

# BOB THIEME'S TEACHINGS ON CHRISTIAN LIVING

By

**Joe Layton Wall**

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Dedication to Linda,  
God's gift to me as an  
understanding wife through  
five years of doctoral studies

*In appreciation to --  
Vicki Callendar, typist  
Phyllis Markel, typist  
Trace Guthrie, cover*

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## FOREWORD

A balanced and fair evaluation of the extensive teachings of Robert Thieme has been overdue. The writer of this volume has achieved a balance between proper recognition of the good qualities of the teaching ministry of Colonel Robert B. Thieme and at the same time a candid evaluation and critique. The author has had a long and warm relationship to Colonel Thieme which has enabled him to show proper appreciation of those aspects of his ministry which are commendable. At the same time, he has not blindly ignored problems which many have noted in these same teachings. As one who has had a long personal relationship with Colonel Thieme, I have been distressed both by those who shower undiscerning praise upon his teachings as well as those who have been unfairly critical. While the comments of Dr. Wall and his analysis will probably not satisfy either the severe critics nor the avid followers of Colonel Thieme, this volume presents an even-handed, fair analysis which will be welcomed by many Christians who have been searching for a thorough study and proper evaluation. It is hoped that this volume will put in proper perspective the questions which many people have raised, arising out of great admiration for Colonel Thieme or prompted by critical opposition. This volume is commended to the Christian reading public for its solid contribution.

*John F. Walvoord*



## **PREFACE**

Without a doubt, we live in an era of diverse doctrinal systems and numerous influential teachers. When one of these teachers builds both an elaborate theological system and an impressive following of educated people, he demands the attention of the theological community. Such a person is Robert B. Thieme, Jr., pastor of the Berachah Church in Houston, Texas.

The author, a native Houstonian, has been personally acquainted with Bob Thieme for twenty years. From Thieme's teaching, the author has seen very remarkable and positive results in his own life and in the lives of many friends and family members. He has had the opportunity to study at the same seminary from which Thieme graduated and to minister in Houston churches for most of the past ten years, and he knows personally many of the former staff members and present and former members of Berachah Church. He has also had opportunity to observe numerous problems that have developed in the lives of some Thieme disciples as well as the division caused by the extreme student-to-teacher loyalty and dependence developed in many Thieme disciples, some of whom have caused major divisions among evangelical Christians.

In view of both the prominence of Thieme's ministry and the apparent problems resulting from his influence, a study of those doctrinal areas most closely related to Christian practice is in order. Though two dissertations have already been written on Thieme, another is needed. The first was a Ph.D. dissertation by George King at the University of Illinois on Thieme's preaching method; the second was a broad overview of his entire theological system by Dick Koopmans at the California Graduate School of Theology. Though both made helpful contributions, neither was designed to carefully evaluate Thieme's exegesis and his categorical studies relating to Christian living. It is his teaching in this area that has raised most of the controversial issues surrounding his ministry.

In an attempt to maintain personal objectivity and a loving attitude, and at the same time to make a positive contribution to the development of Christian unity, doctrinal purity and practical godliness, the author has attempted to present an unemotional, objective analysis of these controversial issues, through a study of those doctrines Thieme himself acknowledges to be significant to Christian living.

The assistance in the collection of data provided by Thieme and his staff was greatly appreciated. Thieme indicated no reluctance to cooperate, except with the one qualification -- that his teaching be treated fairly, that is honestly representing his position.<sup>1</sup> It is the author's hope that not only the presentation of

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<sup>1</sup> Before the final draft of this dissertation was presented to the Seminary, Thieme was given the opportunity to read it and to correct any possible misrepresentations of his doctrine. Aside from a few corrections concerning personal data in the introductory chapter, he did not indicate any errors in the descriptions of his doctrinal position.

Thieme's doctrinal stance is both fair and honest, but that the critique is likewise a fair treatment.

To embark on such a study and critique is fraught with dangers. To attack a man of God without cause is worthy of divine discipline. To evaluate the ministry of one of God's servants, when it is not one's responsibility to do so, likewise is a precarious position to be in. On the other hand, to avoid doctrinal issues raised by a teacher in the body of Christ that are affecting the lives of many believers would be irresponsible.

Realizing these dangers, the author was forced to answer two basic questions: (1) Is it his responsibility to evaluate the teachings of Bob Thieme? (2) To what extent should Thieme's ministry and personal life be examined?

In answer to the first question, yes, it is the responsibility of the elders and the functioning pastor-teachers in the body of Christ to guard the flock of God over which they have been given oversight (Acts 20:28), to examine and reprove false teaching (I Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:9), and to provide this same ministry to the body of Christ in general (as illustrated by the ministries of John, Paul, and, Peter).

In answer to the second question, all of us are sinners by nature, and should not mete out judgment of others lest we be judged (Matthew 7:1-5), unless such a judgment is clearly one's responsibility (as illustrated in 1, Corinthians 5 and implied in Paul's listing of the qualities for spiritual leaders to be used by Timothy in evaluating potential leaders). In the case of Bob Thieme, any personal sin (and this writer is not implying that there is or is not such) or questionable conduct of his ministry, worthy of church discipline or reproof, is in the hands of his deacons and church who must answer to God for either unjust attacks on a pastor- teacher or irresponsible ignoring of wrong doing. Nevertheless, though it is not the author's responsibility to pass judgment on Thieme's personal life and ministry, facts concerning actions in his life that are clearly consistent applications of his teachings and information relating to controversy over his teachings are both relevant and appropriate items of investigation to ascertain the soundness of the doctrines involved.

It is the prayerful desire of the author that no part of this dissertation will be construed as a malicious attack on a man but rather a fair evaluation of doctrine, and that the ultimate impact of this study will promote the unity, growth, purity, and stability of the body of Christ and will bring glory to our blessed matchless redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Houston, 1978

# Introduction

One of the most controversial figures in America today is the pastor of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas, Robert B. Thieme, Jr., respectfully addressed by his followers as the "Colonel." Through the widespread influence of his small paperback books and his tapes, Thieme has become a major ecclesiastical and theological phenomenon in the twentieth century as is evidenced by recent magazine articles<sup>1</sup> and a special report prepared by a commission of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America.<sup>1</sup> His intellectual brilliance, commanding style and personal charisma have captivated a host of disciples. His church of a thousand seats is filled every Sunday and is at near capacity almost every night of the week for Bible class.

## ***THIEME'S INFLUENCE***

Evidence of the widespread influence of Thieme's ministry can be observed in the extensive and varied avenues through which his doctrinal contributions presently are being disseminated.

### **Berachah Publications**

Early in his ministry Thieme produced a variety of printed materials including expository notes on Bible books and basic doctrine messages, frequently in mimeographed form. In recent years these have been replaced by a series of attractive books (more than sixty-five have been published) consisting of edited transcripts of sermons and Bible class lectures. With a nationwide (and to some degree world-wide) distribution, these small paperback books, which are offered free of charge upon request, have had and continue to have a far-reaching impact. In 1975 alone, over 300,000 pieces of literature were distributed.<sup>2</sup>

### **Other Publications**

At least two individuals have sought to organize Thieme's teaching into notebooks produced for distribution. Ralph G. Braun of Brookings, Oregon, compiled and edited a loose leaf notebook series entitled *Categorical Bible Studies*<sup>3</sup> that arranges Thieme's teachings by his categories as referred to in the taped

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<sup>1</sup> See William J. Peterson and Stephen Board, "Our Non Prophet Press," *Eternity*, March, 1977, p. 49; and Denny Rydberg, "Sieg Heil at Houston," *The Wittenberg Door*, April-May, 1977, pp. 22-24.

<sup>1</sup> Lyle P. Murphy and Harold L. Pothoven, *Report of the Commission on the Impact of the Teachings of R.B. Thieme, Jr.*, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Robert B. Thieme, Jr., Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 16 September 1977.

<sup>3</sup> Ralph G. Braun, ed., *Categorical Bible Studies*, 3 vols. (Brookings, Oregon, n.d.).

lectures. A similar approach has also been carried out by Marge Milliren of Portland, Oregon, under the title *Nutshell Notes*.<sup>4</sup>

## **Electronic Media**

Perhaps the most characteristic means of communication identified with Thieme's ministry is that carried on through magnetic tape recordings. Between thirty and thirty-five thousand tapes are produced and distributed each month by Berachah Church's Tapes and Publications Department.<sup>6</sup> Again, in accordance with Thieme's teaching (which will be discussed in a later chapter), there is no charge for the tapes -- only free-will offerings.

In addition to Berachah's direct tape distribution, Thieme has authorized fifteen tape franchises including some in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and England.<sup>7</sup>

Another interesting development in Thieme's growing ministry is "Bible Class By Telephone." At an appointed time prior to each Bible class a group in another city calls a prearranged telephone number, and the Berachah sound system is connected to their public address system. Such groups are located in nine Texas cities and in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Portland, Oregon, and Louisville, Mississippi.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond the tape and telephone outreach, Thieme's teaching is regularly aired over thirty-two radio stations across the nation.<sup>9</sup>

## **Conferences**

During the year Thieme attempts to provide what he calls "face-to-acre" teaching in different parts of the country. Averaging about one Bible conference a month, he seeks to strengthen the ministry of the tapes and publications.<sup>10</sup>

## **Pastors**

Although Thieme's commitments do not allow time to individually disciple young pastors, he has had a remarkable influence on a large number. Many regularly listen to tapes; some move to Houston to study at Berachah "face-to-face;" some participate in Bible conferences, some of which in the past have been specifically designed for pastors.

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<sup>4</sup> Marge Milliren, ed., *Nutshell Notes*, .3 vols. (Portland, Oregon, n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>7</sup> Berachah Church Bulletin, 31 July 1977, Houston, Texas, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Another development, with far-reaching implications, is the recent establishment of the Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages, a school both encouraged by Thieme and influenced by his methodology and emphases. This seminary officially began in September of 1977 under the leadership of Glenn A. Carnagey, following an abortive attempt by Richard Fugate to establish the Seminary of Biblical Theology in Tulsa, earlier in the year. The lack of financial support prevented Fugate from carrying out his extensive plans; therefore, Carnagey decided to expand his already established Greek and Hebrew courses in Tulsa, utilizing space provided by the American Christian College.<sup>11</sup>

## **Missions**

Although a current church bulletin indicates that nine missionaries are presently being supported by the church,<sup>12</sup> the most prominent emphasis in the church is directed toward a newly founded mission board, Operation Grace World Missions, Inc. According to a church bulletin announcement, the mission was formed "because of legalistic and unrealistic policies of most faith missions," which have produced a need for a "haven for refugees who are persecuted for their grace stand"<sup>13</sup> The obvious design of this mission is to provide an ever-widening influence of Thieme's particular theological emphasis.

## **Primary Contribution**

Why has Thieme's ministry been so highly successful when measured in terms of the extent of his influence? The answer lies not only in his intellect and his personal gift and charisma, but in a distinctive contribution he has made to the Christian community. In the sixteenth century the reformers took the Scriptures, which had been kept from the common people and began to preach the Bible and translate the Scriptures into the languages of the people. In the twentieth century Thieme has attempted to do the same thing with theology and detailed exegesis of the Scriptures. Although some of his terminology has aroused criticism and ridicule in some quarters, he has succeeded in communicating to a large segment of Christendom, and to many non-believers, much biblical truth heretofore restricted to the seminary halls. Furthermore, he has devoted years of study to the development of doctrine previously either overlooked or treated only partially by other teachers.

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<sup>11</sup> Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages, Catalogue, (Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1977), pp. 1, 2,7.

<sup>12</sup> Berachah Bulletin, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Berachah Bulletin, 22 May 1977, p. 7.

## **CURRENT CONTROVERSY**

In the 1960's the major negative criticisms of Thieme were directed toward his pulpit style and vocabulary, his domineering and seemingly arrogant demeanor, and his strong, right wing, political opinions. However, in recent years more serious allegations have arisen. Many accuse him of teaching doctrinal error and causing division in local churches and separation between Christian brothers. Even the possibility of outright heresy has been raised by some. In the light of Thieme's widespread influence, the evangelical community has the responsibility to evaluate both Thieme's teachings and the allegations against him. An examination of the current controversy will help to focus our attention on those areas most demanding of our attention.

### **Response to Thieme's Ministry by Many in the Christian Community**

The reaction to Thieme's ministry by many Christian leaders all over the world on many occasions has tended toward hardline rejection. In one case a missionary, Barton Browning, was "kicked out of his mission because he wouldn't quit listening to tapes."<sup>14</sup> Such experiences have occurred to others as well, which have led to the establishment of a new mission board, oriented to those in agreement with Thieme's ministry.<sup>15</sup> One Bible college president is reported to have forbidden his students to listen to Thieme tapes,<sup>16</sup> and at least one pastor has published warnings against the use of Thieme materials.<sup>17</sup> One pastor who formerly had promoted Thieme books and tapes felt obligated to preach a message denouncing what he considered to be dangerous and divisive teachings and influences from Thieme.<sup>18</sup>

At one time Dallas Theological Seminary had many students that were products of Thieme's ministry. Today, however, the breach between Dallas leadership and Thieme has widened. Berachah no longer carries Dallas Seminary on its prayer list, though an official form letter to prospective pastor-teachers recommends Dallas Theological Seminary along with Grace Theological Seminary, Talbot Theological Seminary, and the new Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages for gaining proficiency in linguistic tools. Some professors of Dallas have been

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<sup>14</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Buddy Dano, Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 1971.

<sup>17</sup> Warten E. Bathke, "Why We Don't Use Bob Thieme Materials," *Fountains of Faith*, 2 May 1975, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Pastor Jack Dark, Open Door Bible Church, Beaumont, Texas, 14 September 1976.

quoted as raising some serious questions concerning Thieme's teachings.<sup>19</sup> The Admissions Committee at Dallas Seminary, furthermore, is quite reluctant to accept new students from Berachah, because of a history of problems involving a "critical spirit" and a "rigidity" that negatively affected some classes.<sup>20</sup>

Such reactions stem from two sources: information concerning Thieme's personal life and information relative to his teaching ministry.

### **Attacks Related to Thieme's Personal Life**

First, allegations relating to Thieme's personal life have been made from time to time, and criticism of his personality frequently rise to the gossip level. Such material is not the direct concern of this dissertation. Rather, such information should either be ignored and squelched, or proper biblical patterns for rebuke and discipline should be carried out.<sup>21</sup> The body of Christ is not edified by the spreading of bad reports on anyone; therefore, this dissertation will not directly address this area.

### **Criticism Directed Toward Thieme's Ministry**

Second, although Thieme's personal life is not of direct concern to the pastors in the Christian community at large, the effects of his teaching ministry are. The following observations and criticisms, though some are emotional overreactions to a degree, serve to underscore the great need to understand and evaluate the doctrinal framework that lies behind the alleged evil by-products of his ministry.

*Division.* Robert G. Walter, a Baptist minister from Pennsylvania, in *The Baptist Bulletin* points out the divisive character of portions of Thieme's teachings.

In recent months, many Christians have been sending for the tapes and booklets of a man by the name of R.B. Thieme, Jr., pastor of Berachah Church, Houston, Texas. His material has been circulated widely, with the result that people have left their sound churches to

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<sup>19</sup> Warren Bathke quotes Dr. Ellwood Evans at length in his article in *Fountains of Faith*, "Why We Don't Use Bob Thieme Materials," and Robert G. Walter includes copies of letters from current faculty members, Dr. Charles Ryrie and Dr. John Walvoord, and from former professor, Dr. Philip R. Williams.

<sup>20</sup> Telephone interview with John Beverage, Director of Admissions, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 26 August 1977.

<sup>21</sup> A pastor should be confronted privately and then with one or two others if private exhortation is not received; then if a problem still remains and there are two or three witnesses, he should be brought before the church for discipline (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Tim. 5:19).

form "Thiemite" Bible study groups and even "tape churches." A number of fundamental churches have had serious conflicts and divisions, engendered by his supporters.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Discerner*, which calls itself "an interdenominational heresy-exposing quarterly," David Larsen of the First Covenant Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota, writes concerning Thieme:

He is generally conservative and sound but in late years has developed some very curious and dangerous teachings which have been repudiated by Dallas Seminary. Followers of Thieme become fanatically loyal to their mentor and often create division and discord in local churches.<sup>23</sup>

The report of a commission established by the Independent Fundamental Churches of America to study the impact of Thieme's teachings, records a number of instances of church division issuing from the Thieme tape ministry.<sup>24</sup> The author also has observed problems and division in churches in Texas.

The problem of division in churches over Thieme is widespread according to Robert Walter, of Pennsylvania. In a widely distributed paperback on Thieme, he records excerpts from numerous letters he has received from places as far removed as California, Iowa and Wisconsin, in which he documents consternation over division in churches caused by Thieme tapes.<sup>25</sup>

Further indication of the geographic extent of the problem of division comes from Dr. John G. Mitchell of Multnomah School of the Bible. Based upon his observations as he travels around the country, he finds that "quite a few of God's people are being divided either on the charismatic issue or on Bob Thieme."<sup>26</sup>

*Man-centered followers.* Although Thieme teaches against focusing attention on himself, the I.F.C.A. Commission concluded that many followers have become spiritually dependent and psychologically bound to him.<sup>27</sup> *The Discerner* describes his followers as "fanatically loyal to their mentor."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Robert G. Walter, "The False Themes of Pastor Thieme," *The Baptist Bulletin*, October 1972, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> David L. Larsen, "Aberrations Evangelicals Face, 1. The Teaching of R. B. Thieme," *The Discerner*, January-March 1975, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Murphy, *Commission Report*.

<sup>25</sup> Robert G. Walter, *The False Teaching of R. B. Thieme, Jr.*, ed. D. A. Waite (Collingswood, New Jersey: The Bible For Today, 1972) pp. 13,14.

<sup>26</sup> Telephone interview with John G. Mitchell, Multnomah School of the Bible, Portland, Oregon, 19 September 1977.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, *Commission Report*, pp. 12,13.

<sup>28</sup> Larsen, "Aberrations," p. 2.

Some men who attempt to pastor "tapers" churches find it quite difficult to minister effectively, since many students of Thieme's are intellectually and emotionally dependent on him. One young pastor, who himself had been on Thieme tapes for a long time, acknowledged his frustration in a letter to another pastor. As he began to objectively exegete the Scriptures and teach his congregation of "tapers," he soon had a divided church on his hands. For many in his congregation, Thieme was "the ultimate source of doctrine," and any different approach from their pastor was unacceptable.<sup>5</sup>

*Critical spirit.* An observation some have made concerning the avid "tapers" is that they tend to be somewhat critical of other Christian groups and leaders who do not measure up to the standards and style of Bob Thieme.<sup>6</sup>

*Licentious living.* Another criticism that seems to recur is that many followers of Thieme develop or continue life styles that are not in keeping with biblical morality. The concluding paragraph of the I.F.C.A. Commission Report expresses this opinion.

Finally, we believe that our study gave every opportunity to hear of any redeeming value in Mr. Thieme's ministry. One looks in vain for people drawn closer to a good church or a faithful pastor, or to a deeper, more consistent walk with the Lord. Over and over again, it is a story of defection from biblical living by those caught up in the electronic church. The IFCA and the Bible Church movement must oppose this departure from the faith.<sup>7</sup>

*Unbalanced church life.* According to many of his critics, Thieme's teaching and especially his utilization of tapes detract from the development of a healthy church life for believers. Dr. Ellwood Evans of Dallas Seminary notes the problems in a tape ministry.

Thieme claims to be able to fill all of the needs of a pastor that anyone who will listen to his tapes could possibly have. Exactly how this is accomplished is left up to one's imagination. A tape ministry, anybody's tape ministry, no matter how excellent, is not a substitute for the ministry of the local church nor for the fellowship provided by believers assembling themselves together in it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John, V. Sarazua to Ted E. Stone, 14 August 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Robert Dean, Houston, Texas, 22 September 1977. Dean included himself as one who had become critical and rebellious toward any teacher but Thieme.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy, *Commission Report*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ellwood Evans, "A Capsule History of Berachah Church," 1976.

## Controversy Over Thieme's Teachings

Behind all the criticism relating to Thieme's ministry is his doctrine. Both his basic orthodoxy and Christian life teachings are currently the object of much controversy.

*Basic orthodoxy.* In the most thorough doctrinal critique written to date, Robert Walter raises the question of Thieme's orthodoxy. He and his elders claim that Thieme has departed "from the historic gospel and Christianity."<sup>9</sup> The focus of their concern and of other critics<sup>10</sup> is Thieme's teaching on the blood of Christ. This issue will be analyzed in the following chapter.

*Teachings on Christian living.* Beyond the doctrine of the blood of Christ, doctrines propounded by Thieme in the area of Christian living have raised the major negative reactions. From an examination of a number of letters and booklets and from the results of personal interviews with former Thieme students, certain Christian life doctrines stand out as the most controversial:

- (1) Relating of doctrine to living
- (2) His view of the immaterial part of man (some claim he sanctions abortion.)
- (3) Categories of evil
- (4) Mechanical (rather than personal) spirituality
- (5) His view of confession of sin
- (6) Definitions of Christian virtues (especially "love")
- (7) His view of spiritual maturity and Christian service
- (8) His view of backsliding which he calls "reversionism"
- (9) His emphasis on the believer's privacy
- (10) The doctrine of "right Pastor" and its correlative doctrine of authority
- (11) The doctrine of "right man, right woman" in marriage

During the course of this dissertation, each of these teachings will be examined.

## Response to Critics

There are usually two sides to most controversies. To be fair to Thieme, some responses to these criticisms should also be presented at this point.

