



Good BOOKS

When the Spirit Comes With Power

Author: John White

Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton (1988), 251pp.

I would not call this a “good” book. It is an important book. Some may even consider it a “dangerous” book. It is the kind of book we need to read with astute critical judgement, which unfortunately seems to be a faculty Singaporean Christians are not generously endowed with.

What makes the book dangerous is precisely because John White *is* a “good” writer. I have bought and read practically every one of his books, at least until this last *When the Spirit Comes With Power*. And then I got weaned from my sense of “White-dependence.” If a practising psychiatrist who had written books that came close to being Christian classics, someone who had produced evidence of a strong biblical and evangelical foundation, can come to such conclusions as he did, then John White is only in my judgement one of the many high-intellect cult victims that can be found within the ranks of the bizarre such as Jim Jones and his ilk.

The book is essentially a persuasive account of the “holy laughter” movement that emerged in the late eighties, and a product of John Wimber’s vineyard ministries. It is an axiom of good reading that we exercise “willing suspension of disbelief.” And it is so easy to suspend disbelief when you feel safe in the hands of someone you deem trustworthy (like John White). And yes, I would like to believe everything he says as being evidence of the Spirit’s reality.

But no, everything within me cries “No!” when I read of the bizarre accounts of the Spirit’s manifestation. That irrational behaviour is explicated by attaching the “brand name” of God, to my mind, does *not* make it any more justifiable than animal or immoral behaviour.

It may seem that I am flogging a dead horse. Nobody does any more “holy laughing” nowadays. Doesn’t this tell you something, when you “play back” all that justification for divinity that was once attached to holy laughter?

What bothers me a lot is that many who are more intelligent and saintly than myself have found the book helpful and edifying. Now that it is no longer a hot issue as it once was, maybe it is a good time to pick up the book and read. With the benefit of hindsight, we might be able to assess bizarre religious phenomena with a more balanced judgement.

The art of critical reading is crucial for Christian survival. The devil will always come to us as an angel of light. And eternal vigilance is the price as much of spiritual sanity as it is of peace.

(Review by Rev Ng Seng Chuan)



THINKING POINTS

by Mickey Chiang

Let’s March Around Jericho

The Bible does not sensationalise events. It gives us only the essential facts. It leaves out details that would be obvious to readers around the time the passage was written. So, when we read a Bible passage, we should ask: What would have been obvious to the reader of that time?

Take the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6). The Israelites marched around Jericho once a day, for six days. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. When the priests blew their trumpets loudly, the Israelites gave a great shout. The city walls came tumbling down. The Israelites charged in and captured Jericho. These are the essential facts. What are the obvious details that were left out?

To answer that, we must look more closely at God’s instruction in Joshua 6:3: “March around the city once with all the armed men.” All? How many men were there in Israel’s army? Didn’t Numbers 1:46 say there were 603,550? Numbers 2:32 confirms that figure.

March? How do soldiers march, if not in step? What would happen if 603,550 men marched in step in close order? Well, the Zulus used to march in big regiments, stamping their feet at each step. The loud thuds could be heard several kilometres away, terrorizing their enemies. Did the earth shake when 10,000 hefty Zulus stamped their feet at the same time? Would the earth shake when over half a million men march in step? I think the answer is obvious.

If the earth moved, what would have been the effect on the foundations of the city walls? The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible tells this about Jericho, “...from 3000 B.C. there was much building and rebuilding because of a variety of catastrophes which hit the community. Earthquake and fire ended some occupations and required from the new settlers major rebuilding activity. Sometimes existing foundations were used. On occasion a new foundation was constructed on the smoothed-over debris of the earlier occupations or the trench for the foundation was dug out of earlier occupational levels.....wind and rain erosion had weakened or collapsed the existing wall or structure.” A city built on the broken debris of houses

destroyed long ago? Isn't that a bit like building houses on sand? When debris is shaken by the stamping of over half a million feet, would it not settle? When debris under the city walls settled, how would that have affected the city walls?

