
Editorials

THE NON-NOURISHING MIX OF CHICKEN SOUP

An old joke goes: "Come on over for supper. We'll throw a little more water in the soup." However, with too many guests one ends up with a watery non-nourishing mix. Spiritually speaking, the plethora of self-esteem/self-help books that continue to stockpile the shelves of even Christian bookstores depict this unhealthy brew. And none more so than the best-selling "Chicken Soup" series.

The title and concept has caught on and there are "Chicken Soup" books for everyone and everything imaginable (including women, mothers, teenagers, children, the surviving soul, the soul at work, and the never forgotten doll). The line sells at an unabated rate. And many of its titles repeatedly appear on the best-seller list with selections including, *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul* and various cookbooks.

Despite the series' appeal, Christians should take pause and exercise caution when they realize that these books are published by a New Age publisher. And the authors, Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, are admittedly New Age proponents. At the very least, these books will be tainted by Canfield's visualization and self-esteem ideas and Hansen's humanistic bent. The books further include contributions by or references to M. Scott Peck, Joseph Campbell, Norman Vincent Peale, Napoleon Hill and other New Age or positive mental attitude gurus.

Apologist K. Craig Branch of Watchman Fellowship in Birmingham, Ala., has done the Christian body a valuable service in exposing Canfield's and Hansen's views on man's perfectibility. In his article, "Chicken Soup Or Witch's Brew" (*The Watchman Expositor*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 18-20), he notes that in one book alone (*A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup*), at least 38 New Age and Mormon authors are cited. Other volumes from the series are equally seasoned with the same unchristian flavor. In addition, both Canfield and Hansen have published another work, *The Aladdin Factor*, which affirms visualization techniques and cites numerous New Age leaders.

Further in his article, Branch catalogs three areas of deep concern for the Christian. These include:

1) *The humanistic tendency of these books.* Throughout the series, people are told that life is just reaching one's potential. It is a feel-good message of simply living in terms of what one feels is right. It removes the Christian's focus from the sure Word of God. Our reference point as believers is the eternal God and His eternal Word, not our feelings and opinions.

2) *The success in sales have given notable credibility to Canfield and his coauthor Hansen.* In addition to local Christian bookstores, national booksellers such as Christian Book Distributors (CBD) and Christian book brokers such as Ingram/Spring Arbor Distributors, all have added respectability by making the publications available. Yet, New Age ideas — no matter how popular they

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when the conscience of the individual cooperated with it. Grace not only forgives, but teaches (Titus 2:11-14).³⁵

Wuest concludes:

“Just because the believer now is scot free from the law, does not mean that he can sin with impunity. There is a new propelling and compelling deterrent to sin, divine love, produced in the believer’s being which causes him to hate sin and obey the Word of God (Gal. 5:13, John 14:21-24).”³⁶

Endnotes:

1. Dave Breese, *Know The Marks of Cults*. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1975, pg. 14.
2. Stephen Westerholm, *Israel’s Law and The Church’s Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988, pg. 2.
3. Thomas McComisky, *The Covenants of Promise*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985, pg. 108, italic in original.
4. *Ibid.*, pg. 109.
5. Theonomy or reconstructionism is the belief system whose objective is to reestablish society according to the strict and explicit guidelines set forth in the Old Testament law. For more information on Christian Reconstructionism see, Bruce Barron, *Heaven on Earth?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.

Also H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?*. Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1988.

6. For more information on this pseudo-Christian sect, see Philip Schaff, *History Of The Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910, Vol. 2, pp. 428-434. Also see, “Here Come the Ebionites,” PFO Newsletter, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 2, 7.
7. George Williams, *The Radical Reformation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962, pg. xxviii, Introduction.
8. Mart DeHaan, *Times Of Discovery*, “Been Thinking About ... Torah.” Grand Rapids, Mich.: Radio Bible Class, February 1998, pp. 1-2.
9. Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of The Kingdom*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968, pg. 65.
10. John Reisinger, *Tablets of Stone*. Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Publications, Inc., 1989, pg. 26.
11. *Ibid.*, pg 27, italic in original.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See further, Schaff, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 201-205.
14. J.B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, no date, pg. 17.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185.
16. Harry A. Ironside, *Epistle To The Galatians*. Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1970, pg. 174.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.
18. Charles Ryrie, *The Grace of God*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, pg. 96.

19. John Strombeck, *Disciplined By Grace — Studies In Christian Conduct*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregal Resources, 1991, pp. 10, 11, 13, italic in original.
20. *Ibid.*, pg. 36.
21. McComisky, op. cit., pg. 227.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Westerholm, op. cit., pg. 96.
24. Reisinger, op. cit., pp. 99-100, italic in original.
25. John MacArthur, Jr., *Strength For Today*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1997, entry for January 2, pg. 2.
26. McClain, op. cit., pg. 430.
27. Fenton Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1894, pp. 1-2, 4, 5, 83, emphasis added.
28. John Reisinger, *But I Say Unto You*. Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Publications, Inc., 1989, pg. 73.
29. Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949, pp. 319-320, emphasis in original.
30. F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale Bible Commentaries—The Epistle Of Paul To The Romans*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963, Vol. 6, pg. 162.
31. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948, Vol. 4, pg. 180.
32. *Ibid.*, pg. 185.
33. *Ibid.*, pg. 187.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 211.
35. Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988, Vol. 1, Romans, pg. 109.
36. *Ibid.*

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become — are a denial of a personal, Holy Father God who will call all men into account for their sins. The human potential movement anesthetizes people to their real need of forgiveness and a Savior.

3) *The decidedly postmodern perspective of our culture and the Church*. Postmodernism posits that there are no fixed truths or real moral values. Everyone’s truth is truth. It is a pragmatic and subjective approach to life. The demise of doctrine in most Christian churches may be the reason so many believers are so undiscerningly buying and reading this series.

Some teaching (like the theology of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Latter-day Saints) is downright destructive to the soul. Other teaching is like junk food with no real nourishment for the soul. The Apostle Paul warns: “Charge some that they teach no other doctrine. ... if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:3, 10). The word “sound” (Greek:

hugias) is literally healthy or vibrant in health. There is the good doctrine of Scripture that promotes spiritual health and then there is unscriptural and New Age teaching that makes people spiritually sick. The latter is the unhealthy doctrine warned of by Paul. We are mandated to teach “healthy” doctrine and stay away from poisonous or junk food doctrine.

Paul further directs these sober words to Timothy that say it all: “If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings” (1 Timothy 6:3-4).

Christians should avoid the non-nourishing mix found in the “Chicken Soup” series. Moreover, Christian booksellers would do well to forgo the profits made from selling this popular series by discontinuing its sales and then affirming to become more discerning in the material they make available to their customers.

—GRF