Thieme's policy is not to defend himself,<sup>11</sup> and his response to most criticism is to ignore it. The only criticisms that seem to concern him are those from

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<sup>9</sup> Walter, *False Teaching*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> "Colonel Thieme Again," *The Sword of the Lord*, 20 October 1972, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

respected, grace-oriented scholars, when it seems to him that his teachings are not truly understood or properly presented, and moral accusations by those close to him.<sup>12</sup> However, some of Thieme's followers have attempted to defend him and his teachings. In his dissertation, Dick Koopmans attempts to answer most of the attacks leveled by the major critics of Thieme: Stewart Custer of Bob Jones University and Robert G. Walter.<sup>13</sup> Also a number of men have written letters in response to many of the allegations mentioned above.<sup>14</sup> The arguments of most of these men are that Thieme is basically sound on fundamental doctrines; that he is often misunderstood and thus unjustly attacked; and that any criticism of Thieme is divisive and inappropriate to the spiritual health of the body of Christ.

Koopmans specifically maintains that Thieme's fundamentalist critics "show a total disregard for the latest orthodox scholarship and, for the most part, a disregard for the basic issues."<sup>15</sup> He further contends that the criticisms are "superficial accusations . . . based on a failure to comprehend Thieme's total theological frame of reference."<sup>16</sup>

Koopmans emphasizes that Thieme's ministry is "grounded upon the communication, of the Word of God," and that he refuses to use "gimmicks" and "Madison Avenue techniques."<sup>17</sup> For this reason, he has drawn the fire of those fundamentalists which employ different methods of ministry. Concerning one critic, who categorized Thieme's ministry as "very, very dangerous," Koopmans responds that what is involved "is in reality only a difference in methodologies." Thieme "refuses to use 'gimmicks'," and depends on "only the power of the Holy Spirit to build up the ministry."<sup>18</sup>

He concludes his dissertation on Thieme by defending his orthodoxy.

Many of his concepts are different than those of other fundamentalists. But to call these idiosyncrasies heresies and apostasies is to judge a fellow believer in a manner incompatible with the spirit of Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thieme interviews, 2 June 1976 and 16 September 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Dick Koopmans, "An Investigation of the Theology of Col. R. B. Thieme, Jr." (Ph.D. dissertation, California Graduate School of Theology, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> See reference to letters to the editor in the *Sword of the Lord*, 20 October 1972; letter from Claude Porter to John F. Walvoord, 15 November 1975; and letter from Gunnar and Kenneth Thelander to Harry Pearson, 30 July 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Koopmans, "Theology of Thieme," p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153, 54.

In a written response to a telephone call from the author, another student of Thieme's, Gary A. Barnard, provided a further example of a Thieme disciple's perspective on the criticisms leveled at his teacher. Barnard is a businessman who moved from Australia to Houston, primarily to study under Thieme. Pointedly reacting to the allegation of heresy in Thieme's teaching on the blood of Christ, he writes,

The naive and stupid, with zero content of doctrine in the soul will obviously be attracted by the magical concept of a mysterious power in the literal Blood of Jesus Christ. This approach while totally lacking in truth will provide a maximum outlet for a stimulation of poorly controlled emotions on the subject which will be interpreted by them as spiritual. The arrogant, unable to discern spiritual truth, totally lacking in objectivity, will superimpose their own brand of extraneous legalism or self righteousness on the truth, blinding themselves to it. Words like heresy fall easily from their lips.<sup>20</sup>

He further attempts to answer the accusation that Thieme's teaching causes division:

Division among churches does not emanate from his ministry; this is precluded by the way his objectives zero in on the word and result in concentrated Bible teaching with application on contemporary history.

Certainly from time to time individuals will wander in a cloud of subjectivity, getting their feathers ruffled and a few bruises in the process. It is to be expected that these types, smarting badly, would claim division, but the basis for such comment is subjectivity and a lack of doctrine and spiritual growth, mixed with self righteousness and arrogance.<sup>21</sup>

Finally Barnard seeks to clarify Thieme's approach to fellowship and privacy:

The local church is a place to worship a place to study the word of God, and a place to have fellowship with other believers. It was not instituted by God as a social club, but a place for spiritual advancement. In order to achieve this, privacy is a very important element in the function of the local church.

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<sup>20</sup> Gary A. Barnard to Joe Wall, 20 September 1977, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Nosy (sic) parkers, busy bodies, handshakes all round, fond embraces, meaningful glance. etc. never contributed to spiritual growth -- ever. Priorities must be kept in order, and under principles of true freedom and privacy, fellowship may be enjoyed by those who desire it.

The accusation is quite false, emphasis on privacy results in true fellowship where it is mutually desired. On the other hand it may well result in a lack of superficial behavior, (sic) passed off as "Christian fellowship."<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This brief presentation of the widespread allegations and the strong defense of committed Thieme students demonstrate that Thieme's doctrine and ministry are quite controversial and deserving of a serious examination.

## ***THE APPROACH OF THIS DISSERTATION***

### **Purpose**

In an attempt to furnish some answers to some of the questions raised by the current controversy, this dissertation is designed to state and evaluate Thieme's major teachings on the Christian life. The emphasis will be placed on doctrine, not on Thieme's personality. A studied attempt will be made to avoid any personal evaluation of the man beyond the statement of some basic biographical facts integrally related to his theological mentality and position, and the description of some possible and actual results of his teachings in the lives of his students.

### **Thesis**

It is the thesis of this dissertation that Robert B. Thieme, Jr., is a gifted brother in Christ who has had some significant exegetical and theological contributions to make to the body of Christ, but that certain of his current teachings and emphases will not bear up under close exegetical scrutiny and, therefore, have resulted in faulty and erroneous doctrinal and practical conclusions, which though still within the limits of historic Christian orthodoxy tend to affect the lives of his disciples negatively and to hinder the maintenance of Christian unity.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

## **Methodology**

Using all of Thieme's current printed materials, handwritten notes of his lectures for the past four years (provided by a current student of Thieme's), selected tape recordings of his messages, and personal interviews, we will attempt to describe his doctrines related to the Christian life and outline the major biblical support marshalled by Thieme. The bases for evaluation of each doctrine will be the following criteria; (1) sound exegesis, (2) the logical development of the doctrine, and (3) the comparison of the godly quality of life described in Scripture with the consistent application of Thieme's teachings in the life of a believer.

For the purpose of perspective, a historical and theological background will also be provided.

# CHAPTER I

## BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

### *HISTORICAL CONTEXT*

In, order to understand the emphasis of Thieme's doctrinal system and the impact of his intellect and personality on those who study under him, it is valuable to examine the historical background to his ministry; that is, Thieme's family and training, the history of Berachah Church, and the place of Thieme's ministry in the twentieth century theological milieu.

#### **Family and Training**

Robert B. Thieme, Sr., was stationed at Ellington Field, Texas, when his wife gave birth to Robert, Jr., in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, on April 1, 1918, near the family home. Robert, Jr.'s grandfather had amassed the family fortune as owner of the Ft. Wayne Hosiery Mills. With his inheritance, Robert, Sr., moved to Beverly Hills, California, where Robert, Jr. (the younger of two children) grew up among wealthy people. Robert, Jr.'s father was a strong disciplinarian and also furnished him his first exposure to a military mentality.<sup>1</sup>

While still in high school Thieme accepted Christ as his savior. Later during his schooling at the University of Arizona at Tucson, he met and married Miss Betty Beal, daughter of R.S. Beal, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Tucson. The Thiemes have one son, Robert, III, who also followed in his family's military heritage.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1940, Thieme received a commission as second lieutenant in the United States Officers Reserve Corps along with his Bachelor of Arts degree. The next fall he entered Dallas Theological Seminary, but at the outset of World War II in 1941 he was called to active duty in the Army Air Force. Thieme was soon charged with all cadet training at Luke Field. Though he never saw action, his capable leadership of approximately 30,000 men resulted in his advancing to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1946 at the close of the war, at age twenty-eight,<sup>3</sup> he became the youngest lieutenant colonel in the Army Air Force.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George William King's interview with Kathrine Tapping at Berachah Church, 23 November 1973, as recorded in King's dissertation: "Robert Bunker Thieme, Jr.'s Theory and Practice of Preaching," (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1974), pp.8-10.

<sup>2</sup> King interview with Tapping, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> King indicates Thieme was twenty-four, but Thieme corrected this in an interview, 13 June 1977.

<sup>4</sup> King interview with Tapping, p. 11.

As we shall see in the next chapter, Thieme's military background has influenced his doctrinal emphasis. It should also be observed that his formal academic training had a significant influence on him as well. In high school he completed four years of Latin followed by a major in Greek literature at the University of Arizona at Tucson, where he was elected Phi Beta Kappa. His basic theological training at Dallas Theological Seminary began before World War II and was completed after the war in 1949, when he graduated *summa cum laude* and was accepted into the doctoral program at the same seminary. His doctoral work was never completed because of the demands of his pastoral ministry at Berachah Church in Houston, where he was called to pastor in May, 1950. Trained in the classics, Hebrew and expository preaching of a detailed exegetical type, Thieme quickly established his ministry upon verse-by-verse exegesis of the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

Not only was Thieme affected by his military and formal education, but one individual stands out as a prominent influence on his whole theological perspective: Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder and first president of Dallas Seminary. Under Chafer's leadership this seminary was established as an attempt to maintain a "fundamental" theological position in protestant Christianity in an era of wide-ranging humanism and growing theological liberalism. Like most students of Chafer's, Thieme exhibits a firm commitment to historic Christian truth based upon in an inerrant revelation. Also like many, he has attempted to be an independent exegete of the Scripture in the original languages.

### **History of Berachah Church**

Berachah Church of Houston, Texas, has been the sole full-time pastorate<sup>6</sup> held by Thieme. A perspective on the history of this church seems appropriate to the study of its present pastor's ministry. Dr. J. Ellwood Evans, who once pastored Berachah Church and presently serves as the Dean of Students at Dallas Seminary, relates what he calls "A Capsule History of Berachah Church:"

In the early 1930's, Mr. C. Y. Colgan of Philadelphia, a Sun Oil Company<sup>7</sup> executive, was sent to Houston to oversee a local operation. Mr. Colgan searched the city for an opportunity of ministry and finally became identified with the Norhill Methodist Church in the Houston Heights section. A men's Sunday school class and women's Sunday school class were taught respectively by the Colgans. A change in pastors resulted in an alteration of the conservative biblical emphasis enjoyed by the congregation. The new pastor disbelieved the virgin.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Thieme did have part-time pastoral responsibilities at Reinhardt Bible Church in Dallas while attending Dallas Seminary.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Evans later corrected his history to note that Mr. Colgan actually was with the Atlantic Refining Company.

birth; so he removed the Apostle's Creed from use in the morning service. After hearing the Colgans teach, he decided that they too were unwelcome in his congregation. The Colgans were abruptly refused the right to continue teaching their respective Sunday school classes, and their announced termination left the class members up in arms. A meeting was held that evening in a private home to decide on a course of action. It was decided to form a church that would be true to the Bible. Quarters were rented in the Heights Woman's Club at Twentieth and Harvard Streets for Sunday services as well as a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. Colgan was asked to lead the group and to become its layman pastor. This position he occupied for the next two years. The Colgans had been members of Berachah Church when they lived in Philadelphia, and the name of that church was selected for the new church in Houston.

Colgan's Houston business responsibilities more terminated in 1936, and his company transferred him back to Philadelphia. He contacted Dallas Theological Seminary for possible recommendations for a full-time pastor. The name of J. Ellwood Evans was suggested, and he became pastor in August, 1936, and continued until June, 1941. During that time property was purchased at 171 Heights Boulevard and a small auditorium was erected, and a year later a Sunday school addition was added. Evans resigned in May, 1941 to become pastor of Union Tabernacle in Racine, Wisconsin.

Evans recommended Richard Seume, who graduated from Dallas Seminary in 1941, and he became pastor from September, 1941, until October, 1946. At that time Seume resigned to become pastor of the Madison Avenue Baptist Church of Patterson, New Jersey. It became necessary to have two Sunday morning services toward the close of Mr. Seume's pastorate, and property was purchased for \$50,000 in downtown Houston at the corner of Lamar and Brazos Streets. The church experienced tremendous growth under Seume's pastorate and took on a much larger city-wide aspect than it had enjoyed previously.

Pulpit supplies were used after Seume left, but no pastor was called until William F. Burcaw became pastor in 1948 for about one year. He encouraged the congregation to move downtown to 502 Lamar Street and to erect a quonset hut for an auditorium. His pastorate was terminated following an unfortunate clash in personalities. Pulpit supplies were then used for a time.

Finally, members of the pulpit committee sought the advice of Dr. Evans, who by this time had become a member of the Dallas Seminary faculty. This resulted in his recommending Rev. R.B. Thieme, Jr. to the church as a pastoral candidate. Thieme was called to the pastorate in May, 1950. His first Sunday may have been a preview of

what was to come. Thieme met with the Board of Deacons at the close of his first morning service and demanded their immediate resignation with the threat of his resignation if his demand was not met. The dumbfounded deacons acceded to Thieme's demand, and the pastor became the dominant leader who brooked no challenge to his authority from that time forward.

The church grew under Thieme's masterful teaching, and property was purchased for a new location in southwest Houston at Westheimer<sup>8</sup> and Sage Roads. The Lamar Street property was sold for \$250,000, and an edifice was erected at the new location. Adjoining property was obtained for parking for the church and for ultimate expansion. As the city grew, some adjoining property the church owned was needed by the huge Galleria Shopping Center. The church was able to negotiate a sale of some of its real estate which enabled it to clear all of its debt and placed it in a financial condition that few, if any churches in America enjoy....

While Berachah Church attracts many to its services, an equal number seem to leave the fold since the overall attendance appears only to about hold its own. Recently, the early morning service was discontinued, leaving only the main morning service. The largest departure occurred about 1972 when some two hundred left to form the Grace Bible Church in another part of the city. Included in this group were many of the men who had been leaders under Thieme for the previous twenty years.<sup>9</sup>

### **Thieme's Place in Current Theological Developments**

Thieme's teaching ministry is in a large part a response to certain areas of weaknesses in the current theological situation. He opposes the liberalism and relativism so dominant in western theology, politics and society in general. He reacts against the legalism and Pentecostalism of the twentieth century. He, likewise, deplors the lack of self-discipline and weak teaching in contemporary Christian circles.

His own position could be characterized as a grace-oriented, fundamental, premillennial, dispensational theology.

## ***THE QUESTION OF THIEME'S ORTHODOXY***

Before engaging in an evaluation of Thieme's Christian life teachings, one basic doctrinal question needs to be answered. Do the critics of Thieme have any grounds for the accusation of heterodoxy or heresy? Is Thieme within the circle

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<sup>8</sup> The actual location of the church is West Alabama at Sage Road.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, "A Capsule History," pp. 1-4

of orthodox Bible teachers, or not? Two vocal critics, Stewart Custer<sup>10</sup> of Bob Jones University and a minister by the name of Robert G. Walter<sup>11</sup> both maintain that he is not. The major doctrinal question raised by these men relates to Thieme's teaching on Christ's atoning sacrifice and his interpretation of the term, *blood of Christ*. Thieme emphasizes that Jesus died both physically and spiritually; that the primary focus of the New Testament is on his spiritual death; and that the term *blood of Christ* refers only to Christ's spiritual death.

The accusation of heresy is a serious one and demands a careful examination of Thieme's teaching and of the accusations leveled against him, for heresy at this point would make his entire system suspect and unreliable.

### **The Standard for Orthodoxy**

The primary dictionary definition of *orthodox* is "sound or correct in opinion or doctrine, esp. theological or religious doctrine."<sup>12</sup> One's opinion as to what is orthodox, therefore, is determined by the standard for "sound or correct" doctrine by which one measures doctrine. Two measuring rods will be employed in this dissertation. First are the fundamentals to which adherence was required by The World's Christian Fundamentals Association, which was begun in 1919 as a reaction to the growing modernism in the early twentieth century:<sup>13</sup>

- (1) the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures,
- (2) the Trinity,
- (3) the deity and virgin birth of Christ,
- (4) the creation and fall of man,
- (5) a substitutionary atonement,
- (6) the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ,
- (7) the regeneration of believers,
- (8) the personal and imminent return of Christ,
- (9) the resurrection and final assignment of all men to eternal blessedness or eternal woe.

Second, the doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary, which is a concise statement of Lewis Sperry Chafer's theology, will be used as a broader basis for determining orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stewart Custer, *What's Wrong with the Teachings of R. B. Thieme, Jr.?* (Greenville, South Carolina: Bob Jones University Press, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> Walter, *False Teachings*.

<sup>12</sup> Jess Stein, ed., *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 1017.

<sup>13</sup> Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> A copy of the Dallas Seminary Doctrinal statement is included in the appendix.

## Thieme's Assertion of Orthodoxy

Thieme conceives of his doctrinal position as being orthodox, claiming that he has not departed from Chafer's theological stance, which is embodied in the seminary doctrinal statement. Thieme also sees himself as clearly in harmony with all of the fundamentals of the faith accepted by the fundamentalists of Chafer's generation. Thieme, in a personal interview stated,

I feel that I have followed Dr. Chafer pretty carefully, even though people do not recognize it as such. And some people cannot distinguish between methodology and content of doctrine. But Dr. Chafer and I did a lot of talking, and he felt that there were a lot of things that were unexplored and used to tell me, "You seem to have the mentality for it. Go to it!"<sup>15</sup>

## Allegations of Thieme's Lack of Orthodoxy

*Origin of the controversy.* In June of 1969, while teaching through the book of I John, Thieme first elaborated on his understanding of the meaning and significance of the phrase, "the blood of Christ." In this study Thieme raised a number of issues which have been used by Robert G. Walter of the Bible Covenant Church, D.A. Waite<sup>16</sup> of the Bible for Today radio program, and Stewart Custer, the head of the Bible department at Bob Jones University, to attack his doctrinal soundness.<sup>17</sup>

*The allegations.* D.A. Waite and Walter list four major areas of disagreement with Thieme that they conclude are a "departure from the historic gospel and Christianity:"<sup>18</sup>

(1) Thieme *denies* that the Blood of Christ at Calvary is to be taken *literally* with regard to our salvation (2) Thieme denies that the Blood of Christ was *shed* at Calvary: (3) Thieme denies that Christ *literally presented His Blood to the Father in Heaven.* and (4) Thieme declares *that the physical death of Christ was for Himself alone*, a result of bearing our sins in His Spiritual death for us on the Cross, and, therefore, that His Spiritual death alone was substitutionary, that His physical death was not substitutionary and *did not save us.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Waite was a student at Dallas Seminary with Thieme in 1948.

<sup>17</sup> Walter, *False Teachings*. Note, Waite edited and published Walter's material.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Walter also took issue with Thieme's allegations that fundamentalists teach Christ bled to death, claiming this to be a "straw man" argument.

Walter, in gathering material for his radio broadcasts on the teachings of Thieme, corresponded with some of the faculty at Dallas Seminary. Although none classified Thieme's teaching on the blood of Christ as heretical or extreme enough to place his entire doctrinal position outside of orthodoxy, they specifically took issue with Thieme's position in this area. The president of the seminary, John F. Walvoord, answered in a letter dated September 29, 1972:

Thank you for your letter of September 24 and your previous phone call relative to the booklet, "The Blood of Christ" by Robert B. Thieme. Although Mr. Thieme quotes a syllabus of mine written many years ago, I did not then nor do I now agree with the point of view expressed in this booklet . . . I do not know of anyone who follows the point of view of Mr. Thieme, and his teaching on this point has apparently confused a number of people. It is not the teaching of any member of the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary.<sup>20</sup>

Walvoord also wrote Thieme the following month requesting that he clarify Walvoord's position in his publication since in the first edition of his book, *The Blood of Christ*, Thieme had introduced his study with a lengthy quote from Walvoord's Christology class notes. Following is the body of that letter.

Since our previous correspondence on your booklet on the subject "The Blood of Christ," a number of letters and phone calls have been received indicating that there is widespread confusion on the implications of your quotation of some of my writings in connection with your discussion of the subject.

As I am sure you understand, there is considerable opposition to the point of view you present in this booklet, and my own convictions differ materially from your conclusions. While I do not believe that the literal blood of Christ was carried into heaven and that He went to heaven through His blood rather than with His Blood as indicated in Hebrews 9:12, it is not true that I agree with your exposition of what was accomplished when Christ died on the cross. I believe Christ died on the cross both physically and spiritually and died by an act of His will. While He did not bleed to death, I do believe that He literally shed His blood as part of the act of dying and that this was necessary to fulfill such scriptures as Hebrews 9:22; 1 Peter: 18-19; and similar passages.

The implication from your quotation of my writings that you and I agree on your major thesis set forth in the booklet is, therefore, wrong as I do not agree with the major point of view which you express in the booklet. Further, I do not know any Dallas faculty member who shares

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<sup>20</sup> John F. Walvoord to Robert G. Walter, 29 September 1972.

your point of view. In fact, your point of view is quite a unique and unusual interpretation.

Because your quotation of my writings and the somewhat controversial point of view which you expound in your booklet is being misunderstood, I would appreciate it very much if, in future publications, you would make plain that while I do not believe that the physical blood of Christ was applied to heaven literally, I do believe that Christ shed His blood when He died on the cross as a part of His act of dying.

We sincerely hope that something can be done to alleviate the misunderstandings that have arisen on the points in question.<sup>21</sup>

Since that time, two revised editions of the book have been published by Berachah Tapes and Publications, removing the quotation from Walvoord's Christology notes and attempting to clarify Thieme's position more fully.

