

# A Summary Critique

## Good Morning, Holy Spirit

Benny Hinn  
(Thomas Nelson, 1990)

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### Book Reviews by Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and Paul Carden

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**Good Morning, Holy Spirit** is a runaway best seller by Benny Hinn, pastor of Orlando Christian Center in Florida, and a popular televangelist on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN). Less than six months after its release, there are already (as of February 1991) 350,000 copies in print.

I met with Benny Hinn on December 5, 1990, along with Hank Hanegraaff and Bob Lyle of the Christian Research Institute (CRI), to discuss CRI's concerns about this book. After that meeting, and in consultation with Hinn, Thomas Nelson Publishers made several changes in the eighth printing of the book (January 1991). (Thomas Nelson is a generally reputable Christian publishing house carrying a number of fine books which CRI continues to endorse and even distribute to the public.) There is no acknowledgment in the book that changes have been made. That is, there is no way of knowing, other than carefully comparing select pages, whether one is holding in one's hands the original or the revised version. Although representatives of Thomas Nelson have stated publicly that changes were made to clarify Hinn's intended meaning, I shall argue that the changes constitute a revision and not merely a clarification.

### **This book is significant for two reasons.**

**First**, in it Hinn recounts his life story, essentially the testimony on which he bases his claim to be an anointed minister of God. If people accept his story, they may be inclined to accept and even support his ministry — and whatever might be considered controversial in his book is by all accounts mild compared with what goes on in his public ministry.

**Second**, Hinn presents a controversial understanding of the doctrine of the

Trinity. If it is in any way erroneous, the public needs to be informed. Moreover, although changes have been made in the eighth printing, no copies of the original version were recalled, and no public retraction of its errors was made. Thus, a review of both the original book and the revision is imperative. (In what follows, citations are the same in both versions unless indicated otherwise.)

### **HINN'S STORY**

Benny Hinn claims to have had two visions of Jesus before his conversion. The first was at age eleven while he was asleep (p. 22). The second occurred when he was nineteen during a charismatic prayer meeting, when, says Hinn, "Suddenly I saw Jesus with my own eyes" (31). This vision resulted in an immediate conversion.

Later, Benny had a powerful experience at a Kathryn Kuhlman service. While waiting in line and throughout most of the service he was shaking uncontrollably and experiencing a range of intense emotions. Through listening to Kuhlman speaking of her intimate friendship with the Holy Spirit, Hinn was led to seek a similar intimacy with the Spirit (4-13). The purpose of **Good Morning, Holy Spirit** is to help other Christians do the same.

After this event Hinn claims to have had numerous ecstatic and supernatural experiences. Members of his family and others supposedly began crying and even falling down when Benny would enter the room or walk by them (41-42). This falling down is known as being "slain in the Spirit," an experience Hinn regularly effects during his services. His most impressive claim is to have been healed of stuttering when he first stood up to preach (45).

There is no reason to doubt that Hinn had certain experiences such as he describes, though we may allow for some exaggerations. Whether they were actual manifestations of Jesus and the Holy Spirit is another question, one to which easy answers are not available. For example, there is no way to prove or disprove that Hinn really saw Jesus. Ultimately, these accounts of supernatural experiences must be evaluated on the basis of Hinn's present ministry and teaching, not the reverse.

One way in which Hinn's story relates fairly directly to his ongoing ministry concerns occurrences of people being "slain in the Spirit." Hinn's practice of slaying people in the Spirit by blowing on them or touching their heads bears all the marks of manipulative, staged performances. This should be evident

whether or not one admits that there is a valid spiritual experience of being slain in the Spirit. Hinn announces to his congregation to get ready for the experience; he positions "catchers" on the stage to catch those who fall; those who are "slain" lose complete control of themselves, while Hinn remains always firmly in control of himself; at times whole sections of the congregation are "slain" at the same instant, and always at Hinn's cue. Hinn has been known to "throw" the Holy Spirit to his audience as if the Spirit were a softball! It has even been reported that one woman died as a result of someone falling on top of her after being slain by Benny Hinn (see **Charisma**, Jan. 1988, 54). The book **Good Morning, Holy Spirit**, by presenting these phenomena as incidental, moderate occurrences, will make it easier for people to accept the more extreme, problematical manifestations in Hinn's actual ministry.

Although Hinn's story is worthy of more detailed consideration, the most significant aspect of the book is his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity. The rest of this review will focus on this issue.