By the way, when over half a million hostile soldiers assembled at one side of Jericho, what did the defenders of Jericho do? Did they not reinforce the troops guarding that side by sending over hundreds, if not thousands of soldiers to that side? I wonder...what effect would the weight of a few thousand heavily armed soldiers have had on the parapets and city walls they stood on?

As the Israelites marched around the city, would the reinforcements not walk on top of the city walls keeping pace with the Israelites in case they suddenly charged towards the city walls? What effect would this movement of hundreds or thousands of men on top of the city walls have on the walls? Especially if it was repeated for a total of $6+7=13$ times? And after the third day, would the whole population of Jericho not be curious about the seemingly crazy marching of the Israelites around their city? Would the people not throb the top of the city walls to look at the strange sight? Were the city walls built to take the weight of tens of thousands of people milling around? Or would the walls have been weakened by the weight and movement of many people on top of the city walls and by the marching of the Israelites day after day? Wasn't God very wise to have instructed the Israelites to march around Jericho many times?

This is not to say that God did not work a miracle by sending an earthquake at the right time, to bring down the walls of Jericho. The area suffered from earthquakes as it was near a rift valley. But if the walls had been weakened as postulated above, wouldn't even a slight tremor have sent them crashing down? Is it now so hard to believe that the walls of Jericho actually came crashing down, as God said they would?

Chapel Notes

The speaker at chapel this week (April 3, 2002) was Debra Kang, an M Div graduate (1997) and Zion's missionary to Kenya. Debra shared with us briefly her background – how she came to Singapore, got married, and ended up in Africa. Currently, she (with husband, Caleb; and son, Joshua) is on furlough awaiting new directions.

Most of her reflections were focussed on Psalm 16. She spoke of her sensing of God's preservation (v.1), and her felt need of being mindful of God's

sovereignty in her life (v.8). The danger with those who serve God (whether full-time or otherwise) is that our ministry can get bigger than what is good for us (leading to a neglect of personal well-being, e.g., health); it can become even bigger than God Himself!

Debra ended with a reminder to us of the many blessings we have here, material and otherwise; and closed with a hint, from her own experience, that some pain and suffering at a personal level may well be God's reminder that we are pushing ourselves too hard, and God loves us too much to allow us to carry on that way. Surely a sobering word that we Singaporean Christian workaholics would do well to take note of!

Chapel speaker for this week (10 Apr) will be our full-time student, Mr Paul Losute, from Nigeria.

NEWS BITS

1. **ANNOUNCEMENT.** The classes for Romans and NT Greek (I) will not be meeting this Saturday. Classes for Greek Exegesis (I) & Christian Faith will proceed at the usual time & place.

2. **BGST "LOVE" PHONECARDS.** Each card shows the letters LOVE, outlined by the passage taken from 1 Cor 13:1-13, in the original New Testament Greek, visible when magnified. The English translation is also printed on the cardholder. The phonecards with a stored value of \$2 are available in 2 presentations: in cardholder @\$2 each and with blank greeting card @\$2.20 each. They are versatile and can be used as cards for encouragement, Thank You cards, or even as souvenir or gifts for weddings, camps, etc. Please help us clear our stocks by buying the cards or providing us with contacts. You may purchase directly from Library or contact Serene if you can help us in other ways. If you want to take a look at the cards, log on to <http://www.bgst.edu.sg/pc.htm> or visit the Library. Looking forward to your

Wishing you God's blessings on your Birthday!



Mr Michael Chan 08/04
Mr Alan Tay Hock Chuan 10/04
Mrs Pauline Kwek 11/04
Dr Elizabeth Whey 12/04
Ms Goh Li-Ern 13/04
Rev Joseph Dakhum 14/04
Mr Yong Teck Meng 14/04
Mdm Grace Yap Soh Chin 14/04
Mr Ng Beng Hong 14/04