Though avoiding any attack or polemic against Thieme, two other Dallas Seminary professors also answered Walter by mail clarifying their doctrinal position on the blood of Christ in contrast with Thieme's.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously there are orthodox theologians that consider Thieme's position to be in error and serious enough to disclaim association with it. However, it should be recognized that none of the Dallas Seminary professors shared Walter's alarm, and none classified Thieme outside of orthodox Christianity.

*Reasons for the consternation.* There are probably two primary reasons for such consternation over Thieme's teaching on the blood of Christ. First, the opinion of men like Walter, Waite and Custer, that Thieme's tape ministry is causing division in Christian ministries, has made them suspicious of Thieme's teaching as a whole. Second, the Christian faith is based on the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and centers in the doctrines related to His person and work, and any teaching that appears to compromise any accepted doctrine related to Christ's death, it is feared, could begin to detract from the very gospel itself.

### **Summary of The Issues Related to The Doctrine of The Blood of Christ**

Those who question Thieme's teaching on the blood of Christ have raised a number of issues. For the sake of clarity, we will examine these issues under three questions: (1) Is the term *blood of Christ* in the New Testament to be taken literally? (2) Did Christ take his literal blood to heaven to present to the Father as a part of his atoning work? (3) What relationship did Christ's physical bleeding, suffering and death have to his saving work for man? Most other issues

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<sup>21</sup> John F. Walvoord to R. B. Thieme, Jr., 17 October 1972.

<sup>22</sup> Charles C. Ryrie to Robert G. Walter, 1 September 1971, and Philip R. Williams to Robert G. Walter, 2 August 1971.

that have been raised by Thieme's critics on this subject are the result of misreading Thieme or unwarranted assumptions as to the implications of what he teaches.<sup>23</sup>

Our objective in analyzing the three questions stated above is twofold: to determine Thieme's orthodoxy, and to determine the correctness of his position even though it may be within the circle of orthodox teaching. Therefore, our approach will involve a statement of Thieme's teaching on each issue, followed by the response of one major critic, Robert G. Walter then Walter's accusations of heresy will be evaluated, followed by an evaluation of Thieme's doctrine itself.

### **Issue One. The Term "Blood of Christ"**

The first question is one which has prompted much discussion some of which has produced more confusion than insight: Is the term *blood of Christ* in the New Testament to be taken literally?

*Thieme's explanation* Thieme's answer to this first question is that the phrase *blood of Christ* is not to be taken to refer to the literal blood that Jesus bled on the cross,<sup>24</sup> but that it is a "technical term which expresses the fact that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament shadows." He further states that it is a "shorthand title for the saving work of our Lord", and as such it is 'a synonym for His spiritual death.' He calls the relationship between the term *blood of Christ* and the spiritual death of Christ a 'representative analogy;' that is, an analogy between two things, one of which is physical and the other spiritual. As such it is like the relationship between the Old Testament types of Christ and the New Testament realities.<sup>25</sup>

In support of his position Thieme quotes from Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and Arndt and Gingrich's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* to demonstrate that the term *blood of Christ* is used figuratively to represent a theological concept.<sup>26</sup> Thieme also argues that, since the term *blood of Christ* is used

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<sup>23</sup> Walter refers to Thieme's statement, that Christ bled very little and did not bleed to death, and he concludes that he teaches Christ did not shed his blood. Then, armed with a letter from Spiros Zodhiates, he attempts to make an issue of the term "shed his blood," ignoring the point Thieme makes relative to Christ's death; that is that he gave up his spirit voluntarily, and that the focus of Scripture is on more than just the material liquid that bled from his body.

<sup>24</sup> Robert B. Thieme, Jr., "I John 1: 7b-8: Doctrine of Blood," magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 23 June 1969.

<sup>25</sup> Robert B. Thieme, Jr., *The Blood of Christ* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1977), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

in the New Testament to describe Christ's work of expiation, justification, redemption, propitiation and sanctification (Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Eph. 2:13), it must represent something different from his physical blood.

*The critics' response.* Walter, Thieme's chief critic at this point, contends that "Thieme should be reprimanded for his heresy falsely interpreting the blood of Christ, just as we reprimand other false systems like that of the Jehovah's Witnesses." He claims that Thieme is guilty of heresy since "he allegorizes and falsifies the Scripture dealing with the very cardinal doctrine of Christ's literal shed blood."<sup>27</sup>

Walter supports his attack by claiming that Thieme's teaching "contradicts the historic Christian faith," which he attempts to prove by a series of quotations from noted Bible teachers who believe that the term *blood of Christ* refers to Christ's literal blood.

*The critics' charge evaluated.* Walter states that the term *blood of Christ* refers solely to Christ's literal, physical blood and that it is the basis for salvation. He further claims that to give any figurative meaning to the term is heresy. However, it is not contrary to either the nine fundamentals listed above or the Dallas Seminary Doctrinal Statement to define the term *blood of Christ* as Thieme does, so long as he acknowledges that Christ physically bled and died in the process of providing salvation -- which Thieme does teach. Furthermore, Walter's position itself is unsound both exegetically and theologically. Exegetically, it will be shown in the next section that, although the term *blood of Christ* is not to be taken (as Thieme teaches) as a figure of speech referring to something *other than* physical blood, it is also not to be viewed as literal blood alone. It includes both the physical, literal blood and the whole act of dying through which Christ went. Also, theologically Walter is in danger of attributing magical or mystical powers to Christ's physical blood.

*Thieme's position evaluated.* Thieme is correct in observing that the term *blood of Christ* is a pregnant term with figurative significance. The problem with Thieme's interpretation is that he restricts the term solely to the spiritual death of Christ and fails to see that it includes not only his spiritual death but also his physical blood and the whole act of dying physically. Such a use of the term is a common literary device in the New Testament known as a "synecdoche," that is "a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole."<sup>28</sup> Acts 27:37 (A.V.) furnishes an example: "We were in all in the ship two hundred three score and sixteen souls." Here *souls* is a synecdoche for the whole person. The "blood of Christ" is a synecdoche for the entire event of the crucifixion of Christ on Golgotha, which included the nailing of His hands and feet, His bleeding, His

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<sup>27</sup> Walter, *False Teachings*, p. 21

<sup>28</sup> *Random House Dictionary*, p. 1442.

blood, all of His physical suffering of the cross, His separation from the Father as He bore the sins of the world, His physical death, and the piercing of His side. Similar synecdoches are the terms *cross*, *stripes* and *Calvary*.

On the one hand, it should be observed that *blood of Christ* cannot be used *solely* of the fluid that once flowed in Jesus veins as Walter suggests; otherwise, there are two means of reconciliation: the cross, as stated in Ephesians 2:16, and the blood of Christ, as stated in Ephesians 2:13. Obviously such is not the case; both cross and blood of Christ are synecdoches for the same thing, Christ's suffering and violent death.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that the term *blood of Christ* is used solely of Christ's spiritual death as Thieme suggests; since New Testament figurative usage of *blood* includes physical death. In the New Testament the term refers to the total event of death by violent means. In Matthew 23:35, Jesus speaks of the "blood of righteous Abel" and "the blood of Zechariah." Obviously death by violent means is in view not spiritual death. *Blood* is used because the normal violent taking of life in those days was by blood-letting with the sword, spear or other weapon. As such, *blood* is used as a synecdoche that includes physical blood, not a "representative analogy" that excludes it.

To be fair with Thieme's position, it should be pointed out that Thieme sees only the phrase *blood of Christ* as a representative analogy, not the other uses of *blood*. Nevertheless, the use of *blood* in other contexts demonstrates that the use of synecdoche was prevalent with at least the word *blood* and that any use of the term would automatically arouse a picture of physical death by violent means in the mind of the reader. Other uses of blood as synecdoches for the total event of death by violent means include Matthew 23:30; Luke II: 50, 51; 13: 1; Acts 18:6; 22:20; Romans 3:15; Hebrews 12:4; Revelation 6: 10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; and 19:2. There are also a few non-theological references to *Christ's* physical death by violent means where blood is used. In Matthew 27:4, 24 and 25, the term is on the lips of Judas, Pilate and the mob, and could not refer to Christ's spiritual death. The same is true of Acts 5:28.

New Testament usage of the term makes Thieme's interpretation highly doubtful. In a later section the relationship of the physical death and spiritual death of Christ to the atonement will be considered. At that point it will be shown that Thieme's view of the term *blood of Christ* is not only doubtful linguistically but also impossible theologically.

## **Issue Two: Blood in Heaven**

A second question addressed by both Thieme and his critics relates to Christ's present heavenly ministry of intercession: Did Christ take his literal

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<sup>29</sup> See also Leon Morris's study of the blood in his book *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), pp. 108-124; and A.M. Stibbs' little volume, *The Meaning of the Word "Blood" in Scripture* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1947), pp. 17-20.

blood to heaven to present to the Father as a part of his atoning work?

*Thieme's explanation.* Thieme clearly considers that the idea of a heavenly transporting of Christ's physical blood is wrong:

As the Celebrity of the universe, He ascended and was seated, but He did *not* take any blood with Him to heaven.

There is an old Roman Catholic dogma which says that Christ carried His blood with him to heaven in a bowl. Without even knowing its source, fundamental Christianity clings to that ludicrous idea from the Dark Ages by perpetuating a form of mysticism around the physical blood of our Lord.<sup>30</sup>

*The critic's response.* In his list of Thieme's alleged "four areas of departure from the historic gospel and Christianity," Walter includes the fact that, "Thieme denies that Christ literally presented His Blood to the Father in Heaven."<sup>31</sup> Obviously, Walter considers this to be a critical, fundamental doctrinal issue.

*The critics' charge evaluated.* However, an accusation of heresy for such a belief would also include some of the scholars quoted by Walter in his book to support his attacks against Thieme, notably John F. Walvoord and Charles Ryrie,<sup>32</sup> who also teach that Christ did not present his literal blood in heaven. The only argument for Walter's position found in his book is an emotional one stated by Oliver B. Green.

I believe with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength that the blood of Jesus is in heaven right now because His blood was and is incorruptible. God cannot corrupt, and Jesus had the blood of God in His veins ... We are redeemed with incorruptible . . .<sup>33</sup>

*Thieme's position evaluated.* Thieme's position is sound at this point. Walvoord presents a strong argument supporting the position that Christ did not take his physical blood to heaven:

The false interpretation of the typology of Hebrews 9:7 lends itself to the theory of perpetual offering. According to this interpretation, which is embraced by Catholic and Protestant theologians alike, Christ took His blood into heaven when he entered it by ascension (Heb.

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<sup>30</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Walter, *False Teachings*, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

9:7 compared with Heb. 9:24). Based on the work of the high priest on the day of atonement, who offered sacrifices and then brought the blood in the holy of holies, it is assumed that Christ also brought His blood into heaven itself, and therefore made an offering in heaven sacrificial in nature.

The problem is exceedingly complicated, but a number of facts help to demonstrate that Christ never offered His blood in heaven, the sacrifice being complete on the cross. The high priest of the Old Testament must be regarded as having completed the sacrifice on the altar, the entrance with the blood being merely an application of the sacrifice . . . It was a means of entrance rather than a completion of the sacrifice itself . . . While the blood was brought into the holy of holies, it was not in a sacrificial sense . . . The high priest was allowed to enter the holy of holies on the ground of a *completed* sin offering on the altar . . .

The uniform manner of references in Hebrews is that Christ entered *through* His blood, rather than *with* His blood . . . The thought is that Christ entered, not as one bringing blood to complete a sacrifice, but as One who is clothed in blood, entering by virtue of the sacrifice . . . It must be concluded that the sacrifice of Christ was completed on the cross once and for all; that Christ did not present literal blood in heaven any more than His literal blood is applied to the believer now; that all cleansing in earth and heaven is on the basis of the blood shed on Calvary; that the work of Christ in sacrifice was finished when He died.<sup>34</sup>

A.M. Stibbs, in his scholarly examination of the term *blood* in Scripture, so concurs. In his discussion of Romans 3:25 he concludes concerning the phrase, “in His blood,”

The suggestion then is not that after His death Christ sprinkled blood on some heavenly mercy-seat, but that He himself is the true, eternal mercy-seat of the divine purpose “by His blood,” that is, because of His death as Man for men.<sup>35</sup>

Stibbs further elaborates on this conclusion in his explanation of Hebrews 9 and 10: “Christ did not enter ‘with blood;’ or taking blood at all. He entered ‘through His own blood;’ that is, by way of death...”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Unpublished class notes by John F. Walvoord cited in Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 72, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Stibbs, *Meaning*, pp. 21, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

### Issue Three: Christ's Physical Death and Salvation

A third question, and by far the most critical one, relates to Christ's physical death: In view of Thieme's teaching that the blood of Christ refers only to Christ's spiritual death, what relationship did his physical bleeding, suffering and death have to his saving work for man?

*Thieme's explanation.* Thieme's response is stated succinctly in his book, *The Blood of Christ*:

The Old Testament rituals that so graphically depicted the saving work of Christ all pictured His spiritual death -- the source of our salvation. Therefore the physical death of the sacrificed animal represented the spiritual death of Jesus Christ. The analogy between something physical and something spiritual will not be confused if we understand the nature of the Lord's physical death and see that although it has great significance, it was *not* a means of salvation.

Christ's physical death simply indicated that His work was completed. Nevertheless, He died physically in a unique and magnificent manner, by dismissing His own soul and spirit when the Father's plan called for His to depart.<sup>37</sup>

*The critics' response.* Walter concludes that Thieme teaches that "the 'physical death' of Christ has nothing to do with a person's salvation" and that this is "the area where Thieme goes into heresy," by teaching " 'fables' or 'myths'."<sup>38</sup>

*The critics' charge evaluated.* The accusation of heresy is a serious one and should not be cast at a brother without clearly understanding his position and providing him an opportunity to defend or clarify his teaching. We will attempt to provide such a clarification of Thieme's position on this issue.

Primarily as an attempt to develop the doctrine of the blood of Christ so as to "avoid Roman (Catholic) mysticism"<sup>39</sup> concerning Christ's blood, Thieme has attempted to analyze the biblical way of expressing Christ's finished work of salvation. He maintains that the central issue in Christ's work was the sin of Adam which resulted in the spiritual death of Adam, and which was imputed to all men. He claims that Christ died twice on the cross -- spiritually and physically, but that only his spiritual death was related to the problem of Adam's sin. In his book on *The Blood of Christ* he concludes, then, that the spiritual death of

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<sup>37</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, pp. 13, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Walter, *False Teaching*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>39</sup> Thieme interview, 26 September 1977.

Christ (which he claims is referred to in the New Testament by the term *blood of Christ*<sup>40</sup>) was the means by which expiation, redemption, justification, sanctification, propitiation, reconciliation, and salvation were provided for man.<sup>41</sup> He acknowledges that Christ bled literal blood and truly died physically, but he maintains that salvation was procured entirely through His spiritual death.

Such a position appears to teach that the physical suffering and death of Christ were unnecessary. However, Thieme teaches that they were necessary and that the physical death in particular is a part of the gospel<sup>42</sup> (as stated in I Corinthians 15). Furthermore, Thieme's teaching on reconciliation seems to include Christ's physical death and resurrection as a necessary part.<sup>43</sup>

Thieme may be charged with inconsistency, vagueness or error on this issue, but he is far from heresy. He sees the work of Christ, for man's eternal future (though he fails to carefully use all the biblical terms describing our salvation) as requiring Christ's spiritual death, His physical death and His resurrection.<sup>44</sup>

In his early teaching on the blood of Christ, Thieme also remarked that "when Jesus died physically, He ... died for himself."<sup>45</sup> Such a statement aroused some of his critics to challenge his entire teaching on the physical and spiritual death of Christ.<sup>46</sup> Apparently Thieme's statement was an unguarded one; for in a personal interview he quickly responded that he did not believe that Jesus died for himself, and he also labeled such a concept as heresy.<sup>47</sup>

In support of the fact that Thieme teaches the necessity of Christ's physical death, it should also be observed that he has developed a threefold view of the physical death of Christ. First, Christ died physically because the expiation through his spiritual death was finished. Second, the provisions for the believer that are associated with our identification with Christ (Thieme calls this "positional truth") include our dying with Christ (Ephesians 2) in His physical death.<sup>48</sup> Third, the resurrection of Christ would not have been possible without His physical death.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The theological use of *blood of Christ* is found in the following passages: Acts 20:28; Romans 3:25; 5:9; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12, 14; 10:19; 13:12, 20; 1 Peter 1:2, 19; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11.

<sup>41</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, pp. 3-5.

<sup>42</sup> Thieme interview, 16 September 1977.

<sup>43</sup> Implied in book by R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Barrier*, 2d. ed. (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1974), pp. 29-32, and stated in Thieme interview, 26 September 1977.

<sup>44</sup> Thieme interview, 26 September 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Robert B. Thieme, Jr., *I John 1: 7b-8 Doc. of the Blood*, 23 June 1969.

<sup>46</sup> Walter, *False Teaching*, p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Thieme interview, 26 September 1977.

<sup>48</sup> The complete term Thieme applies to this is "retroactive positional truth" in contrast with "present positional truth," which includes our present position in Christ with eternal life, royal priesthood, perfect righteousness, etc.

<sup>49</sup> Thieme interview, 26 September 1977, and R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Romans 4:5a, *Deaths*, & *Reject./Good & Evil*," no. 194 in *Romans*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 8 September 1977.

After a careful examination of Thieme's teaching on the blood as it related to Christ's spiritual and physical deaths, one must conclude that he is definitely within the sphere of orthodox Christianity.

*Thieme's position evaluated.* Although Thieme's position on the physical and spiritual deaths of Christ is not extreme enough to call it heresy, it has some major exegetical and logical shortcomings. To simplify an evaluation of his arguments, his progression of thought is outlined below:

(1) There is a difference between spiritual death and physical death, since physically alive people can be spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 5: 12).<sup>50</sup>

(2) Adam's judgment for his disobedience was spiritual death, not his physical death, for he lived physically 930 years after the day God said he would die.<sup>51</sup>

(3) Therefore, only spiritual death is the judgment demanded for Adam's original sin that was imputed to us.<sup>52</sup>

(4) Christ died twice on the cross -- spiritually during the three hours of separation from the Father from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m., and physically soon afterwards. Evidence for the two deaths includes the plural of death (*bemutayv*) in Isaiah 53:9 and the plural of death in the New Testament in resurrection passages (*ek nekron*).<sup>53</sup>

(5) Since the penalty for Adam's sin was spiritual death, one should conclude that Christ's work of expiation, forgiveness, justification and propitiation had to be by spiritual death only.

This conclusion is not contradicted by biblical references to the need for the shedding of physical blood and physical death for remission of sins; for the Old Testament sacrifices of the physical life of the animals were only typical (symbolic) of the saving work of Christ. They just pointed to the real expiation (the removal of the penalty for sin by substitution) at the cross; therefore, there need not be a direct correlation between the *physical* death of animals and the *physical* death of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

Further support for his conclusion is Christ's words on the cross at the conclusion of the three hours of darkness when the Father had forsaken Him: Christ said, "*Tetelestai*" ("It is finished"), implying that the work of salvation was complete before he died physically.<sup>55</sup>

(6) Finally, Thieme observes that the term *blood of Christ* is related to salvation passages that describe expiation (in the terms of forgiveness, justification

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<sup>50</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Thieme specifically mentions Colossians 2:12.

<sup>54</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

and propitiation).<sup>56</sup> Since he has already concluded that these aspects of salvation were accomplished solely by Christ's spiritual death, he reasons that the *blood of Christ* is used figuratively to represent only the spiritual death of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

There are a number of problems with both the premises and the logical progression of thought described above. First, the sharp separation between the physical death of Christ and his spiritual death is unwarranted, for as Thieme himself acknowledges, "Physical death is an eventual result of) spiritual death, . . . ."<sup>58</sup> Also, Paul clearly contrasts the death of Adam with physical resurrection in I Corinthians 11 5:20-22, implying that part of Adam's death penalty was physical. Thus, it appears that Thieme's first three points fail to recognize the close relationship between spiritual and physical death.

Second, although it may be admitted that Christ's death included his dying both physically and spiritually, Thieme's exegesis of passages that he claims specifically refer to death in the plural is highly suspect. The normal interpretation of Isaiah 53:9 recognizes that the plural of *muth* is used to show the intensity of death -- a "plural exaggerativus" according to Delitzsch.<sup>59</sup> Also the New Testament *nekros* is an adjective meaning "dead," and when it is used as a substantive, it refers to a dead person, not death. As such it is used idiomatically in the plural to refer to the abode of the dead (i.e. "the dead ones"), and it never means the event of death.<sup>60</sup> The Greek word for death is *thanatos*, and it is not used in the plural in the New Testament. Thieme's premise that the New Testament teaches that Christ rose from deaths, therefore, ignores the clear meaning of the terms.

Third, although it is proper to say that the Old Testament animal sacrifices were typical, that the emphasis of these sacrifices was on a substitutionary expiation, and that Christ took Adam's spiritual death sentence upon Himself; it is not warranted by the evidence already discussed to restrict the need for Christ's substitution to just His spiritual death. Neither does the statement of Christ from the cross that it was "finished" (*tetelestai*) necessarily refer solely to his spiritual death. Probably He had in view both His physical suffering and His spiritual death, and that He no longer needed to remain alive physically.

Finally, the critical error in Thieme's logic involves his oversight of the implications of the doctrine of the believer's position in Christ (positional truth).

