our lessons and eventually "graduate" (7).

Hurnard's Christ, instead of being the eternal only-begotten of God incarnated as a man, is merely "the first really holy man," "the embodiment of perfect love and purity," the "one who embodied the true standard" (4). Elsewhere she rhapsodizes over "the great Ideal which He embodied" (27). The Jesus whom Hurnard loves and in whom she believes is One who "taught men how to escape into eternal life, and this is the clearest proof that He believed in the fact of reincarnation" (23). The "Jesus" of *The School* is not the Redeemer, the Savior, and the Lord; He is a teacher who knows the way of escape from suffering:

Every time that He mentioned "eternal life" He was simply proclaiming the glorious news of the way by which men can escape from the necessity of having to reincarnate yet again in a physical body which must experience the sufferings of mortal life. (22-23)

Hurnard speaks of "the good news of the Gospel brought by Jesus Christ, about the one way to escape from the need to reincarnate yet again in a mortal, physical body here on earth" (21). This "gospel" is different (Gal. 1:6-9) from the gospel announced by Paul: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Hurnard's "gospel" concerns a "Jesus" who "brought the great and glorious news...concerning the way to escape from the need to go on reincarnating" (8).

In application, Hurnard's "way to escape" involves a three-step procedure. First, one must accept, learn, and follow Jesus' teaching, especially the teaching about love (5, 27). Second, one must make atonement for one's sins by "undergoing a cleansing and purging experience" (26), an experience that involves passive acceptance of suffering. In answer to the anticipated question, "Is not Christ the One who makes atonement?" Hurnard replies, "Yes, He is, for He is the Head of the Body and initiates it all, and feels it with us. But He makes that atonement through us...and by inspiring us with the desire to atone" (26). Third, the "way

of escape" entails a gradual process of self-development, requiring "Christ-inspired efforts...to rise to higher things [the High Places]" (27). "We need times and seasons of learning, under all the different circumstances possible, to give us a real understanding love, before any of us can reach full spiritual development" (5). After a person has become "sufficiently spiritually matured and evolved" and thus has attained full spiritual development, he or she will "be counted worthy to graduate out of mortal life into 'eternal life'" (10).

What Hurnard writes in *The School* is contrary to the faith, the gospel, the economy of God, and the union with the Triune God. Her

belief is not "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), the contents of the New Testament as our objective faith (Acts 6:7; 14:22; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10, 21; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:7; Titus 1:13), in which all genuine Christians believe for their common salvation. Neither is her teaching in the category of "the common faith" (Titus 1:4), the faith that is common to all believers. In *The School* Hurnard teaches a "different Jesus" and thereby "goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ" (2 John 9), that is, the truth concerning the deity, incarnation, redeeming death, and bodily resurrection of Christ. Hurnard's "gospel" of release from reincarnation is her own invention and as such is a "different gospel" from Paul's gospel of grace received through revelation (Gal. 1:11-12). Furthermore, Hurnard disregards Paul's charge "not to teach different things"—things different from God's economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4). On the one hand, Hurnard ignores God's economy; on the other hand, what she teaches is altogether contrary to God's economy. Therefore, despite her concern for "perfect union," her teaching cannot help a seeking Christian to progress in the genuine spiritual union with the Triune God. The teachings in *The School of Earth Experiences* are heresies which lead to deviation from God's economy and from normal Christian spiritual experience—the experience that satisfies the desire of God and the desire of those who love Him, seek Him, and long to live in union with Him.

by Ron Kangas

Works Cited

- Hurnard, Hannah. *Hind's Feet on High Places*. Ulrichsville: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1977.
- . *The School of Earth Experiences*. London: C. W. Davies. n.d.