#### **HINN'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY: VERSION #1**

There is much about what Benny Hinn says concerning the Trinity with which orthodox Christians can agree. Hinn affirms that God is a "triune being" and that the three persons "are really one in Being" (70, 71, 74). He states clearly that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each fully God, emphasizing that the Holy Spirit is just as much God as the Father and Son (69-71, 87, 90, 131). He also insists that the Holy Spirit is just as real and personal as the Father and Son (2, 51, 71). As God, third person of the Trinity (49, 73), the Holy Spirit is omnipresent (73, 87-88), unlike the angels or the Devil (88), and He is also omnipotent and omniscient (88-89). The Holy Spirit is a personal friend, companion, and counselor to the Christian (52).

Unfortunately, these biblically sound assertions are mixed with statements which express notions that are unbiblical and unorthodox. That Hinn is presenting a novel view of the Trinity is implied when he informs us that "what I am about to share with you regarding the Godhead gave me an **entirely new picture** of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (81, emphasis added). In context this "entirely new picture" is evidently new to most Christians, and not something that was merely new at one time to Hinn. Thus he complains that "even dedicated ministers of the gospel" and "clergy"

have misled the church in this matter. Throughout this key chapter Hinn claims that most ministers and Christians generally have ignored or even avoided the subject (81, 84, 89).

What is this new picture of the Trinity? According to the original version of the book (and even more explicitly in Hinn's sermon on the subject televised October 13, 1990, on TBN), God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, like God the Son, each is a real "person" in the sense that each has his own separate "Spirit, Soul, and Body" (the title of chapter 6, pp. 80-92). Although this teaching is not absolutely new (it has been taught by F. J. Dake, Jimmy Swaggart, and others), it is new enough in most circles to account for Hinn's repeated claim that most Christians and even most ministers have ignored it.

According to Hinn, the Father "is eternal spirit yet with nonmaterial form" (81, 1st ed.), having "the appearance . . . of a man," described by the prophets as having such "features" as lips, tongue, breath, eyesight, and a back (82). "To my amazement I found that God has the likeness of fingers and hands and a face" (82, 1st ed.). To document that God has a soul in addition to his spirit and body, Hinn notes that in Scripture "God also has a heart" (83).

Jesus is also shown from Scripture to have both a body and soul (83). "And His glorified human body is distinct from the divine form of God the Father" (84). "But what about the Holy Spirit? Does He also have a mind, will, and emotions? Does He have a body? He certainly does" (84). He "has a mind of His own" that is "distinct from that of the Father and the Son"; "He also has emotions"; and he has a "will" by which it is possible for him "to decide separately from the Father and the Son," though of course "always in harmony with the Godhead" (84, 85).

"It is the question of the 'body' of the Holy Spirit that causes much confusion," however (85). Hinn states, "I believe the Holy Ghost is spirit body, not with actual flesh and blood but a spirit being with form, yet without limitation . . . Let me tell you why I believe the Holy Ghost is a body — a spirit body" (86, 1st ed.). His reason, in short, is that as "God the Father looks like Jesus on earth," so also Hinn believes "that as Jesus looked on earth, so the Holy Ghost looks" (87, 1st ed.). "Someday soon I'm going to find out for certain" (87). Hinn evidently does not mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit look **exactly** like Jesus, since he says that no one knows what the Father's "mysterious form" looks like in detail (72, 82) and that the Holy

Spirit "doesn't have ears or a mouth" and "doesn't have eyes like mine" (86). Rather, he seems to mean simply that the Father and the Spirit, like Jesus, each have a body.

The notion that the three divine persons have three separate constitutions of spirit, soul, and body is inconsistent with orthodoxy because it implies that they are really three separate beings rather than (as Hinn also does say in passing) one divine being in three persons. This implication is underscored by Hinn's assertion later that "the Trinity, as we see, is comprised of three distinct and unique entities" (140, 1st ed.). Hinn pictures the Trinity as "a **team** working together in complete accord and eternal harmony" (144, 1st ed.; emphasis added).