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> Franz Delitzsch, "Isaiah," in vol. 5: *Isaiah 15 to Ezekiel 24*, Old Testament Commentaries, 6 vols. (n.p.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.).

<sup>60</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, 4th rev. ed., s.v. "*nekros*", pp. 536, 37 and *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 9th rev. ed., s.v. "*nekros*", pp. 1165, 66.

This oversight has allowed him to press his first four points to produce his weak view of the significance of Christ's physical death and his faulty interpretation of the term *blood of Christ*.

Thieme himself acknowledges that the believer's reconciliation rests upon his positional identification with Christ in His bodily death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-6; Ephesians 2:1-16). He also recognizes that the *blood of Christ* accomplished reconciliation (Ephesians 2:13).<sup>61</sup> However, he fails to relate these two truths to each other. Had he done so he would have concluded that the blood of Christ includes the physical death of Christ as well as his spiritual death. In view of the fact that the Scriptures not only state that the *blood of Christ* accomplished reconciliation, but also forgiveness, redemption, propitiation, justification and sanctification (Romans 3:25; 5:9; 1 Peter 1:2, 18, 19; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13), one should conclude also that these other aspects of the saving work of Christ (described in terms of forgiveness, etc.) were accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection including his physical death.

## **Conclusion**

Thieme's teaching that the spiritual death of Christ alone was sufficient to accomplish expiation and his interpretation of the term, *blood of Christ* is untenable. On the other hand, he is correct in rejecting a magical or mystical view of *blood*. Nevertheless, it must be concluded that when measured by the standard of the nine fundamentals and the doctrinal statement of Dallas Seminary, his doctrine of the blood of Christ as well as his stand on other basic doctrines rests clearly within the sphere of orthodoxy.

## **THIEME'S METHODOLOGY**

Two aspects of Thieme's methodology are relevant to our evaluation of his teaching on the Christian life: (1) his method of study, because it affects his theological conclusions; and (2) his method of teaching, because it is the source of many misapplications, as well as unfounded attacks related to the content of his doctrine.

### **Study Methodology**

At the core of Thieme's doctrinal weaknesses and errors is a faulty methodology for Bible study. Although certain elements in his approach are commendable, others are theologically dangerous.

Using the acronym ICE, Thieme uses and encourages the use of three major parts of Bible study: "isagogics," "categories," and "exegesis."

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<sup>61</sup> Thieme, *The Barrier*, pp. 38-43.

*Isagogics.* "Isagogics" refers to "the interpretation of the Bible in its historical setting."<sup>23</sup> From his background in the classics and his special interest in ancient history, Thieme is able to structure vividly the historical setting of the various Old and New Testament books, a must for dependable interpretation.

*Categories.* "Categories" is used by Thieme to refer to "Categorical teaching: the organization of principles of doctrine based on the comparison of Scripture with Scripture to determine doctrinal classification."<sup>24</sup> Another, or at least quite similar, term for categorical Bible study is *systematic theology*. The process of developing categories of doctrine that are then used in interpreting the Scripture frequently includes three elements that can result in faulty exegesis or unbalanced doctrinal emphasis unless checked by other methods. These elements are (1) the establishment of categories according to the theologian's mental inclinations, (2) the coining and defining of terms that relate to the theologian's categories, and (3) the defining of biblical terms according to the theologian's categories. All three of these elements have some validity, but they can produce interpretative problems unless kept in balance by historical theology, biblical theology, and the contributions and critical evaluation of other teachers in the body of Christ.

Illustrations of Thieme's use of these elements abound in his exposition. An example is found in his study of Proverbs 24:3,4.

"By understanding" is the frame of reference in the right lobe. "By understanding it is established." "Established" actually has the connotation of preparing oneself. From your frame of reference you prepare yourself for whatever responsibility you have in life. "And by KNOWLEDGE shall the chambers be filled." The word "knowledge" denotes the whole function of GAP. By the function of GAP shall the chambers -- the categorical storage in the human spirit - be filled. The human spirit contains storage slots, and the function of the grace apparatus puts categories of doctrine into the human spirit from the perceptive lobe.<sup>25</sup>

GAP is Thieme's acronym for "grace apparatus for perception," which he defines as "the provision of God whereby every believer can understand every doctrine, regardless of education or human IQ."<sup>26</sup> His equating of knowledge with GAP obviously stretches the meaning of the proverb in question beyond its normal meaning.

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<sup>23</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Edification Complex of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *GAP* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1974), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Thieme, *Edification Complex*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Super-grace Life* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1973), p. 68.

To avoid the abuse of interpretation by systematics (or categories) an appreciation for the contributions of the theologians and interpreters of the past is needed, and should be communicated to the hearers of the teaching. Also, systematic theology should depend largely upon "biblical theology;" that is, the study of the doctrines of Scripture according to the categories, emphases, terminology, context and place in the development of theology of the particular biblical writer. For example, Thieme quickly thrusts I John 1:9 into his category of "rebound," but John's categories are "walking in the light" and "telling the truth in personal fellowship relationships." The absence of sound biblical theology, we shall see in a later chapter, has produced a mechanical, in-and-out, view of fellowship and spirituality, rather than John's concept of continual personal relationships.

Unless checked, Thieme's methodology will likely produce more and more doctrinal error in the future. Thieme would be wise, therefore, to develop a relationship with some respected theologians who could discuss with him any new theological teaching he develops and could direct his attention toward insights from biblical theology and historical theology.

*Exegesis.* Thieme defines *exegesis* as "the analysis of each verse within its context, emphasizing grammar, syntax and etymology of words from the original language" of Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Utilizing his thorough training in the biblical languages, Thieme has produced volumes of materials on virtually every verse in the Bible. Most of this is incorporated into his extensive taped teaching series. This exegesis for the most part is sound. However, at times he tends to overstate the relevance of etymology<sup>28</sup> and the significance of Greek grammar.<sup>29</sup> Also, as has already been noted, Thieme frequently allows his "categories" to govern his exegesis -- a point that has been illustrated in his exegesis of passages containing the term, *blood of Christ*.

Another difficulty with Thieme's exegesis comes from the way he frequently communicates his conclusions. His normal way of teaching his exegesis includes retranslating each passage so as to include his interpretation. Such retranslations should be called "interpretive paraphrases" or "expanded translations." However, he repeatedly labels these paraphrases "corrected translations."<sup>30</sup> This is a serious misrepresentation, for it leaves one with the impression that Thieme's interpretation is on a par with Scripture itself.

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<sup>27</sup> Thieme, GAP, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> For example, he presses the meaning of the Hebrew words for faith beyond their contextual meaning; see his book, *The Faith-rest Life*, pp. 53, 54.

<sup>29</sup> For example, frequently Thieme emphasizes that the aorist tense always means "once-for-all" action. See article by Frank Stagg, "The Abused Aorist," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (June 1972): 222-31, for documentation that the *aktionsart* of the aorist tense is simple past action and does not necessarily demand "momentary, singular, or once and for all" significance. Stagg supported his conclusions with both specific scriptural examples and quotations from grammars by Ernest De Witt Burton and A. T. Robertson.

<sup>30</sup> See examples in Thieme's book, *Blood of Christ*, 1977, pp. 5, 13, 14.

Using his ICE approach, Thieme has made some significant exegetical insights and some logical expansions of orthodox theology, which he calls "doctrinal breakthroughs." However, one must be aware of the limitations of Thieme's methodology lest he become influenced more by Thieme's thought forms and the perspective of his personality than by that of the biblical writers.

## Teaching Methodology

Four characteristics stand out in Thieme's teaching methodology: first, his dogmatic and authoritative way of communicating from the pulpit; second, his style as expressed in his choice of words and illustrations; and third, his approach to the teaching content itself; and fourth, his commitment to mass (or large group) teaching by the lecture method.

*Authoritative attitude.* Rooted both in Thieme's personality and background and in his doctrine of right pastor, Thieme comes across as a highly authoritative person who will not allow any interruption or distraction in his Bible class.<sup>31</sup> His teaching provides a sense of security to his hearers as he extends his authoritative manner to his dogmatic stand on virtually everything he teaches. The author as a young man had the enlightening experience of preaching a message based on one of Thieme's books, assuming that everything in the book that was stated so dogmatically could be substantiated from the Scriptures, only to discover that a certain teaching, though it was an interesting speculation, just was not in the Bible.

Such authoritative dogmatism even extends to his political and athletic opinions. Following the bowl games in 1976, from the pulpit he dogmatically accused the NCAA officials of not giving the Southwest Conference a fair treatment.<sup>32</sup>

One studying under Thieme soon finds himself so influenced by his authoritative, dogmatic manner that he is reluctant to study the Scriptures for himself; and when he reads the Bible, he is prone to sift the clear scriptural teachings through Thieme's doctrinal grid.

*Style.* Thieme's style of preaching often raises more negative reaction than anything he teaches. George King has summarily treated this aspect of Ms teaching method:

When a speaker wants to avoid the natural or normal words because he may believe them to be too flat or uninteresting, he turns

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<sup>31</sup> King, "Preaching," pp. 138-141.

<sup>32</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 3:13-15a, Test of Mental Attitude Before Ultra S-G," no. 41 in *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 1 January 1976.

to idioms. Thieme's cliches, jargon or slang terms, such as "break-through" . . . ; "household word" . . . ; "a brand new ballgame" . . . ; "greener pastures" . . . ; "cut of my jib" . . . "fat-headed ideas" . . . ; "picks my brain" . . . ; "gift of gab" . . . ; "bask in the sunshine of prosperity" . . . ; and "oddball" . . . provide a sense of life to his style. Terms, such as "bugs" . . . ; "hang-ups" . . . ; "flakey" . . . ; "sucker" . . . ; "flunked" . . . ; "guy" . . . ; (Campus Crusade) "bunch" . . . ; "studying his guts out" . . . ; and "malarkey" . . . do not seem to jar the ear of his audience, because his speech is usually peppered with such informal English terms. Terms such as "take in" . . . ; "tie in knots" . . . ; "take it" . . . ; could be called popular speech terms rather than informal. Hyperbole or exaggeration occurs as Thieme says, "a few thousand times" . . . ; "a few million words" . . . ; "twenty-seven theories about the anti-Christ" . . . Rude, crude, stupid, assinine trick" . . . indicates a rapid catalog with connectors omitted. Saying, "Intelligence Quotient -- sometimes that should be Ignorance Quotient" . . . may be for rhetorical effect by substituting one expression for another. Epithets such as calling those in his audience "dumb butts," "jackasses," "jennies," "dumbest asses in the world," abound in his speeches. Sarcasm is also a relatively frequent device . . . .<sup>33</sup>

The average person's choice of words is important, but it is especially important for a teacher of God's word (James 3:1-13). The use of "four-letter" expletives<sup>34</sup> can easily stumble a weaker brother into using crude, unwholesome, and even blasphemous language (Eph. 5:6-12; Luke 17:1; Rev. 2:14; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8-10). One lady who had studied under Thieme for many years says that "her language changed considerably" for the worse when she first began to study under him. She further observed, "I can't think of a person whose language hasn't changed, even the small children."<sup>35</sup>

Thieme's personal disdain for longhairs, Pentecostals, homosexuals, soft preachers, "do-gooders," legalistic "fundies," ecologists, socialists, and those holding various liberal political positions is no secret, since he includes his opinions in these areas as illustrations of his teaching. A man has a right to his personal opinions, but a teacher of the truth of God, especially one as authoritative as Thieme, does a disservice to the Scriptures by dogmatically communicating his personal opinions alongside the revelation of God.

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<sup>33</sup> King, "Preaching," pp. 126-28.

<sup>34</sup> Thieme sees no problem in the use of "hell" or "damn" as expletives in the pulpit. This is illustrated in his messages and was acknowledged in a personal interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Sharon Farmer, Houston, Texas, 29 September 1977.

A common method of communicating his personal reactions is the use of ridicule and derogatory humor.<sup>36</sup> For one with such an authoritative manner, this too can be spiritually counterproductive, since such a methodology is easily reproduced in his followers.<sup>37</sup>

*Approach to content.* Two aspects of Thieme's approach to his content are prominent: first, his thorough documentation of all of his exegetical and theological conclusions; second, his technical vocabulary that he has developed to communicate the content of doctrines.

A novice toward Thieme's teaching is normally overwhelmed by the vast amount of technical, exegetical material hurled at him in any given service. Thieme has been forced to do this to supply his critics and advanced students with sufficient support for the conclusions he draws. The inclusion of such material, though some question it as a poor teaching method, in practicality apparently has not hindered the development of the obviously expanding following Thieme has.

His technical terminology, likewise, is difficult to grasp for the newcomer, and a great deal of ridicule has been cast at Thieme for his choice of such terms as *rebound*, *reversionism*, *super-grace*, and *frontal lobe*.<sup>38</sup> However, the coining of technical terms is legitimate, and Thieme explains, "I find that many orthodox types of doing things do not communicate any more, so I try to find things that do, that's all."<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, there are a few real problems that develop from the use of such new terminology. It tends to set the students of Thieme apart from other Christians, and to hinder spiritually related communication between them and other believers and pastors -- thus, becoming a basis in some cases for arrogance and division. Also, the new terminology, being a product of extensive categorical or systematic thinking, tends to produce exegesis that is forced into Thieme's thought forms rather than being subservient to the theological thought forms of the biblical writers.

Another serious effect of Thieme's personalized theological vocabulary is that it produces a growing dependency on Thieme and his teaching, for, unless another teacher uses Thieme's terminology, he has difficulty integrating with or building upon what Thieme has taught.

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<sup>36</sup> An example of this method is Thieme's abs at "fundie" preachers in his study of Philippians 3 on 26 December 1975.

<sup>37</sup> See this illustrated in the quote on pages 16 and 17 of this dissertation.

<sup>38</sup> See the appendix for an extended glossary.

<sup>39</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977. Thieme also gives a lucid defense of his technical terminology in one of his more recent publications: R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Reversionism*, 2d. ed. (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1978), pp. 1, 2. This book is also a helpful digest of many of Thieme's more recently developed doctrines (e.g. divine justice, evil and ultra-super-grace).

*Lecture method.* Thieme is committed to the lecture method. So strong is this commitment that he considers other forms of teaching as either harmful or worthless to spiritual growth. He writes,

The spiritual gift of pastor-teacher must be exercised with authority (Tit. 2:15); therefore, monologue, not dialogue, is the order of teaching. By dialogue, I am not referring to legitimate questions from the congregation, requests for clarification or the repetition of a point; I am referring to the current method of "sharing," where you put in a little bit, the teacher puts in a little bit, and you walk out with nothing but "two bits!" Furthermore, except in rare instances, it is not the responsibility of the pastor to counsel. Counseling becomes a crutch or a substitute for the intake of doctrine, which is the ultimate solution to all problems.

The Biblical concept of teaching is set forth in the Greek verb DIDASKO -- public teaching of doctrine. Only in the communication of doctrine in a public assembly does the believer have the privacy to learn doctrine, to use it as unto the Lord and advance to spiritual maturity. A local church is a private organization under God, which affords the public a means to come and hear; but the principle of teaching by monologue must be maintained.<sup>40</sup>

One could hardly argue against the fact that both Christ and Paul utilized the lecture method, but Thieme fails to acknowledge the numerous other methods used by Christ: he taught both very small groups (of three and of twelve) and large groups, he likewise challenged men one-on-one; furthermore, he used object lessons, debate, questions directed at his hearers, modeling by his own example, and training through special assignments (the short preaching tours of the twelve in Galilee and the seventy in Judea). The major weakness in Thieme's approach is not in his very capable use of the lecture method, but in his unbalanced approach to teaching in general.

## **CONCLUSION**

From a study of Thieme's background, the question of his orthodoxy and his methodology, we have been brought to a better understanding of the context in which he teaches and writes. He is an authoritative teacher whose contributions are sharply limited at times by weaknesses in his methodology and emphasis. His doctrine of the blood has some serious errors, but he is a Christian brother well within the circle of orthodox Christianity, who is providing doctrinal teaching that many today are hungry for.

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<sup>40</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, pp. 10, 11.

## CHAPTER II

### DISTINCTIVE FOUNDATIONAL DOCTRINES

There are a number of distinctive doctrines which form the theological foundations for Thieme's teachings on Christian living. Following a brief theological overview, ten of his most significant doctrinal emphases will be considered and evaluated.

#### ***AN OVERVIEW OF THIEME'S THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM***

##### **Theological Classification**

Thieme is the product of the theological teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer and the seminary he founded -- Dallas Theological Seminary. He is, therefore, a Protestant evangelical teacher holding to "fundamental" Christian doctrine and committed to the literal hermeneutic of premillennial-dispensational theology. On questions related to sovereignty, Thieme is neither Calvinistic nor Arminian in his thinking. He rather prefers to teach doctrine relating to God's sovereignty and man's volition according to his own system.

##### **Summary of Distinctive Doctrinal Emphases**

The ten areas considered below contain teachings that are distinctive of Thieme's. Furthermore, they provide an important background for the Christian-living doctrines considered in later chapters. His view of *Bible doctrine* is critical to his objectives for the Christian life: maturity through the internalization of Bible doctrine. Thieme's recently developed doctrine of the *nature of God* has far reaching implications for blessing in the life of the believer, and his teaching on *divine sovereignty and human volition emphasizes* both God's grace and man's responsibility in Christian living. His view of the *angelic conflict* underlies much of what he teaches in almost every area of doctrine.

Thieme has also developed an elaborate analysis of the *immaterial part of man*, and he has deduced a unique view of *sin and evil*. Both of these teachings have significant implications for one's perspective on current social issues, and both greatly affect Thieme's analysis of spirituality and maturity.

One distinctive emphasis of most dispensational teachers is on the doctrine of grace. Thieme is no exception. In fact he uses the word *grace* in many of his new technical theological terms. For Thieme the entire Christian life is dependent upon the grace of God.

Three other doctrinal categories play a part in Thieme's Christian-life doctrines. First, he sees the *people of God* in our present dispensation, which he calls "the royal family of God," as having special provisions for Christian

living. Second, Thieme's view of *history* produces a questionable mentality toward the Christian's response to current events; and third, his doctrines related to the *military* often influence the life style of his followers.

## ***BIBLE DOCTRINE***

### **Definition**

Thieme employs the term Bible doctrine to describe the categorical teaching of biblical content by a pastor-teacher. In outline form he provides the specifics of his definition:

- a. Biblical doctrine is the content of the Canon of Scripture with emphasis on communication of the content by teaching and instruction.
- b. The communication of Bible information on the basis of exegesis of the original languages, or an analysis and classification of the English Text.
- c. Doctrine is the "mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16) and must be communicated by authorized personnel: prophets and Levitical priesthood in the Age of Israel; pastor-teacher in the Church Age.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to realize that although Thieme considers Bible doctrine to be no more than the "content of the Canon of Scripture," in practicality he requires "authorized personnel," (i.e. pastor-teachers) to communicate the doctrine. Thus, Bible doctrine is the teaching by a pastor-teacher by which the Bible's truths are organized and logically amplified within the thought patterns, terminology and definitions of that pastor-teacher. For those studying under Thieme, then, Bible doctrine is Thieme's doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

### **Importance**

Thieme's stress on Bible doctrine is apparent in almost every Bible class he teaches. So great is this emphasis that Thieme regularly interprets the term Bible doctrine into a wide variety of contexts. Taking up the cross and following Christ (Matt. 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27) is a "synonym" for Bible doctrine. Hebrews 13:10 is the "construction of an altar in the soul" by Bible doctrine, and "putting on the full armor from God" (Ephesians 6:11, 13) involves the intake of Bible doctrine. Salt (Matthew 5:13) refers to "maximum doctrine resident in the soul."<sup>3</sup> Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is "doctrine" as it "existed in the mind of God in eternity past."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, pp. 42, 43.

<sup>2</sup> It should also be said that Thieme does recognize that he has no teaching authority over someone under another pastor.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46,47.

<sup>4</sup> Thieme, *Blood of Christ*, p.15.

To emphasize the great importance of Bible doctrine, Thieme attempts to demonstrate its place in the physical suffering and death of Christ. He claims that "the strength, inner resources and divine operating assets that Christ required in order to go to the Cross were provided by the doctrine resident in His soul."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he maintains that "in his dying breath, the Lord Jesus Christ made Bible doctrine the spiritual heritage of the royal family of God."<sup>6</sup> He bases this teaching on his translation of Psalm 31:5:

Into your hand I commit My spirit; You have delivered Me,  
O Jehovah, God of Doctrine (Ps. 31:5; corrected translation).<sup>7</sup>

Another way Thieme emphasizes the importance of Bible doctrine is in his cataloguing of the relationship of doctrine to various parts of God's program:

(1) Attitude toward doctrine is the basis for blessing or discipline (Prov. 8:33-36).

(2) Doctrine resident in the soul is the basis for the distribution of special blessing reserved for the mature (Isa. 53:12).

(3) Doctrine is the basis for the distribution of surpassing-grace blessings in eternity (Heb. 11:9, 10 compared with Heb. 11:13; James 1:25 compared with James 2:12, 13).

(4) The destruction of a nation (deterioration of the society) comes through lack of doctrine (Hos. 4:1-6).

(5) The Plan of God is advanced and vindicated through Bible doctrine (Isa. 53:10; Rom. 3:4).<sup>8</sup>

He also lists eight specific results of "doctrine resident in the soul."

a. Produces confidence for Phase Two<sup>9</sup> (Job 5:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:6-8, Heb. 10:35).

b. Orients believer to the Plan of God (Isa. 26:3,4; Rom 8:28).

c. Causes divine viewpoint in the right lobe<sup>10</sup> and therefore mental attitude dynamics (Isa. 55:7-9; 2 Cor. 10:5).

d. Produces stability of soul (Jas. 1:8).

e. Basis for divine guidance and execution of the will of God.

f. Leads to maximum capacity to love God and occupation with Christ (Eph. 3:19; Phil. 3: 10, Heb. 12:2, 3).

g. Enables believer to attain and hold super-grace<sup>11</sup> status (Phil. 3:12-14).

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>9</sup> "Phase Two" is the Christian life.

<sup>10</sup> "Right lobe" is Thieme's term for the biblical term, *heart*.

<sup>11</sup> "Super-grace" is Thieme's term for spiritual maturity.

h. Means of attaining surpassing-grace blessings for eternity (Heb. 11:9, 10, 13; Jas. 1:25 compared with Jas. 2:12, 13).<sup>12</sup>

### **The Message and the Man**

The emphasis on Bible doctrine is also expressed in terms of the importance of the message and the unimportance of the man used by God to communicate the doctrine. A common expression used by both Thieme and his followers is, "It's the message, not the man." Thieme sees this as an application of John the Baptist's view of himself as a voice."<sup>13</sup>

Two implications are deduced from the concept of "the message not the man." First, the praise of God's people should be directed toward the real source of the truth, God himself, not the teacher. Second, the manner of life and the ministry-methodology of the teacher should not hinder one from learning doctrine, since "the man" is unimportant.

### **Critique**

It is refreshing to listen to a man who takes seriously the teachings of Scripture and arranges his messages according to doctrinal categories instead of homiletical devices. Thieme is making a solid contribution in this way.

Nevertheless, there are some problems with Thieme's view of Bible doctrine. First, Thieme too readily forces his term on the Scripture. He claims that his definition of Bible doctrine is equivalent to the biblical terms: truth, wisdom, and salt. By so doing, he reduces too much to one term.

Second, by linking Bible doctrine to an authoritative pastor-teacher, he has produced a dangerous cycle of increasing dominance of one man over a congregation,<sup>14</sup> not unlike papal authority. In the Roman Church, dogma supports papal authority to interpret the Bible. The pope interprets the Bible to support the dogma of his authority. In the same way, Thieme's doctrine of Bible doctrine supports his pastoral authority to be the sole and final authority for Bible interpretation for his congregation. As such he continually emphasizes his view of Bible doctrine which in turn reinforces his authority.

Third, with the limitations of the ICE method, along with Thieme's authoritative approach, his view of Bible doctrine easily produces an equation between

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<sup>12</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>14</sup> In Thieme's case, his congregation may number almost a million, through his tapes and telephone ministries, a possibility pointed out by Thieme in an interview, 26 September 1977.

Bible doctrine and Thieme doctrine.<sup>15</sup> This makes a critical evaluation of his teaching and a discernment between biblical truth and personal opinion extremely difficult for a Thieme student. In fact, many express tremendous emotional stress in leaving Berachah Church, since it is tantamount to leaving God's Word in their thinking.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, the extreme emphasis on Bible doctrine has led Thieme to hold Bible class six nights a week. He continually exhorts his people that the process of spiritual maturity demands the intake of Bible doctrine from a pastor-teacher daily. This, in many cases can result in a warped, legalistic, life style<sup>17</sup> that provides for little time for healthy family relations,<sup>18</sup> contact with unsaved neighbors, personal study and enrichment in the Scriptures, and a ministry to the needs of others. Instead, it can produce the unbalanced, "puffed-up," mentality condemned by Paul in I Corinthians 8, and in some cases, it can do much harm to the Christian family.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, his differentiation between the "message" and the "man" is not completely a biblical view. It is true that honoring the teacher is not appropriate. However, God desires that the vessel he uses to communicate his message be one that does not detract from the message. The argument that the life of the teacher is irrelevant is one also used by some cult leaders to excuse their life styles.<sup>20</sup> However, James warns that teachers are to be judged more strictly than others (James 3: 1), and Paul demands high standards for the elders of the church (I Tim. 3; Titus 1). Both Samuel (I Sam. 12) and Paul (I Thes. 2:1-12) were careful not to let their lives hinder the impact or proper understanding of their message.

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<sup>15</sup> The strong correlation between Bible doctrine and Thieme doctrine in Thieme's mind is further substantiated by the letter Berachah sends to potential pastor-teachers, that urges them to learn the biblical languages in seminary, but to continue on Thieme's tapes to get their Bible doctrine.

<sup>16</sup> Telephone interview with Debbie Foster, Houston, Texas, 1 October 1977, and interview with Sharon Farmer, Houston, Texas, 29 September 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Though Thieme denounces legalism, he has produced what could be called "agnostic legalism," i.e. spirituality by knowledge accompanied by forceful demands to attend Bible classes.

<sup>18</sup> The Scriptures are clear in their emphasis on the need for the father to take time to teach, model and train his children and for the husband to take time to give his wife loving attention. (Dt. 6:6, 7; Joel 1: 2, 3; Eph. 6:4; Eph. 5: 22-33; 1 Pet. 3:7).

<sup>19</sup> A number of personal interviews have disclosed the negative effects of the Bible class legalism on families.

<sup>20</sup> For example, the leaders of the Children of God teach that their people are to ignore their blatant immorality and submit to their authoritative teaching because they are God's appointed authoritative teachers.

## THE NATURE OF GOD

Thieme has made some significant strides toward explaining the nature of God to his students, and in recent years he has also sought to expand the traditional teachings relative to two divine attributes: justice and love.

### Thieme's Approach to Describing God

*The essence box.* The "essence box" is a term Thieme uses to refer to his method of communicating the primary elements in the nature of God. (See figure 1)<sup>21</sup> Through the essence box illustration, he describes God in terms of his sovereignty (S), absolute righteousness (+R), justice (J), love, eternal life (EL), omniscience (O), omnipresence (O), omnipotence (O), immutability (I), and veracity (V).<sup>22</sup> God's holiness is made up of his righteousness and jus-

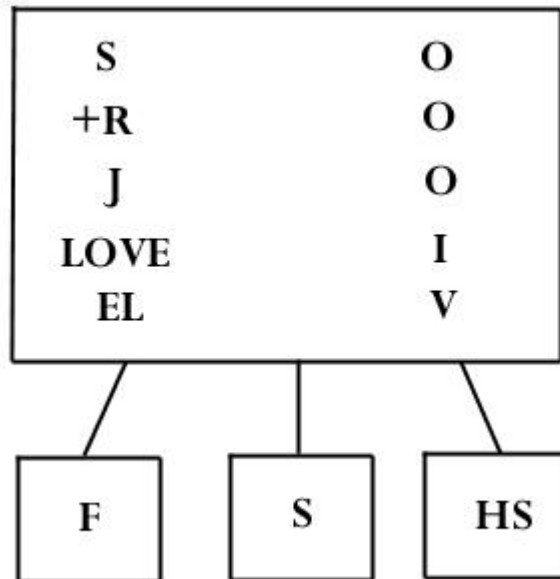


Figure 1, Essence Box

<sup>21</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Trinity*, 2d, ed. (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1975), p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr. *Divine Essence* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1973), pp. 2-16.

tice.<sup>23</sup> All three persons of the Godhead have the attributes of divine essence ascribed to them; thus, he indicates that the Father (F), the Son (S), and the Holy Spirit (HS) all participate in the divine characteristics.<sup>24</sup>

*Recent analysis.* A modification of Thieme's earlier approach to the essence of God is presently being prepared for publication.<sup>25</sup> In this he breaks down the essence of God into three major categories. The first category includes the absolute attributes of spirituality, infinity, and perfection. Under spirituality Thieme includes God's eternal life and personality. Infinity "characterizes not only what God is, but all that God does as well: His holiness, His love, His veracity, His Word of truth."<sup>26</sup> It has three basic characteristics: self-existence, immutability and unity.<sup>27</sup> God's "perfection involves absolute truth, love, and holiness."<sup>28</sup>

The second major category includes the relative attributes, as they are related to creation, and related to moral beings. The attributes related to time and space include God's eternity and His immensity. The attributes related to creation are omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. The attributes related to moral beings are veracity and faithfulness, mercy and goodness, and justice and righteousness.<sup>29</sup>

The third category is entitled "Other Divine Characteristics." This includes the freedom of God ("not truly an attribute"), the affections of God (His feelings of hatred, anger, scorn, benevolence, compassion, longsuffering, and happiness), and the authority of God.<sup>30</sup>

Within this new framework two aspects of Thieme's recent teaching on the essence of God stand out: his view that the love of God for man is an anthropathism and his doctrine of the justice of God.

## The Love of God

Thieme distinguishes between two uses of the term *love* with regard to God. First, there is the love that "belongs to the Being of God," designated level. Second, there is the love of God for His creatures, designated love<sub>2</sub>, which Thieme concludes is an anthropathism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "The Doctrine of Divine Essence," unpublished notes, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 25-24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 22,23.

Since the Scriptures say "God is love," (I John 4:8), and God is immutable, it should be concluded that He has always loved, long before there existed objects of His love outside of His own person. This love was directed toward God Himself, in particular His own integrity (or holiness), the only object worthy of God's love. This is love<sub>1</sub>, and it is beyond human comprehension. This love contains no emotion and no deception, and needs no object outside of itself.<sup>32</sup>

Love<sub>2</sub>, on the other hand, is an anthropopathism. "Human love is often ascribed to God . . . as an anthropopathism to account for divine motivation in human terms that we can understand."<sup>33</sup> Using the Hebraism of love and hate<sup>34</sup> as a starting place, Thieme argues that if hate is an anthropopathism, so also is love. He concludes that passages referring to the nature of God as being love are true descriptions, but that passages describing God's love for man, especially sinful man, are anthropopathisms.<sup>35</sup> In so doing he has attempted to solve the problem of God's immutable love being expressed toward unworthy sinners at one point (in sending Christ to die for the world), and at another point His wrath being expressed toward unworthy, Christ-rejecting sinners. He sees the love of God for men (Love<sub>2</sub>) as anthropopathic for God's saving work toward men. As such it involves the imputation of God's righteousness to men so that God's love for His own integrity can be directed to justified men.

One major ramification of this approach is that love is not the point of contact between God and man -- justice is. God does not provide blessings for men because of love; rather it is because of His justice, since God's love can only be directed toward His own integrity.<sup>36</sup>

## **The Justice of God**

Based upon Paul's emphasis on justice in Romans, Thieme sees the justice of God as the predominant attribute in God's dealings with man. "In Himself, God's spirituality or personality is supreme, but in relationship to man, integrity (righteousness and justice) is supreme,"<sup>37</sup> both in salvation and in blessing in the Christian life. "All direct blessing from God comes from His justice."<sup>38</sup> The "whole principle" is summarized in the statement that "God only deals with creatures on a basis of justice." "Love" according to Thieme can be described as the "motivator, but justice is the functioner." However, love is only a part of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Malachi 1: 2, 3 says that God hated Esau and loved Jacob.

<sup>35</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Thieme, "Essence," p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

God's entire motivation; "the whole integrity of God is the motivation."<sup>39</sup>

The implications of this view of God's dealings with men are pressed by Thieme in his current teachings on the Christian life. Thieme claims that God's justice demands an appropriate target for God's blessings. Then he concludes that the believer is an appropriate target since he has "adjusted" to God's justice by faith. Salvation blessings are given to him by God because God's justice can and does bless God's righteousness, and the believer shares the absolute righteousness of the perfect God-man, Christ, by virtue of his position in Christ.<sup>40</sup>

Thieme also concludes that God's justice requires a proper target for His blessings directed toward the believer in the Christian life. This involves two more adjustments to the justice of God. First, the believer needs to "adjust" to God's justice by confession of sin, allowing Christ's finished work to satisfy the just demands of God relative to his daily sins. The cleansed believer is then a proper target for God's blessings.<sup>41</sup>

Second, there is the maturity adjustment to God's justice which provides greater blessings in life. "When we crack the maturity barrier<sup>42</sup> ... we have capacity for blessings, and ... the justice of God is then complete and totally free to provide all categories of blessing for us."<sup>43</sup>

Thieme also teaches that "only blessings in time from the justice of God glorify God." Thus, he sees only three ways to glorify God: accept Christ as savior; confess one's sins; and grow spiritually through the intake of Bible doctrine. Furthermore, he says, "The greatest false system accepted today by fundies is that their production is glorifying God . . ." Production doesn't glorify God, "only blessing that flows from God's justice to his imputed righteousness."<sup>44</sup>

## Critique

Thieme's basic methodology of communicating God's essence is commendable and very helpful to the beginning Bible student.

The structure of his more recent analysis, however, at times is somewhat difficult to follow. For example, he includes personality under the category of God's spirituality, which does not seem appropriate. The content of this recent analysis, nevertheless, does contain a number of very helpful observations. For

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Cracking the maturity barrier" is Thieme's teaching terminology for moving from spiritual childhood to spiritual adulthood.

<sup>43</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>44</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Rom. 5:16 Keys (Cont.) 2nd Func./Justice/God; Basis for a Fortiori," *Romans*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 12 July 1977.

example, he observes that God's infinity is "intensive rather than extensive, that is, God is not to be thought of as merely extending infinitely beyond time and space, but as possessing within Himself infinite resources."<sup>45</sup>

Thieme's analysis of God's love is interesting, but it raises some serious questions. First, Thieme assumes that the biblical revelation concerning God's love for sinners (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8) is only a description of the "divine motivation in human terms that we can understand." For him, the term *love* in the Bible, when used with reference to God, is not attributing love to God, but is an anthropopathism for God's divine motivation. Is this not a presumptuous attempt to do a better job of describing the divine motivation than God Himself has done through His revelation?

Second, if we cannot take God's descriptions of His own attributes and attitudes at face value, how can we know what God is like unless we turn to extra biblical logic and surmising? Furthermore, is it valid to speak of divine anthropopathisms at all? Although anthropomorphisms can be shown to occur in the Scriptures (since God is spirit and man is physical), the existence of anthropopathisms is open to question, for both God and man are personalities<sup>46</sup> and thus similar in the areas of thinking, feeling, and willing.

Therefore, Thieme's view, that God's love for man is an anthropopathism, is at best a speculative possibility, and therefore improper for the development of sound doctrine based upon the Scriptures.<sup>47</sup>

It should also be noted that the exegetical basis for Thieme's anthropopathic love in Malachi I is no more than a Hebraism for placing one party above another in one's choice. As such the terminology of *love* and *hate* are used in the New Testament to describe the believer's attitude toward his family and Christ (Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26). Therefore, it does not provide a textual basis for anthropopathic love.

Thieme's teaching on the justice of God also raises some important questions. Thieme rightly observes that God's loving salvation provisions for man cannot be given to him without the justice of God being satisfied<sup>48</sup> However, must it be concluded that God's love for man was not involved prior to the cross? The New Testament clearly states that God loved the world (John 3:16), and God loved the sinner (Rom. 5:8), before the cross.

Also, does not the teaching, that the mature will receive more blessings from the justice of God, imply that some men deserve God's blessings based

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<sup>45</sup> Thieme, "Essence," p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> The obvious significance of the term "image of God."

<sup>47</sup> It should be observed also that Thieme's basis for his view of divine love does not rest upon any change whatsoever in the Greek vocabulary choice of the biblical writers. It is purely a deduction rooted in his own system and a speculation pressed far beyond the biblical evidence.

<sup>48</sup> Thieme's basic teaching is similar to Chafer's at this point. Chafer taught that God could not directly forgive sin; His grace had to first supply a substitute expiation to satisfy the just demands of God's character.

upon human work -- the work of taking in Bible doctrine in the discipline of the local church under the teaching of a pastor-teacher? Is this not contrary to the biblical emphasis on grace?<sup>49</sup>

Thieme has raised some profound issues relative to the nature of God, and at times appears to be moving toward some significant theological contributions. However, some serious theological and exegetical questions remain unanswered with regard to his conclusions.

## **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN VOLITION**

The views of theologians for centuries have conflicted over doctrines relating to divine sovereignty and human volition. The Augustinians and Calvinists have leaned heavily upon the biblical descriptions of the omnipotent God and of depraved man, while Pelagians, semi-Pelagians and Arminians have championed the biblical demands on the responsible choices of men and the scriptural portrayal of the justice of God. Thieme has rejected both Calvinism and Arminianism, and he has developed an approach to these issues that is an attempt at balance, giving proper place to both God's character and man's volition.

### **The Relationship Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Volition**

The first characteristic of God that Thieme describes in his portrayal of divine essence is His sovereignty:

God is, first of all, sovereign,- that is, God has supreme volition. His volition has always existed, and there is no higher volition in the universe. As Sovereign, God is the Supreme Being of the universe: "Know therefore . . . the Lord He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Deut. 4:39; cf. I Sam. 2:6-8; 1 Chron. 29:11; 2 Chron. 20:6; Psa. 83:18; Isa. 45:5,6; Acts 17:24).<sup>50</sup>

For Thieme, God's absolute authority and power are never in question; nor does he detract in any way from man's total dependence on God and His sovereignty expressed grace.

On the other hand, Thieme is careful to recognize man's personality, in particular his volition:

In harmony with His sovereign decree that man be allowed freedom of choice, God will never use His absolute will to coerce the volition which He gave man (John 7:17). God honors your decisions, whether they are for or against Him.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> A further treatment of this issue may be found in Chapter IV.

<sup>50</sup> Thieme, *Essence* p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

## Related Doctrines

Four terms are prominent in the issues of sovereignty and volition: divine decrees, election, predestination and foreknowledge. A brief statement of Thieme's view on each of these is a helpful perspective toward his theological stance.

*Divine decrees.* Thieme defines *divine decrees* as "the sum total of God's plan designed in eternity past." This "plan was designed eternity past, so as to include ALL EVENTS and ACTIONS (of which our lives are made up) related to their causes and conditions as a part of an indivisible system, every link being a part of the integrity of the whole."<sup>52</sup>

This definition is carefully expanded to include human volition. Thieme claims that the issues between fallen angels and God ("the angelic conflict") demand that God's decree should not interfere with human volition.<sup>53</sup> He sees this also as an explanation for the existence of sin and evil:

The plan of God is consistent with human freedom. God does not limit or coerce human freedom. However, distinction should be made between what God causes (the cross) and what God permits (sin). God created man with free will; He permits human volition to function. This is how Adam sinned. God is not the Author of sin. Man's volition is the source of sin in the human race ....

This demonstrates that man has free will. God never condones or causes sin in the human race. In the perfect environment of innocence, God warned man against sin and its consequences.<sup>54</sup>

*Election and predestination.* Thieme sees election and predestination in terms of "positional truth."<sup>55</sup> In his study of positional truth, Thieme lists "thirty-six things God provides for every believer at the point of salvation."<sup>56</sup> Because the believer is eternally united to Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12: 13; Rom. 6: 14) and has thereby become a new creature<sup>57</sup> in Christ, certain blessings related to the person, work and status of Christ are also his. By virtue of his position in Christ, the believer shares Christ's

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<sup>52</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Greatness of Grace* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971), p. 37.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>55</sup> "Positional truth" is the doctrine of the believer's position in Christ.

<sup>56</sup> This list is a slight modification of Lewis Sperry Chafer's, "Riches of Divine Grace," in his *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (1948): *Soteriology*: 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48), pp. 225-66.

<sup>57</sup> Thieme's term for *new creature* is *new species*.

righteousness and holiness, and he participates in Christ's death, resurrection and present session in heaven. Since Christ is the chosen one (elect one) of God, and His destiny is established, the believer, who is in Christ, shares His election and His destiny.

The point is that God the Father planned a future for Jesus Christ, and Christ was therefore "called" or "elected." Since we are in union with Christ, we share His election; and we were elected "before the foundation of the world." In other words, there never was a time when Christ didn't exist. He lived in eternity past with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. During some period in eternity past, some planning occurred. In that planning Christ was given an eternal destiny; and since it was planned in the past, we call that "election." Since it was designed in the past, we call it "predestination." So we share His election and we share His destiny.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, the believer's "election takes place at the moment of salvation (I Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9)."<sup>59</sup>

*Foreknowledge.* The issue of foreknowledge was the watershed between Calvinistic and Arminian doctrine historically. For that reason, Thieme's teaching concerning foreknowledge has led some to classify him as Arminian or semi-Pelagian, which of course Thieme denies.

The Calvinist interprets foreknowledge so as not to depreciate God's sovereign choice of the elect in eternity past. He makes it another expression of God's choice emphasizing either that knowledge can mean "intimate loving relationship" or that God's knowledge of anything in itself establishes the certainty of it. Thieme, in contradiction to this view, has opted for the natural sense of knowledge in the term, and he takes seriously the Greek *kata* in I Peter 1:2<sup>60</sup> He concludes that God in eternity past foreordained those who would believe in Christ to share Christ's destiny. This foreordination was based upon the foreknowledge of God, which in itself makes nothing certain. Rather God knew in eternity past who would choose to believe in Christ; then He ordained their eternal future in heaven.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *A New Species* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971), pp. 11, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Thieme, *Greatness*, p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> I Peter 1:1b, 2a says "elect according to (*kata*) the foreknowledge of God." <sup>61</sup> Thieme, *Greatness*, pp. 38,39.

<sup>61</sup> Thieme, *Greatness*, p. 38, 39.

## **Implications**

Three major implications of Thieme's view of sovereignty and volition stand out. First, a big view of a sovereign God is foundational to the walk of faith dependent upon God's grace. Second, one's spiritual life is impossible without God's working, and it is also dependent upon the believer's response to God and His Word. Third, because Thieme sees man as having a free volition, he teaches quite strongly the importance of political freedom and personal privacy.