So separate are the three persons that Hinn argues that each has personality traits unique to himself as compared to the other two (139). In particular, "the Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity and yet is ["so completely," 1st ed.] different from the Father and the Son" (152). The Holy Spirit "reacts differently" (2d ed.; "totally different," 1st ed.) to those who are willfully sinning from the way the Father or the Son would react (140). He feels human emotions more deeply than either the Father or the Son; he is more sensitive, so that "He is touched in a deeper, more profound way than the other members of the Godhead" (153, 1st ed.). Because of this the Holy Spirit, unlike the Father or the Son, is "easily wounded" and "can be tormented by human beings" (91, 92). Thus blasphemy against the more "tender" Holy Spirit is unforgivable while blasphemy against the Father or the Son is not (154).

Finally, Hinn compromises the deity of Christ when he argues that "had the Holy Spirit not been with Jesus, He would have ["may have likely," 2d ed.] sinned . . . Without the Holy Ghost Jesus would ["may," 2d ed.] have never made it" (135). This implies that Jesus overcame sin as a mere man empowered by the Spirit, and that he could have failed. While Jesus **was** filled and anointed by the Spirit, and while the Spirit **was** involved in Jesus' overcoming of temptation, Jesus was no mere man indwelt by the Spirit — he was the divine Son of God incarnate. There are orthodox theologians who have held that Jesus was able to sin. I can agree or disagree with this assertion, depending on what is meant by it. But the real question here is not whether and in what sense Jesus might have sinned, but Hinn's assertion that



Jesus **would** or **might have** sinned had it not been for the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Such a statement is by all accounts inconsistent with Hinn's confession that Jesus was God.

Along the same lines, Hinn goes on immediately to ask rhetorically, "Can you imagine Christ headed for the grave knowing He would remain there forever if the Holy Ghost would change His mind about raising Him from the dead?" (136, 1st ed.). In the revised printings this is changed to the less colorful statement, "He [Christ] even depended on the Spirit to raise Him from the death-grip of the grave." This removes the scandalous speculation about the Holy Spirit changing his mind, but leaves Jesus helpless in the grave. In fact, while of course the Holy Spirit was **involved** in Jesus' resurrection (Rom. 1:4; 8:9-11), Jesus as God the Son **raised himself** from the dead (John 2:19; 10:17-18). Peter even stated that it was **impossible** for Jesus to stay dead (Acts 2:24).

In short, in the original version of this book Hinn taught (no doubt unwittingly) a form of implicit tritheism (belief in three Gods or three divine beings). Certainly in no version of the book does Hinn teach **explicit** tritheism, since Hinn affirms that God is one being and never says they are three Gods. But his referring to the three persons as separate "entities," his insistence that they are markedly different in personality traits, and his teaching that each possesses a separate spirit, soul, and body, contradict the few passing references in the book to the Trinity as one triune being (70, 71, 74). Hinn's doctrine of the Trinity, then, at least in this version, may be classified as "aberrational" — neither soundly orthodox nor thoroughly heretical, but a mixture of orthodox and unorthodox elements.

### **HINN'S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY: VERSION #2**

The revised version of **Good Morning, Holy Spirit** contains a number of significant changes in Hinn's teaching on the Trinity. Hinn's original position has been left intact except for changes (often only slight modifications) of his most obviously questionable statements. The only way to see this clearly is to read both versions of chapters 6, 9, and 10 (especially 81-82, 85-87, 90-91, 135-36, 139-40, 144, 152-53). Some of these changes have already been noted.

The most substantial changes in the book appear in chapter 6, where Hinn now appears to teach, not that the Father and the Holy Spirit possess bodies

as intrinsic aspects of their constitution, but that they can **reveal** themselves in bodily form, as in theophanies. Now, undoubtedly this is a fully orthodox position. But the changes raise difficult questions.

Most generally, it is now difficult to understand why Hinn would describe his view as "an entirely new picture" that the church has ignored and avoided discussing, and that caused Hinn to be amazed when he learned it (80-82). There is nothing new or controversial about the Father and the Holy Spirit being able to reveal themselves in bodily forms in theophanies.

This problem surfaces in the revised version repeatedly. For example, in the original version, after speculating that the Holy Spirit looks like Jesus and therefore has a spirit body, Hinn commented, "Someday soon I'm going to find out for certain" (87). This sentence in the revised version now appears after Hinn's observation that "Jesus reveals the Holy Ghost as He does the Father." Is Hinn uncertain about that?