## **Critique**

For those with either tight Calvinistic or Arminian positions, Thieme's system is unacceptable. Nevertheless, he has attempted to honestly deal with the scriptural evidence and to keep a balance between sovereignty and volition that recognizes the place of both.

Thieme's view of foreknowledge has merit, but at this point he seems to have overstated the implications of the scriptural evidence. Divine foreknowledge of everything that will take place, including who will accept Christ and who will not, does not necessarily mean that God's choice is based upon a particular action he knows about -- i.e. an individual's choice of Christ as savior. This may be the case, but Scripture never says God chooses those He knows will choose Him.<sup>62</sup>

Attempts at harmonizing divine sovereignty and human volition often run aground at one place or another in the development of one's system. We should not be surprised to see weaknesses in Thieme's. However, it must be admitted that he has attempted to present divine sovereignty in such a way that God's grace has its proper emphasis, and he has so defined man's volition that human responsibility has its proper emphasis as well.

## ***THE ANGELIC CONFLICT***

A significant doctrinal area overlooked or given a relatively unimportant emphasis by many Bible teachers in angelology. Thieme not only teaches on angels, but he has integrated angelology into his entire doctrinal system.

### **Pre-history Conflict**

The context for much of biblical teaching includes the role of Satan and other fallen angels in their rebellion against God. Thieme teaches that there are two categories of angels, "elect" or "holy" angels and "fallen" or "unsaved" angels. He describes the pre-historic conflict between God and Satan:

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<sup>62</sup> In fact at one point Paul lists several reasons for God's choice of some (I Cor. 1), and their choice of Christ is not one of those reasons.

Prior to history, there was a conflict in heaven among the angels and a division ensued. Angels were originally in a state of innocence, just as man was; then, when Satan fell by exercising negative volition toward God and toward grace, a great portion of the angelic structure chose to go along with him . . . The angels which followed Satan had the opportunity to reverse their decision, and over a period of possibly a million years refused to do so. Therefore, in pre-history we actually have a court held at the end of the period of consolidation.<sup>63</sup>

## **Relationship to Man**

Thieme also maintains that the angels had ample opportunity to choose or reject "whatever means of salvation existed for them" (Neb. 2:2). Then, he teaches God held a trial for the angels and passed a sentence (the lake of fire), but the sentence was not executed.<sup>64</sup> At this point he shows the relationship of man to this angelic conflict with God:

Now, we can immediately infer something from this: if the sentence is pronounced before man was created but not carried out until after man's history is concluded, then man was created by God to resolve something that happened at the end of that trial. The words "diabolos" and "Satan" both tell us what happened because "Satan" and "Devil" are not names for the super angel but titles. His name is Lucifer, Son of the Morning (Isa. 14:12). "Satan" and "Devil" mean "adversary," "accuser" or "attorney" -- someone who goes to court and appeals. Satan appealed the case. So, by putting together certain evidences which occur throughout Scripture, we can begin to see why man was created.<sup>65</sup>

Thieme then concludes, "To resolve the angelic conflict, a creature inferior to angels was created and placed on one planet (Psa. 8:5; Neb. 2:7)." There man's volition was also tested: tested first with regard to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; then tested after sin entered with regard to the cross.<sup>66</sup> Throughout human history man would be observed by the angels to see how uncoerced, human volition would choose. Victory over Satan ultimately relates to Christ's work on the cross, and man's choice to appropriate the cross by faith is critical to man's part in the angelic conflict.<sup>67</sup> Also the believer, though living in

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<sup>63</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Angelic Conflict* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971), pp. 9, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Thieme, *Conflict*, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

the devil's world, can gain more and more freedom from Satan through doctrine. Referring to a learning process (GAP) that will be discussed in a later chapter, Thieme describes the relationship of Bible doctrine to the angelic conflict:

After salvation, the great thrust is knowledge of doctrine, acquired by means of GAP. The more doctrine the believer has in his human spirit and the more doctrine he has in the right lobe of his mentality, the more freedom he possesses in operating independently of Satan. One of the great issues in the Christian life is divine guidance, and the whole basis for knowing the will of God on any particular point, or in general, is Bible doctrine in the right lobe.<sup>68</sup>

### **Questions Answered By the Doctrine of the Angelic Conflict**

The doctrine of the angelic conflict explains a number of major questions that perplex men. First, why does man exist? Thieme says that "mankind exists to resolve the angelic conflict."<sup>69</sup> Second, why does sin exist? Thieme observes that sin did not originate with God, but that it was the result of Satan's "voluntary act involving his free will" to rebel against God.<sup>70</sup>

Third, why does suffering exist? The doctrine of the angelic conflict gives two answers. Man's departure from innocence inevitably led to all kinds of human-caused suffering. Also, "suffering exists to the extent that Satan cannot cope with the problems of the human race."<sup>71</sup>

Fourth, why does the church exist? Thieme sees the church as a major battleground between Christ and Satan, since the church is Christ's body:

But in the Church Age, the believer is the battleground for the angelic conflict, which is now inner, hidden and subtle. Only in the Tribulation will it come out in the open (Rev. 12). To survive in this conflict, we must have training, which comes through knowledge of Bible doctrine.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Thieme also recognizes the broad purpose of man's existence, i.e. to glorify God.

<sup>70</sup> Thieme, *Conflict*, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

## Critique

Thieme's analysis of the relationship of the angels to man can be supported fairly well from Scripture. He may overstate the place the angelic conflict plays,<sup>73</sup> and he tends to force the issue of learning Bible doctrine into the discussion of the conflict with Satan. Nevertheless, his approach is quite helpful and provides a valuable background to the understanding of much of biblical teaching.

## **THE IMMATERIAL PART OF MAN**

Few theologians have attempted to analyze the immaterial part of man to the same extent as R.B. Thieme has. His detailed model forms the backdrop for his entire teaching on the Christian life. His current views of spirituality and spiritual maturity are both explained by and dependent upon his anthropological perspective outlined in this section.

### **Dichotomy vs. Trichotomy**

The debate between those who see the biblical view of man as dichotomous (man has two parts: body and soul *or* spirit) and those who claim that the Bible teaches that man is trichotomous (man has three parts: body, soul *and* spirit) has never been settled to the satisfaction of most Bible teachers. Thieme has offered a third alternative. He claims that Adam was "created with a body, a human soul, and a human spirit (Gen. 2:7)." However, "when he sinned, his human spirit was destroyed (spiritual death), and his human soul acquired an old sin nature." He says flatly that the unbeliever does not have a human spirit; when a man accepts Christ as savior, he becomes trichotomous -- he then receives a human spirit.<sup>74</sup>

Thieme has compiled evidence for this view. First, the unbeliever is called a "soulish" man in I Corinthians 2: 14.<sup>75</sup> Second, it is the soul that is saved in salvation -- "not the body and (definitely not) the spirit. (Cf Psalm 19:7; 34:22; Mark 8: 36, 37; Hebrews 10: 39; 1 Peter 1: 9 ... )." Further support is Jude 19: "These are they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit."

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<sup>73</sup> For example, it is true that the angelic conflict is related to the purpose for man's existence, but it is overstating the case to leave the impression that it was God's only purpose in creating man. God's glory and His good pleasure are at the heart of His purpose (Eph. 1:11, 12), and there are also strong indications that God desired fellowship, with creatures like Himself (Gen. 1-3).

<sup>74</sup> R.B. Thieme, Jr., *The Origin of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1970), p.

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

Thieme interprets the anarthrous pneuma to refer to the, human spirit, instead of the Holy Spirit.<sup>76</sup>

In making these distinctions Thieme defines the human spirit as that part of man that has the "capacity for fellowship with God."<sup>77</sup> In so doing, he draws an additional conclusion: that the "Holy Spirit is the Substitute for the human spirit in comprehension of the Gospel."<sup>78</sup>

## The Essence of the Soul

A model to describe the function of the human soul is needed for any in-depth study of human psychology or spirituality. Thieme calls his model the "essence of the soul." Attempting to expand on the biblical analogies of heart and kidneys (translated "reins" in the authorized version), the medical analysis of the lobes of the brain, and his own analogy of the soul to lungs (or banks), Thieme has developed an elaborate model (see figure 2)<sup>79</sup> of the soul.

In Thieme's earlier teachings he listed six characteristics of the soul: (1) self-consciousness, (2) mentality (made up of the mind or *nous* and the heart or *kardia*), (3) volition, (4) emotion, (5) conscience, and (6) the "old sin nature."<sup>80</sup> Then in 1974 he modified this slightly making conscience a function of the mentality of the soul (specifically a function of the heart-part of the mentality), rather than its being a separate function of the soul. In 1977 a major change was also added. Thieme concluded that, the old sin nature is not a part of the soul, but rather an organic problem; therefore, it is a function of the body.<sup>81</sup>

Thieme further expands the function of these four remaining characteristics of the soul (self-consciousness, mentality, volition, and emotion) by describing the soul in terms of lungs. He concludes that, since man has apertures for the physical lungs and stomach (nose and mouth), God must also have created him with apertures for taking in and responding to God's provisions for the life of the soul. The soul is developed then through the "inhaling" of Bible doctrine (through the apertures of the soul) and the "exhaling" of love toward God, toward one's spouse, and toward friends.<sup>82</sup> In this same context, Thieme also attempts to apply the analogy of a woman's response to her "right man":

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<sup>76</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 41.

<sup>77</sup> Thieme, *Origin*, p. 2.

<sup>78</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 42.

<sup>79</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Emotional Revolt of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Scar Tissue of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Rom. 5:12 Intro. OSN re Genetics; Doc./Imputation Must Have Direction," *Romans*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 29 July 1977.

<sup>82</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Image and Glory of God* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1970), pp. 5, 6.

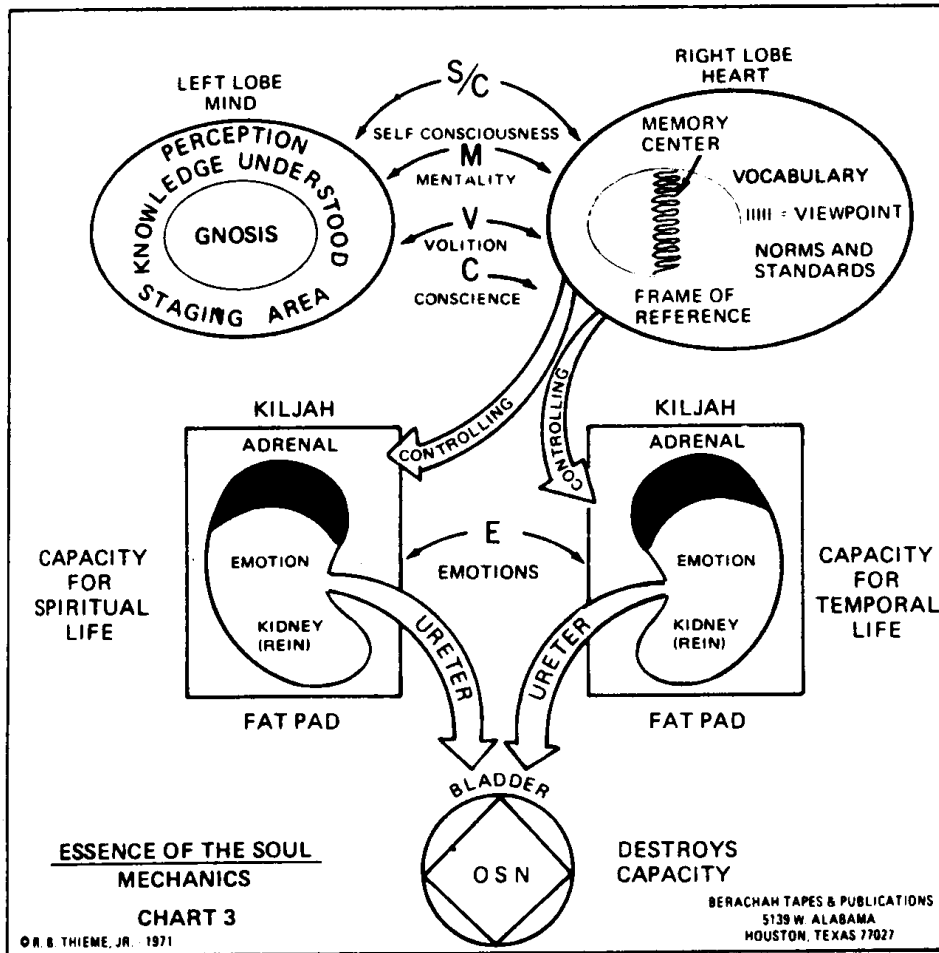


Fig. 2

Figure 2, Essence of the Soul

The word for soul in the Greek (psuche) is a feminine noun. Why? Because the soul is no good until it takes in something from God: this sets up the analogy. In the physical side, man initiates love on the right bank; woman responds to man. The apertures on the right bank of the woman's soul are designed to respond to the right man, just as she has physical apertures for response. The woman was given a body different from the man's because her body was designed to respond, never to initiate. It was specifically designed to respond to the right man.<sup>83</sup>

## The Origin of the Soul

There are two major orthodox views of the origin of the soul: creationism and traducianism. The creationist holds that each human soul is created by God and given to the body of each fetus (either in the womb or at birth). A primary exponent of the creationist view is Charles Hodge.<sup>84</sup> The traducianist, on the other hand, believes that the soul is passed from parents to child through procreation. William Shedd<sup>85</sup> and Lewis Sperry Chafer<sup>86</sup> represent this view.<sup>87</sup> Thieme offers a third alternative which we could designate the "format-soul" view. He says, "Both creationism and traducianism have a point; but the truth lies in between these two theories."<sup>88</sup>

Thieme teaches that one must distinguish between the "format-soul," the "soul-life," and the "soul-essence." By so doing he claims that the biblical evidence answers the question of the origin of the soul. First, the "format-soul" is the developing parts of the soul in the mother's womb. It is primarily the soul's mentality, and it is passed from parent to child and formed along with the body in the womb. The Hebrew word, *nephesh*, refers to the format-soul, before it is given life. It is also used to refer to a living soul after birth.<sup>89</sup>

Second, the "soul-life" is the "spark of life," and it is the Hebrew word *neshamah*. When God gives soul-life, and it contacts "the mentality, there is physical life: that is when the baby cries or takes a breath."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2; 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 70-76.

<sup>85</sup> William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, classic reprint edition, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.) pp. 19-94.

<sup>86</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (1947): *Angelology, Anthropology, Harmartiology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947/48), p. 179. Note that Thieme clearly departs from Chafer's theological position at this point.

<sup>87</sup> Shedd also forcefully argues that Augustine was a traducianist.

<sup>88</sup> Thieme, *Origin*, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Third, the "soul essence" refers to all of the "ingredients" in the soul of a living person. At birth the entire soul-essence is present. The format-soul plus the soul-life produces the soul essence (self-consciousness, volition, emotion, and conscience).

Support for these distinctions is derived from the following evidence: first, Genesis 2:7 indicates that Adam's soul was not a *living* soul until God had "breathed into his nostrils the breath (*neshamah* – soul-life) of lives"<sup>91</sup> (plural)." Thus, it is implied that before Adam was a living soul, he was a non-living soul (i.e. format-soul).<sup>92</sup> Second, Isaiah 57:16b ("the souls which I have made") indicates that God made the soul-life (plural of *neshamah*) of people living in Isaiah's day. This apparently refers to an act of God other than the creation of Adam and beyond the stage of parental procreation.<sup>93</sup> Third, Ezekiel 18:4 ("Behold, all souls (*nephesh*) are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine . . .") implies that the source of the soul's life originates from God, not from one's father.<sup>94</sup> Fourth, in Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Zechariah 12:1 the word spirit (*ruah*) is substituted for *neshamah* and seems to say God gives and takes away soul-life at a point in time.<sup>95</sup> Fifth, Isaiah 42:5 (God ... "who gives breath (*neshamah*) to the people on it (the earth), and spirit to those who walk in it.") shows that people who are already on the earth (after birth) receive *neshamah* (or soul-life).<sup>96</sup> Sixth, Job 33:4 seems to support Thieme's position also; for Elihu says that "the breath (*neshamah*) of the Almighty gives me life."<sup>97</sup>

Thieme then attempts to explain the problems for his position which are raised by specific passages. Luke 1:15 says that John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit even from his mother's womb. Thieme explains that *from* is the Greek *ek* and it never means "in," rather it means "out from." Luke 1:41, 44 indicates that the fetus of John leaped in the womb of Elizabeth when she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thieme points out that Elizabeth was the one who was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he says that the fetus "leaped as a result of reflex motility, which was precipitated by the intensity of the operation of the cardiovascular system" of Elizabeth. References to Job's desire to have died at birth (Job 3:11, 10:1, 18) are explained as his wishing to have died after he was born since the term *from the womb* is used.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Thieme claims that *lives* indicates the giving of both soul and spirit to Adam.

<sup>92</sup> Thieme, *Origin*, pp. 8,9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29.

In summary, Thieme sees the origin of the soul in two parts. The format-soul (or mentality) is passed from parents to child along with the body and sin nature. He sees the physical life becoming a reality, however, when God gives the soul breath (*neshamah*, or soul-life) and the entire essence of the soul is complete.

### **The Mentality of the Soul**

Thieme relates the soul's mentality to the parts (or lobes) of the brain. He locates mentality in the frontal lobe, and distinguishes between the right side and the left side of the frontal lobe. The left lobe is called *nous* in the Greek and is translated "mind." It is "the perceptive lobe," and it "is a staging area from which, for believers, doctrinal information is transferred to the human spirit and then to the right lobe."<sup>99</sup>

The right lobe is the *kardia* ("heart") and the *noema* ("understanding or thought") in the Greek, according to Thieme. The Scriptures also use *heart* in the Old Testament, to refer to man's thinking (Prov. 23:7). Thieme concludes that *lev*, ("heart") refers to the "divinely designated authority of the soul vested in the heart or right lobe of the mentality of the soul." This right lobe, furthermore, Thieme says, can be analyzed into "four areas: a frame of reference with a memory center; a vocabulary; norms and standards called the 'conscience;' and viewpoint."<sup>100</sup>

This careful distinction between the parts of the mentality is used by Thieme to explain the phenomenon of a person's learning doctrine and yet his life not being changed by it. Such a person has not transferred doctrinal content from the left lobe to the right lobe.<sup>101</sup> This process will be explained and evaluate later, in the chapter on spiritual maturity.

### **The Emotion of the Soul**

Since one of the scriptural emblems for emotion is the kidneys (*kelayoth*, translated *reins* in the authorized version), Thieme's analysis of the human emotions is related to the parts of the physical kidneys.

Most dictionaries and lexicons will define "reins" as the "kidneys." But the word "kiljah" means more than just the kidneys. Every normal person has two kidneys, and on top of each kidney is an adrenal gland. Adrenal glands secrete at least two hormones, one of which is adrenaline. This is an emotional hormone, used to stimulate you for "fright, fight and flight." The whole system is protected by a fat pad, which

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<sup>99</sup> Thieme, *Emotional Revolt*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>101</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 7.

surrounds the kidneys and the adrenals. So "kiljah" actually refers to the fat pad; but by analogy it refers to the emotions. There is a very close relationship between the physiological functions of the glands in the fat pads and the emotions of the soul.<sup>102</sup>

The relationship of the emotions to the rest of the soul is that of being a responder. Thieme bases this on the fact that *kiljah*<sup>103</sup> is in the feminine gender, and "anything that is feminine is designed to be a responder."<sup>104</sup> The emotions (*kiljah*) can either respond to the right lobe (or heart), or it can react to the old sin nature. Here Thieme presses the kidney symbolism. He calls the connection between the emotions (kidneys) and the old sin nature (bladder) the "ureter." If the old sin nature (bladder) "backs up into the kidneys, there is trouble."<sup>105</sup>

Thieme also presses the plural of kidneys to conclude that man has a left kidney and a right kidney of the soul. His left rein (or kidney), "through response to doctrine in the right lobe, gives the believer capacity for spiritual life." The right rein (or kidney) is the "capacity for temporal life and responds to human phenomena."<sup>106</sup>

This analytical description of the soul's emotions may appear to be a useless exercise in psychological and philological speculations. However, for Thieme, such an analysis is an important adjunct to his heavy emphasis on the subordinate role of one's emotions. Also spiritual growth, as discussed in Chapter IV, is hindered by what Thieme calls the "emotional revolt of the soul."

## Critique

Such an approach to the description of the immaterial part of man as Thieme communicates is certainly unique, and for the uninitiated it seems almost incredible. Even for many long-standing students, his analysis is difficult to accept; and the serious Bible student is forced to raise some critical exegetical questions concerning certain of his conclusions.

We shall first examine his view that the non-believer has no human spirit.<sup>107</sup> A primary text used by Thieme to support this thesis is Jude 19. In this passage false teachers are described as "*psuchikoi pneuma me echontes*." The absence of the article with *pneuma* appears to rule out the translation, "Holy Spirit," thus

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

<sup>103</sup> Thieme refers to the Hebrew Kelayoth as Kiljah, the German transliteration of the Hebrew singular. To simplify we will also use the term *kiljah*.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> This question is not extremely crucial, but it does relate to one's overall psychological model.

leaving one with the apparent alternative that *pneuma* refers to the human spirit. If this is the proper meaning of *pneuma*, it would seem appropriate to conclude that the soulish person does not have a human spirit. However, such an interpretation is foreign to the thrust of this portion of Jude. Jude is not dissecting the constitution of the unbeliever's personality. He is rather describing the state in which the false teachers function. Jude is saying that they are "psychic, not spiritual;" that is, that they live without the dimension of the spirit.<sup>108</sup>

Another major argument for Thieme's view relates to the apparent support found in Paul's distinction between the soulish man and spiritual man in I Corinthians 2. However, it should be observed that in I Corinthians 2:11, Paul speaks of the spirit of *man* (not just the believer) as knowing what is in man. Also a number of biblical passages ascribe a spirit to unbelievers. In the Old Testament, frequently the biblical writers would speak of the spirit (*ruah*) in unbelievers: I Chronicles 5:26; 2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1: 1, 5; Job 32:8; Ezekiel 13:3; Zechariah 12: 1; etc.

Furthermore, Thieme's own doctrine concerning Christ's death appears to contradict the view of the unbeliever's lack of human spirit. Since Christ's atoning work required a death like that of Adam's, Christ had to also die spiritually. If spiritual death means the absence of the human spirit, then Christ lost His human spirit while on the cross and became less than complete humanity, and therefore became an improper substitute for man.

A view more in keeping with the biblical evidence is that spiritual death should be defined in terms of separation. The spirit of man, while spiritually dead, is separated from God and, therefore, without the characteristics supplied by the holy life of God: i.e. fellowship with God, divine perspective, etc. Such a definition of spiritual death parallels that of physical death (i.e. separation of the soul from the body).

Second, it should be observed that Thieme's general analysis of the parts or the functions of the soul is not extremely different from the teaching of most Bible teachers. The soul is the human personality, and it obviously has self-consciousness. Also, its description is usually in terms of mind, emotions and will. Furthermore, his recent alteration of his view of the sin nature (i.e. that it is not an integral part of the fallen soul; but that it is to be identified with the body), is not a radical departure from the teachings of other expositors.<sup>109</sup>

Third, although his attempt at harmonizing the biblical evidence marshalled by both the traducianists and the creationists are interesting and worthy of serious consideration, Thieme's approach fails to emphasize clearly the biblical

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<sup>108</sup> Charles A. Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 339.

<sup>109</sup> Lenski, for example, observes that the body is where sin dwells. R.C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 402.

view of the fetus. He has rightly observed the close connection between physical life and breathing in the Scriptures. The Old Testament use of *neshamah*<sup>110</sup> does seem to support the conclusion that full life accompanies breathing. Thieme's basic position concerning the origin of the soul, then, is a likely one. However, in trying to defend his position, he leaves an impression that could be interpreted that he sanctions abortion. One former member of Berachah Church states, "I know of a couple that got an abortion simply because they thought they were emotionally insecure and couldn't raise a child...because they applied Thieme's doctrine of the origin of the soul."<sup>111</sup> Thieme, however, is quick to deny that he teaches that abortion is all right: "I never advocate abortion. All I do is give the doctrinal principles involved, but I never advocate abortion."<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless, neither does he teach that abortion is wrong, and those desiring justification for an abortion can readily deduce that Thieme's doctrine sanctions abortion.

The question of abortion is a serious one, and it is one concerning which a teacher should not leave doubt as to what he sanctions. Thieme would be wise, therefore, to teach the divine viewpoint toward the fetus whenever he teaches on the origin of the soul lest his teaching be used to justify abortions. The importance of the fetus and its being a person formed by God (though not independently alive yet) is taught in Psalm 139:13-16; also God's dealing with the fetus in the womb of Elizabeth (Luke 1:15)<sup>113</sup> emphasizes the special place of the fetus in God's eyes.

Fourth, Thieme's detailed analysis of the mentality and emotions of the soul is questionable, and his hasty application of his categorical definition to biblical terminology produces an extremely unreliable exegesis. His immediate inclination is to categorize the term, *nous*, as the left lobe and the terms, *kardia* and *noema*, as the right lobe of the soul's mentality. He has made a bold effort to develop tight doctrinal categories for the biblical terminology. However, as much as one would hope for such a clear categorical arrangement, Thieme has failed to accomplish his objective. First, the word *nous* (mind) means more than the soul's perceptive, functions, (left lobe). It is the *nous* of man that Paul says

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<sup>110</sup> See Isaiah 2:22;42:5;57:16;Job 33:4 and Genesis 2:7.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Alice Blickle, Houston, Texas 13 October 1977.

<sup>112</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>113</sup> Thieme's interpretation of Luke 1:15 is that the fetus of John was not alive and that it was not filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather, he claims that the verse means that John was filled as he was coming out of the womb of Elizabeth, since the preposition used is *ek*, which means "out from" (*eti ek koilias*). This interpretation is impossible, however, because it demands that *ek* be taken spatially, while the thrust of the passage is clearly temporal, i.e. the filling was from the time of the womb onward. The spatial versus the temporal use of *ek* can be seen in an illustration. A man is said to be a great speaker even from (*ek*) speech class. We do not consider that he started being a great speaker during the time that he spatially walked out of the class. Rather we mean that he was already a great speaker from the time that he was in the classroom onward. This temporal use of *ek* is exactly what Luke is saying in Luke 1:15.

serves God and can be renewed (Romans 7:25; 12:2), and thus is similar to Thieme's description of the right lobe (or heart).<sup>114</sup> Second, the Old Testament word for heart (*lev*) cannot be defined nearly so precisely as Thieme's system does. For example, *lev* (heart) is used beside the word *nephesh* (soul) in Deuteronomy 6:5, and here it is clearly not viewed as a distinct part of the soul. Furthermore the emotions are repeatedly included as a part of the *lev* heart<sup>115</sup> in 1 Samuel 2: 1 ; 4:13; Job 33:21 ; and Psalm 147:3, and Thieme's right lobe (heart or *lev*) does not include emotions.

Thieme's observation that the *kiljah* (kidneys or reins) normally refers to the emotions is a helpful one. However, with his ureter and bladder references he has pressed the analogy to the absurd. This poor methodology is also reflected in his exegesis of the feminine ending on the word *kiljah* (kidneys). Thieme's teaching that the feminine gender of a Semitic word makes the object referred to female and thus a responder manifests an extremely suspect exegetical methodology<sup>116</sup> and it makes one feel the need to question Thieme's authoritative exegesis at almost every point.

## **SIN AND EVIL**

Thieme's hamartiological categories include three major areas: sin, human good, and evil. The distinctive of his teachings of this area relate to the distinctions between sin and evil and between sin and human good.

### **Definition of Sin**

Thieme acknowledges three major categories of sin, by which he answers the question, what is sin? First, there is the sin committed by Adam, which is imputed to all men. Second, there is a sin nature among men inherited from Adam... Third, there is the personal sin committed by individuals. Personal sin is described in terms then of six synonyms: "missing the mark," "transgression -- rebellion against or overstepping the Law," "trespass -- self-will over God's will," "falling aside," "lawless -- failure in relation to the Mosaic Law," and "unbelief ... the only unpardonable sin."<sup>117</sup>

Thieme's teaching on the old sin nature has been modified in recent teaching. To clarify these now developments, Thieme has written a summary statement of his current position:

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<sup>114</sup> In his dissertation S. Lewis Johnson concludes that in Romans the *nous* of man "the faculty of reflective thought and moral judgment." S. Lewis Johnson, "A Survey of Biblical Psychology in the Epistle to the Romans" (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1949), p. 187. This is much more than Thieme's "perceptive lobe."

<sup>115</sup> Johnson, "Psychology in Romans," pp.110.11.

<sup>116</sup> If grammatical gender is equivalent to sex and thus carries with it the idea of being a female responder, then one must conclude that all of the following Hebrew feminines demand that the objects being described have female characteristics and are responders, not initiators; *perudoth* (gain), *terumah* (contribution), *rachuv* (broad open place, plaza), *chazoth* (vision), *yad* (hand), etc. Female objects normally use a feminine gender, but feminine gender does not necessitate female qualities.

<sup>117</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Slave Market of Sin* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1974), p.9

The old sin nature is the source of human sin, good and evil. Genetically formed, it originated as a direct result of Adam's first sin, and resides in the cell structure of the human body (Rom. 6:6; 7:15, 18). While both male and female are carriers, the sin nature is transmitted only through the twenty-three chromosomes in the male sperm that fertilizes the female ovum (Gen. 5:3). At the physical birth of every individual, Adam's original sin is imputed to the old sin nature (Rom. 5: 12), resulting in both spiritual death and the sovereignty of the sin nature over human life (Rom. 6:12).<sup>118</sup>

## Doctrine of Human Good and Divine Good

*Evidence for the satanic nature of human good.* Thieme quotes a section Chafer's *Systematic Theology*<sup>119</sup> to demonstrate that human good is accepted by theologians to be a satanic concept. Expanding upon Chafer's perspective, Thieme refers to a number of biblical teachings concerning human works. He claims that the "dead works" in Hebrews 6:1 and the "wood, hay, and stubble" in 1 Corinthians 3 are descriptions of human good. Also the judgment of man's work in the flesh (Rom. 8) is a judgment of human good. Isaiah 64:6 describes the righteous deeds of the Jews as "filthy rags," and Revelation 20: 12-15 indicates that man will be sent to hell for his works, not his Sin.<sup>120</sup>

*The relation of human good to sin.* Thieme sees the sin nature of man as producing actions and attitudes contrary to God's truth in two directions. First, he sees the sin nature in terms of its area of weakness (Heb. 12: 1), and that which is produced from this part of the sin nature is called sins (plural). The area of strength (Isa. 64:6) in the sin nature produces human good. Therefore, although, both sin and human good are produced by the sin nature, there is a distinction between sin and human good. Acknowledging that both human good and sin are "obnoxious' and objectionable" to God, Thieme then proceeds to clarify the distinction between human good and sin: "Human good does involve a moral issue." Such things as witnessing, worshipping, and prayer are not sinful or immoral. However, they are obnoxious to God when they are accomplished in the energy of the flesh. Actions and thoughts, therefore, that are accomplished in the energy of the flesh, even though they are good from a human viewpoint, do not measured up to God's standards of divine good, thus, the, category of human good.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "The Old Sin Nature," unpublished notes, 1977.

<sup>119</sup> Chafer, *Theology*, vol. 2, p. 100.

<sup>120</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Divine Good vs. Human Good* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1970), pp. 17-21.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34,35.

*The relation of human good to the work of Christ.* A distinctive feature of Thieme's soteriology is his teaching that the human good of man was not covered by the expiation of Christ on the cross. Thieme says that Christ died for the sins of the world, but not for human good. Rather, he claims, Christ "rejected" human good. The result of this rejection of human good by Christ is that at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20) sin will not be an issue. Rather, human good ("works") will be the basis for God's eternal damnation of the unbeliever. When a person accepts Christ as savior, he is identified with Christ in his death on the cross, and he is therefore identified with Christ's rejection of human good. Thus, the believer has his sins expiated for and his human good rejected by faith in Christ.<sup>122</sup>

*The relation of human good to morality.* To teach that human good is obnoxious to God appears to discourage the general morality in the world. However, Thieme is quick to indicate the importance of maintaining morality in society. He distinguishes between morality and human-good. Morality is a byproduct of Christianity, "although it has no spiritual dynamics." He says that, morality is absolutely essential for the orderly function of the human race under the Divine Institutions (volition, marriage, family, nationalism). He concludes that the unbeliever is capable of being moral, but he cannot produce divine good, that is, actions and thoughts that are acceptable to God.<sup>123</sup>

*Producing divine good.* Thieme expresses the importance of understanding the difference between human good and divine good: "One of the greatest tragedies of the Christian life is that, as believers, we are so often doing things which we think are divine good, and should be divine good, but our ignorance or our deliberate carnality (as the case may be) is rendering them only human good." Such actions as giving money, church attendance, and praying can either be human good or divine good. The issue is not "what you do, but who controls ... you when you do it." Thieme admits that God may use our human good, but it is "not rewardable."<sup>124</sup>

Thieme sees three sources for the production of divine good. First, it is produced by the filling of the Spirit; second, it is produced as the believer exhales doctrine from the human spirit; and third, it is produced directly from the edification complex of the soul. All three of these sources will be discussed more fully in later chapters. At this point, we can summarize the practical outworking of these three sources, however. Divine good is produced when a believer has no unconfessed sins (filled by the Spirit); when he applies Bible doctrine in his attitude and actions (inhale of doctrine); and when he responds to the situations

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.,pp. 18-22.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.,pp. 40,41.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.,pp. 26, 27.

in life from his matured character that was produced by the intake of Bible doctrine (edification complex of the soul, which includes grace orientation, relaxed mental attitude, inner-happiness, capacity to love, and the mastery of the details of life).<sup>125</sup>

## **Doctrine of Evil**

*Definition.* Thieme defines evil as the modus operandi of Satan, as the ruler of this world. He also refers to evil as the "policy" of Satan and the "genius" of Satan. It includes not only sin but a great deal more than sin.<sup>126</sup> Just as grace and doctrine represent the genius of God to the human race, evil represents Satan's genius in relationship to the human race. Basically evil is the distortion of doctrine, in general and the doctrine of establishment<sup>127</sup> in particular.<sup>128</sup> It is a type of thinking more than specific acts, and it involves every attempt to solve the problems of life apart from God's grace and Bible doctrine. Since God has provided the laws of divine establishment for the maintenance of human freedom, any program that interferes with human freedom is evil.<sup>129</sup>

*The relationship of evil to sin.* Thieme maintains that generally evil and sin are erroneously considered to be the same thing. Evil includes sin, but not all evil is sin. Sin is the result of Satan's inability to make his policy of evil work. Both are the product of Satan; however, sin (along with human good) is produced by the sin nature, and evil proceeds from the "heart" or "right lobe."<sup>130</sup>

The distinction between sin and evil becomes more pronounced in Thieme's teaching when seen in relation to the work of Christ. Sin was judged at the cross; however, evil is a problem which the believer must continually face in his spiritual warfare during this age.<sup>131</sup>

*Elements included in evil.* Since Thieme defines evil as any part of Satan's program which distorts doctrine (especially the doctrine of establishment and freedom and the doctrine of grace), Thieme is able to characterize a host of religious, political, and social programs as evil. He claims that evil comes in the following forms: religion, legalism, socialism, welfare, political internationalism, religion's practice of brotherly love, attempts to abolish human problems apart

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. pp. 30,31.

<sup>126</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "II Samuel 7:13, Doctrine of Evil," *David*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 27 January 1975.

<sup>127</sup> The doctrine of establishment will be discussed under Thieme's doctrine of history.

<sup>128</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "I Timothy 1:18, Doctrine of Evil-introduction," *I Timothy*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 23 March 1975.

<sup>129</sup> Thieme tape, "II Samuel 7:13."

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Thieme tape, "I Timothy 1:18."

from doctrine and establishment (such as passing laws to help solve social problems), social security, government abuse of power, government interference with industry and free enterprise, governmental policy of curtailing the military, gun legislation, catering to minorities, communism, social action, humanitarianism,, altruism, denominations, and "Christian organizations promoting spiritual growth apart from the local church" such as Campus Crusade for Christ.<sup>132</sup>

*Evidence for Thieme's position.* To support his conclusions concerning evil in the Scriptures, Thieme lists three major terms in the Old Testament and three major terms in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, Hebrew terms that refer to evil as Thieme defines it are: *ra*, *aven*, and *beliyyaal*. The Greek words meaning evil are *kakos*, *poneros*, and *phaulos*. He claims that the basic meaning of these words is different from the Hebrew and Greek words for sin; then he examines the passages where these terms are used and concludes that frequently these terms describe that which Thieme defines as evil.<sup>133</sup>

*Exegetical implications.* With his governing interpretation of the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words for evil, Thieme draws the following conclusions. The super-grace believer (mature believer) is protected from evil (Psa. 21:11; Prov. 12:12; Prov. 12:20, 21; Psa. 23:4; Gen. 50:20; Gen. 48:16; Psa. 37:16 - 19). Negative volition toward Bible doctrine causes the believer to be changed by evil (Prov. 5:13, 14). Doctrine is the neutralizer of evil (Psa. 54:5 ; Rom. 12:21). Evil distorts grace (Psa. 38:19, 20; Psa. 52: 1; I Cor. 15:33). Evil distorts establishment as well as grace (Psa. 50:16-21). The reversionist<sup>134</sup> is always influenced by evil (Psa. 36:14). Conspiracy and revolution are evil (Psa. 64:4,5). Evil seeks to build happiness on someone else's unhappiness (Psa. 35:12). The laws of divine establishment protect the believer and the human race from evil (Rom. 13:3,4). Too much evil in a nation destroys that nation (Isa. 47: 10,11). Since Jeremiah 28:8 lists evil along with war and disease, Thieme concludes that warfare and disease are not evil, though there may be evil in warfare and disease. Warfare may be the means God uses to maintain nationalism and freedom.<sup>135</sup>

Thieme also draws some conclusions concerning the meaning of certain passages where the biblical words for evil are used. He claims that Micah 1:12 teaches that socialism (a form of evil) was mistaken for good in the northern kingdom of Israel and was pursued with great sincerity, but resulted in national destruction. He claims that Nahum 1:11 teaches that evil national leadership is

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid. (See also tape on II Samuel 7:13.)

<sup>133</sup> Thieme tape, "II Samuel 7:13."

<sup>134</sup> The word *reversionist* is Thieme's term for a backslider, who turns negative toward Bible doctrine.

<sup>135</sup> Thieme tape, "II Samuel 7:13."

opposed to God.<sup>136</sup> He also interprets passages like Luke 11:13<sup>137</sup> to teach that evil is equivalent to altruism (i.e. unselfish interest in the welfare of others).

## Critique

Thieme has attempted to carefully define and analyze the biblical terminology in the field of hamartiology. It should be admitted that such analysis is important to the Christian's stability in Satan's world and to his true production in the Christian life. However, Thieme's method of categorizing sin, evil and human good fails to represent consistently the biblical evidence. First, Romans 14:23 indicates that everything that is outside of a faith relationship with God is sin. This, it appears, would include evil and human good under the category of sin. This is also supported by I John 5:17, where sin (*hamartia*) is equated with unrighteousness (*adikia*). Furthermore, I John 3:8 teaches that the devil's program, which Thieme equates with evil, can be described as sin in its entirety.

One could agree that the biblical terms for evil carry a different connotation than the biblical terms for sin; however, Thieme's distinctions miss the primary definitions of the terms. The meaning in normal usage of the terms for evil (*kakia* and *poneros*) seems to emphasize that which is harmful, often causing suffering and disaster.<sup>138</sup> The connotation of sin, on the other hand, emphasizes the state or act of disobedience to the will of God, and it is used as "the most comprehensive term for moral obliquity."<sup>139</sup> It is possible, therefore, to conceive of Satan's strategy as being evil in its various forms, but it is wrong to equate the term evil solely with Satan's strategy, and sin should be seen as the more inclusive of the terms.<sup>140</sup>

When he takes his distinctions between sin, evil and human good and applies them to the work of Christ on the cross and to divine judgment, Thieme comes up with a unique and highly questionable interpretation of Christ's saving work. He claims that sin was paid for on the cross, and thus it is not an issue anymore

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts ..."

<sup>138</sup> W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 4 vols. (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940), vol. 2, p. 50, 1. Vine mentions two basic classes of meaning for *kakia* "(a) wickedness, depravity, malignity" in Acts 8:22; Romans 1:29, James 1:21, and "(b) the evil of trouble, affliction" in Matt. 6:34. He also observes that *poneros* is "akin to *ponos*, labour, toil" and "denotes evil that causes labour, pain sorrow, malignant evil."

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., vol. 4, p. 32.

<sup>140</sup> Another aspect of Thieme's teaching in this area is the source of human good and of evil. His conclusion that human good proceeds from the sin nature apparently is valid. However, it is difficult to conceive of such a sharp distinction between sin and evil so that evil is seen as proceeding from a part of man outside of his sin nature, as Thieme suggests. If this were the case, it is conceivable that Adam could have produced evil plans promoted by Satan, and he possibly could have acted upon them, without sinning.

with regard to salvation; that evil is related to the satanic plan and will be judged by Christ when he judges Satan; and that human good will be the basis for judgment at the great white throne judgment at the end of the millennium. For those who have not accepted Christ as Savior, there will be a judgment which will result in hell; however, since Christ has already paid for the sins of the world (including the sins of the unbeliever), the unbeliever cannot be judged for his sins at the great white throne judgment. He will be judged at that time for his good works which stood between him and his acceptance of Christ. Thieme's basis for these conclusions seems rather weak. He claims that since the judgment in Revelation 20 says nothing about sins and refers to judgment according to works, the passage must be referring to good works. A view which is more consistent with the broad biblical view of sin (as in Rom. 14:23) is that Christ's death on the cross expiated for all sin (including evil in man and man's good works). This expiation is supplied potentially for all men, who must choose between Christ as their substitute or their works (good, evil or sinful in the eyes of men, but categorized as sin in the eyes of God).

A significant problem involved in Thieme's teaching on evil is his exegetical approach to the Hebrew and Greek words for evil. For example, Thieme stretches the point to call "evil" in Genesis 15:20 "satanic policy." In this case "evil" clearly carries with it a common connotation of harm. It is also an application of his weak methodology when Thieme concludes that Romans 13:3, 4 teaches that the laws of divine establishment protect the believer and the human race from evil (i.e. Satan's policy in the world). The passage is talking about governmental authorities, and *evil* refers to harm done to people living under these authorities. It also seems that Thieme has forced his political prejudices on the Scriptures under the guise of the doctrine of evil. For example, he claims that Israel's "waiting for good" in Micah 1:12 involved ignoring the word of God and waiting for socialism.<sup>141</sup> Keil and Delitzsch clarify what the phrase actually means in its context:

The inhabitants of Maroth writhe (*chalah*, from *chul*, to writhe with pain, like a woman in childbirth), because they are also smitten with the calamity, when it comes down to Jerusalem. *Letov*, "on account of the good," which they have lost, or are about to lose.<sup>142</sup>

In other words, the thrust of the passage is not that the people of Maroth were evil for waiting for socialism, but that they were waiting as one writhing in pain on account of the loss of the good.