Worse, at least one passage still clearly affirms that the Holy Spirit possesses a body. In **both** versions it reads, "But what about the Holy Spirit? Does He **also have** a mind, a will, and emotions? Does He **have a body**? He certainly does" (84, emphasis added). Surely this can only mean that the Holy Spirit possesses a body as his intrinsic possession, just as he possesses a mind, will, and emotions. (Obviously, Hinn does not mean that the Spirit "has a mind" only in the sense that he can assume one for revelatory purposes!) Moreover, this body is distinct from those of the Father and the Son ("Does He **also** have . . .?"). Perhaps these statements will be likewise "clarified" in future printings.

In short, the changes made in this chapter fail to rid it thoroughly of the teaching, summarized in the chapter's title, that each of the three divine persons possesses a "spirit, soul, and body." As it stands the chapter is incoherent. Nor do the other changes made in the book eliminate the idea that the three persons possess differing personality traits, though this notion is considerably softened.

### **CAUSE FOR CONCERN**

While the first version of this book is implicitly tritheistic, the revised version has had most (though not all) traces of overt tritheism removed. Yet the overall thrust of the book is still implicitly tritheistic. The danger is that people will absorb the tritheism still latent in the book and become implicitly

tritheistic in some of their own thinking even if they adhere in theory to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. The book in both versions, then, must be regarded as aberrational, though less clearly in the revised version.

It is important to realize that criticisms of this book cannot be ruled out of court on the grounds that the book is not absolutely heretical. Even if it might be regarded as passably Christian in a minimally orthodox way (say, a D-minus instead of an F!), it is certainly not **sound doctrine** (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-7). This is enough to warrant public criticism and rejection of the book by orthodox Christians.

While we rejoice in the good Christian literature being published by Thomas Nelson Publishers, they must be held to account for publishing a book as unsound as this one.

— **Robert M. Bowman, Jr.**

### **Ex-Mormons: Why We Left**

Latayne Colvett Scott

(Baker Book House, 1990)

Despite the boom in materials on Mormonism in Christian bookstores over the past two decades, few works offer deep insights into the human dimension of how and why some Mormons actually become Christians. Latayne Colvett Scott has made an important and innovative contribution with her recent book, **Ex-Mormons: Why We Left**. Unlike the compilers of similar anthologies, Scott (an ex-Mormon herself) has attempted to systematically approach the phenomenon of leaving Mormonism.

In her introduction, the author wisely warns those eager for some "magic bullet" to bring loved ones out of Mormonism that none awaits them in the pages that follow. Instead, she offers thought-provoking insights and encouragement.

The bulk of the book is divided into two parts. Part One presents the testimonies of eight "well-known and little-known ex-Mormons," and Scott has chosen them well. She writes: "I didn't just want people who could spin a good story, but people who have lived valiantly as Christians in every sense of the word." Maturity and stability have an unmistakable authority of their own, and readers of this book will recognize it in the people who are within these pages" (p. 11).



Scott's participants are a diverse group, both in experience and in temperament. They include an inactive (or "Jack-") Mormon, a returned missionary, a former bishop, and a housewife. Each ran his or her own obstacle course in the long and unpredictable process of leaving Mormonism. One young woman underwent a series of meetings with Mormon general authorities. Another woman was forced to recognize the demonic origin of an apparition that appeared to her in broad daylight as her dead grandmother to testify of the church's truthfulness.

Part Two explores various factors involved in leaving Mormonism and effective nurture of ex-Mormons. Its practical chapters include titles like "Personal Costs and Compensations," "Mistakes Christians Make," and "Toward an Easier Transition."

**Ex-Mormons: Why We Left** helps those interested in evangelizing Mormons to realize that, by presenting information damaging to Mormonism, they often set in motion events that profoundly alter their contacts' lives on every level. All but one of the participants acknowledge that, despite "the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8), their departure from Mormonism cost them heavily — especially in their personal relationships.

Numerous flashes of insight reveal Mormons as flesh-and-blood humans — not the cardboard-cutout cultists who exist in the minds of many Christians. The book discourages the hit-and-run style of encounter that too often passes for evangelism.

The volume has its shortcomings. Every testimony but Scott's is related (in sometimes stilted prose) in the third person. But in Part Two she switches her subjects to the first person! It would have been far more effective to maintain the first person throughout. Careless editing and organization have left a number of annoying errors and inconsistencies.

Despite its unevenness, **Ex-Mormons: Why We Left** gives realistic encouragement to those leaving Mormonism while helping Christians to present the truth more compassionately and intelligently.

— **Paul Carden**

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