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<sup>141</sup> Thieme tape, "II Samuel 7:13."

<sup>142</sup> C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, "The Minor Prophets," in vol. 6: *Ezekiel 25 to Malachi*, Old Testament Commentaries, 6 vols. n.p.; reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., n.d.) pp.821,22.

Another observation should be made relative to the doctrine of evil. One of Thieme's determining factors, as to what is evil, is the issue of human freedom. Anything that abridges human freedom is evil. Thus, Thieme can include many social and political movements and actions as evil. Though freedom can be looked upon as a blessing from God, there is no biblical basis to use it as a final determinative factor as to what is good or evil.<sup>143</sup> Thieme's condemnation of modern social legislation also should include a condemnation of Joseph in the Book of Genesis for his famine relief political action. Obviously, the divinely directed plan of Joseph restricted the freedom of the people of Egypt.

Furthermore, when Thieme categorizes altruism and humanitarianism as evil, he makes an unjustified leap in logic in his shaky exegesis of Luke 11:13. Jesus says evil men can do good things, not that good deeds are evil. This kind of teaching can produce both a critical attitude toward the good deeds of others and a basis for rationalizing one's carnal callousness toward the needs of others.

Finally, it is a mistake to categorize entire Christian organizations as evil on the basis of certain weaknesses in their methodologies. One might speak of the departures from scriptural principles in the methodology of a Christian organization such as Campus Crusade, or for that matter, of Thieme's own tape ministry.<sup>144</sup> However, it is quite another thing to label the entire ministry of Campus Crusade or of Thieme as evil.

In summary, we have seen that the primary problem with Thieme's doctrine of evil centers in his exegetical methodology that is, he forces his restricted theological definition of *evil* on many texts where it is inappropriate. With his definition and this methodology, he frequently makes unjustified correlations between his own political persuasion and certain biblical passages.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE**

A very healthy emphasis that pervades most of Thieme's teaching is his doctrine of grace. A brief overview of terms and definitions in this doctrinal area will be a helpful backdrop for much of his teaching in other areas.

### **Definition**

According to Thieme's analysis, there are four major parts to a full definition of grace. First, "grace is all that God is free to do for a man on the basis of the cross." Second, "grace is God's freedom to express His love to mankind without jeopardizing his essence." In other words, God cannot express His love

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<sup>143</sup> No where in the Law, for example, do we read, "Thou shalt respect another man's freedom." Also, frequently, the spread of the gospel and the Scriptures has increased during periods of persecution and limited freedom.

<sup>144</sup> Both involve extensions of teaching authority outside the local church.

towards us at the expense of His other divine characteristics. This requires that His love be expressed through the cross of Christ.<sup>145</sup>

Third, grace can be defined in terms of "the principle of freedom: no can truly give apart from freedom. God gives out of total freedom because of the cross. Anything that is given to you in the right way is given on the basis of freedom." In other words, if something is given as a bribe for affection or attention it does not stem from grace.<sup>146</sup>

Fourth, Thieme expands his definition of grace to apply to "God's plan as well as God's policy for Homo Sapiens." It includes the "plan," "policy" "function," and "mechanics" for living the Christian life.<sup>147</sup>

Thieme concludes his definition of grace by stating the general concept the Scriptures relative to grace:

Grace depends on the essence or character of God; therefore, grace depends on who and what God is, not on who and what man is. Grace is what God can do for man and be consistent with his own essence.<sup>148</sup>

### **Phases of God's Grace Provisions for Man**

Thieme refers to the phases of God's provisions for man in three categories: first, phase 1, or the provisions by God's grace in salvation; phase 2, or God's continuing provisions for living as Christians after salvation and before death the rapture; and phase 3, or God's provisions for the believer after death or the rapture in eternity future.

Thieme summarizes the provisions of God's grace in phase 1 through his listing of the riches of divine grace (the 36 blessings given to the believer at generation, because of his position in Christ). Phase 3 blessings from the grace God include ultimate sanctification, heaven and rewards. Phase 2 grace-provisions are broken down into four major types of grace: (1) logistical grace (common grace provisions for maintaining physical life); (2) the gracious ministry of Holy Spirit in producing spirituality; (3) the grace apparatus perception or GAP (all of the divine provisions both inside the believer and in his context that are related to his being able to understand and apply Bible doctrine);<sup>149</sup> (4) dying

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<sup>145</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Super Grace Life* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications 1973), p. 5.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Living Grace* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971 pp. 18, 19.

grace ("the mature believer's experience of physical death under the provision of grace and under the ideal conditions of happiness and blessing").<sup>150</sup>

## **Grace-thinking**

Thieme strongly encourages his followers to develop a mentality that is dominated by the principles of grace. Such a mentality would be the opposite of legalism. There are two aspects of grace-thinking. First, one should think and act in his relationship with God, acknowledging that he is totally dependent upon God's grace for anything of any value in his life. Second, the believer is to express a grace-attitude toward others. In his interpretation of Philippians 2:3, Thieme explains this second type of grace-thinking:

Grace-thinking is the state of mind which submits to the divine order and does not exalt itself; it eliminates all human viewpoint from the soul. Grace-thinking is regarding other believers as better than ourselves . . . Grace-thinking is accomplished by being so occupied with the Person of Jesus that in your relationship with other people you do not judge, malign, criticize, ridicule, or intrude on their privacy.<sup>151</sup>

Such a view of grace-thinking is primarily a passive one. Thieme says, "You don't have to try to love people or to gush over them; you simply allow them "their privacy."<sup>152</sup>

## **Areas of Application**

In his teachings on the Christian life, Thieme consistently relates practical living to the basic premises of grace. He finds in grace the basis for one's prayer life and his ability for handling suffering. Grace is also the basis for growth and stability for the Christian life, as well as the foundation for the production of good.<sup>153</sup> Also, he teaches that "grace orientation is the bona fide motivation and thought pattern for giving in the Church Age."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> R.B. Thieme, Jr., *Dying Grace* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1977), p. 11.

<sup>151</sup> R.B. Thieme, Jr., *Celebrityship of Jesus Christ* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Thieme, *Living Grace*, p. 19.

<sup>154</sup> Thieme, *Super-Grace*, p. 10.

## Critique

There are three major observations that can be made concerning Thieme's teaching on grace. First, he has an excellent emphasis on God's gracious relationship with man and man's response to God's grace in salvation and in Christian living. Second, his categories for discussing the various aspects of God's gracious provisions are helpful. Third, however, his analysis of the meaning of grace, when referring to man's relationship to man, is weak and one sided. Thieme sees grace in its expression between two men as little more than a passive honoring of each other's privacy.<sup>155</sup> This is clearly not consistent with Thieme's own definition of grace (i.e. giving freely out of love). Thieme accepts grace as the active giving of God to those who do not merit His blessing, but he apparently redefines grace between men as something either totally or primarily passive.

## THE PEOPLE OF GOD

There is nothing unique or especially distinctive in Thieme's concept of the people of God. However, he does have a distinctive way of communicating dispensational truth. Since the dispensational framework is critical to one's view of the Christian life, it is helpful to have a brief statement of Thieme's teaching in this area.

### Dispensations

Thieme's analysis of the various categories of people throughout history (dispensations) is an extension of the dispensational framework established by Darby, Scofield and Chafer. For teaching purposes, he has grouped a number of the dispensations together and come up with four major dispensations (see Fig. 3).<sup>156</sup> The first dispensation is the dispensation of the Gentiles, and it includes what other dispensationalists have called innocence, conscience, and human government. The second dispensation is the dispensation of the Jews, which includes both God's promises to Abraham and the law of Moses. The dispensation of the Jews will be continued during the seven-year tribulation period after the removal of the church. The third dispensational division is the dispensation of the church, which extends from Pentecost to the rapture of the church. Thieme believes in a pretribulational rapture of the church. The fourth and final dispensation is the dispensation of Christ, that is, the millennial kingdom.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> For example he claims that when the Bible describes grace-thinking in terms of regarding another as excelling oneself (Phil. 2:3), it means no more than that one should not criticize another. Then he explains Philippians 2:4 by saying that to regard the personal interest of others is simply to "allow them their privacy. Thieme, *Celebrityship*, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>156</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), pp. 13, 14.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-23.

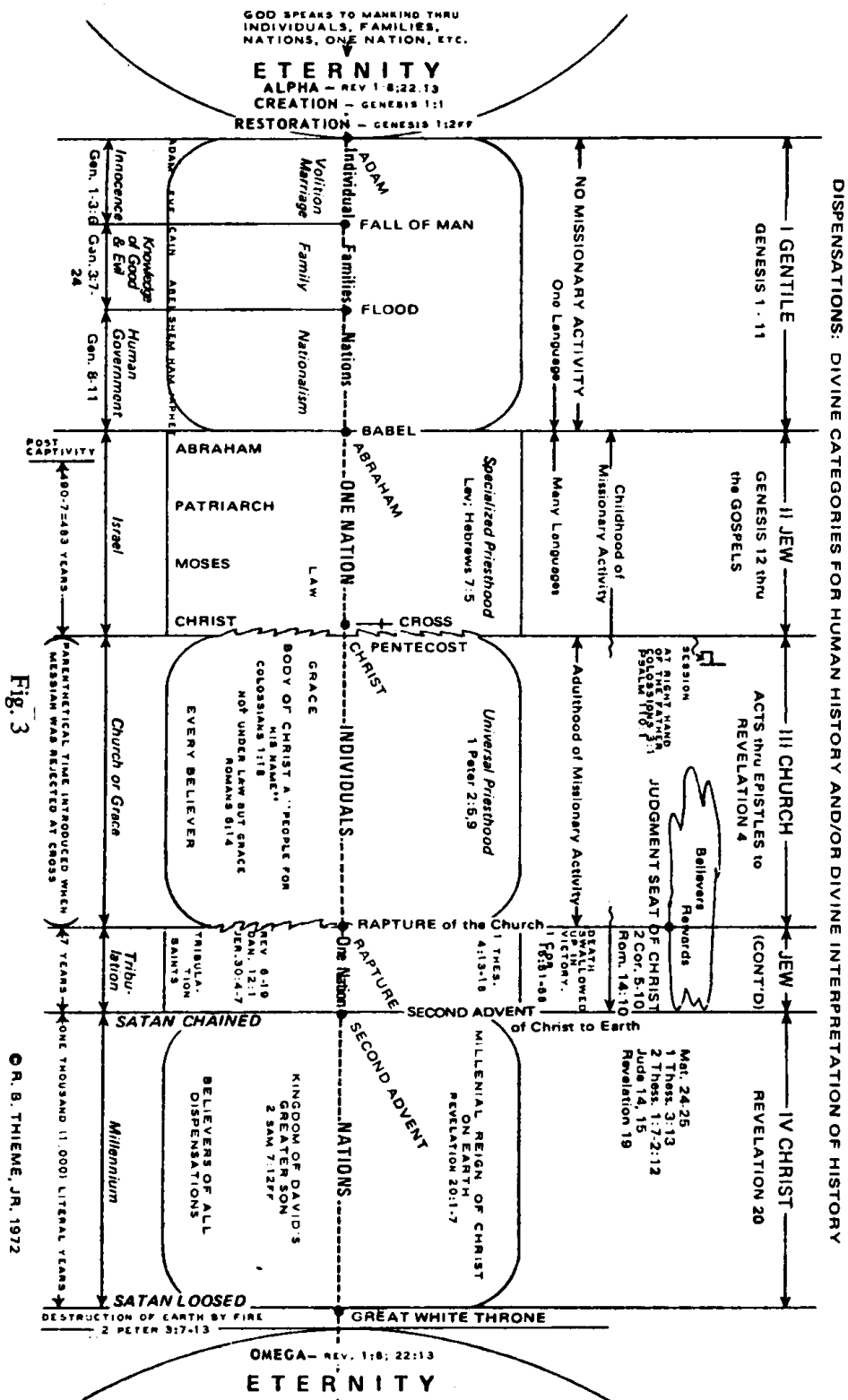


Fig. 3

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Figure 3, Dispensations

## **The Royal Family of God**

Thieme has chosen a special term to describe the people of God during the Church Age: "the royal family of God." He sees Christ as having three families. First, in accordance with his title, "Son of God," Christ has a family as God: the Father and the Holy Spirit. Second, in accordance with his title, "Son of David," Christ has a family by physical birth, the dynasty of King David, his Jewish royalty. Third, "in the angelic conflict, his battlefield name is 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords,'" and he has a royal family in this conflict, the church, known as the royal family of God.

In carefully setting apart the church as Christ's royal family, Thieme then teaches the special blessings that God had reserved only for the Church Age believers. Although the Old Testament saints had both eternal life and divine righteousness imputed to them by faith, the members of the royal family of God (the church) have a double portion of both.<sup>158</sup>

## **Critique**

Thieme has made a valuable emphasis on the role of the church in God's program. His dispensational distinctions are likewise a helpful teaching tool. Although at times Thieme's choice of terminology detracts from the thrust of his doctrine,<sup>159</sup> in this case the term, *the royal family of God*, is most appropriate.

## **THE DOCTRINE OF HISTORY**

Under the doctrine of history we shall consider three important subjects: (1) Thieme's approach to the interpretation of history, (2) his concept of divine establishment and the divine institutions, and (3) his doctrine of the priest nation.

### **Interpretation of History**

Thieme's interpretation of history also may be subdivided under three topics: (1) the control of history, (2) the purpose of God in history, and (3) understanding the problems in history.

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<sup>158</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Rom. 6:5a U.S. Gov. Evils; Doc/Retroactive Positional Truth (Revised)," *Romans*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, 11 September 1977.

<sup>159</sup> For example, his name for a high level of spiritual maturity is "super-grace," which sounds much like "super spirituality" (a term employed by some to describe those who think they have arrived spiritually as a result of some experience-ecstatic or otherwise).

*The control of history.* Thieme sees the control of history completely in the hands of Jesus Christ. He rules in three different ways. First, he rules by sovereign intervention. Second, he rules indirectly, "when mankind follows the divinely ordained laws of establishment" (See discussion below). Third, the control of Christ over history is also done "permissively, when God allows negative volition and evil to run their course as part of the angelic conflict."<sup>160</sup>

*Purpose in history.* Thieme's view of the purpose of history is an outgrowth of his doctrine of the angelic conflict. World history is the arena for the resolving of the spiritual warfare between God and Satan. During the present age, that purpose is primarily related to the "Royal Family" of Jesus Christ. God's working in history is "to enable the members of the Royal Family to glorify Christ on earth (Eph. 1)."<sup>161</sup>

*The problems in history.* The major problems in the progress of history from a Christian point of view can be reduced to one basic question, why do the wicked prosper? Thieme gives two answers to this question. First, we are a part of the angelic conflict, and "a nation is often tested in a crisis situation." The prosperity of the wicked is a test to see if believers will "stick with doctrine, or...get their eyes on the enemy, panic and fall helter-skelter into human viewpoint and reversionism."<sup>162</sup> Thieme compares such a situation to military training exercises: "believers must also face the test of maximum adversity."<sup>163</sup>

The second reason why God allows evil to continue is that "aggressive and arrogant nations are often used as whips to administer divine discipline against reversionistic nations which are totally under the influence of evil."<sup>164</sup>

## **Divine Establishment and the Divine Institutions**

The second major area under Thieme's doctrine of history includes two closely related categories: the four divine institutions and the eight laws or principles of establishment.

In the 1960's the radical student movements began to attack what they called the establishment. During those same years, Thieme developed his doctrine of divine establishment as a basis for the support of establishment institutions. He built this upon some of his earlier teachings concerning divine institutions.

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<sup>160</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Divine Establishment* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1976), p. 82.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *Reversionism* is Thieme's term for backsliding.

<sup>163</sup> Thieme, *Establishment*, p. 90.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

Under his doctrine of divine institutions Thieme teaches that God ordained four institutions for "the entire human race -- believers and unbelievers -- regardless of race, nationality, sex or any other factor." These four institutions are volition, marriage, family, and nationalism. He supports the existence of the first three institutions by an examination of the early history accounts of man in Genesis 3 and 4. The fourth institution is based upon the establishment of human government in Genesis 9 and 10 and Paul's message in Acts 17: 26-28.

The implication of Thieme's teachings on the four institutions is that God has designed certain principles or laws (the "laws of establishment") for every nation to maintain "the protection, orderly function, survival and blessing of the human race."<sup>165</sup> Thieme sees two major reasons for these principles or laws. First, they "perpetuate man's existence during the course of the angelic conflict," by holding in check man's sin nature. Second, "these laws also provide for the fullest expression of individual freedom."<sup>166</sup>

The first of these principles relates to police protection, which Thieme designates "interior protection." God has designed interior protection in a nation as the "guardian of human freedom." Interior protection, he writes, is "achieved through proper enforcement and administration of the law, supported by the people and whatever form of government exists." The second principle involves capital punishment. Thieme says, "When a murderer's guilt is properly established by conclusive evidence in a court of law, that person should be removed from the earth." The third principle relates to exterior protection of a nation. It is God's purpose that a nation be able to defend itself through the military establishment. The fourth principle is that "the foundation for the economic prosperity of a nation is free enterprise." The fifth principle relates to law. A nation should have "a single system of law which operates according to the principle of objectivity ... Legislation should never encroach upon freedom; it is designed to protect the life and freedom, privacy and property of law-abiding citizens." Furthermore, he says, "Law is perverted when it is used as an attempt to make people equal." Sixth, the stability of a nation is based upon "a common culture . . . which reflects the spiritual life, the morality, the nobility and the patriotism of the people." Seventh, the function of government should be carried out so that it allows the genius of its people to express itself. "This is done through two channels: one, to leave its citizens alone without governmental interference; and two, to protect those citizens from criminal activity." Finally, freedom is the highest value to be sought in a human government, since "freedom provides the basis for the proper function of evangelism."<sup>167</sup>

Thieme's support for these laws of establishment primarily involves three biblical sources. First, the nation of Israel functioned under God's blessing with

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-9.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-37.

interior and exterior protection and under law. Second, both Genesis 9 and the Mosaic Law required capital punishment. Third, the Scriptures place a great emphasis on man's personal responsibility, and thus the Bible emphasizes the importance of human volition, and the function of human volition demands political freedom. The implications of this approach lean heavily in support of most right-wing political positions, thus forming a philosophical link between biblical Christianity and conservative politics.

## **Priest Nation**

Based upon the statement in Exodus 19:6 ("And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests,") and Thieme's observation of the history of nations, he draws the conclusion that "at any period in history, somewhere in the world, God has a priest nation." For Thieme, a priest nation is "God's repository on earth for Bible doctrine." Furthermore, he says, "the basis for survival and prosperity for any priest nation is the attitude of its believers toward Bible doctrine (Hos. 4: 6)."<sup>168</sup>

Obviously, the conclusion that Thieme is pressing toward in his teaching on the priest nation, is that the United States has become the priestly custodian of doctrine. He observes that after a succession of other European priest nations<sup>169</sup>, nineteenth century, Victorian England provided the freedom for the communication of the gospel, becoming the priest nation in that century. Today the United States has replaced the British Empire. From this basic assumption, Thieme can easily begin to make direct applications to the United States from the Old Testament prophets, for he sees the United States in the same role that the nation of Israel was in during Old Testament history.<sup>170</sup>

## **Critique**

Of the three areas considered in this section, Thieme's approach to the interpretation of history is the most helpful. On the other hand, his concepts relative to the laws of establishment, the divine institutions and the priest nation have some serious weaknesses.

First, certain aspects of his doctrines of establishment and of the divine institutions are founded upon erroneous presuppositions which ignore some important biblical teachings concerning the expression of compassion through

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 90, 91.

<sup>169</sup> Thieme lists a number of priest nations: Frankish Kingdom of the Merovingians, Brandenburg under the Hohenzollerns, Sweden during the Thirty Years' War, Switzerland at the time of Zwingli, France in the days of the Huguenots, and Ireland and Scotland for brief periods.

<sup>170</sup> Thieme, *Establishment*, p. 91.

political and social avenues.<sup>171</sup> One of Thieme's underlying presuppositions is that the divine principles of establishment must be understood in terms of that which provides the greatest political freedom for man's volition. There is a basic error in this kind of thinking. Freedom is not a virtue; rather, it is a blessing, like prosperity and peace. The virtues that are acknowledged in the Scriptures for the nation of Israel include such things as justice, righteousness, compassion, and loving service of God (Amos 4:1; 5:14, 15; Mic. 6:8; Dt. 6:4-15). However, freedom is a blessing God may provide, and a blessing worthy of defending, but it is not in itself a virtue to be used as the final determinative factor in the decisions made by governments. In fact, unbridled freedom can allow for the production of fruits that contradict Christian virtues. For example, the oppression of the poor, referred to in Amos 4:1, was the product of the sin nature of the wealthy, exhibited in a free market place.<sup>172</sup>

It is readily admitted that liberty is highly desirable and government intervention is dangerous to the maintenance of political freedom. However, one needs to keep the emphasis on freedom balanced with the biblical teachings on righteousness and compassion. Psalm 72 describes the ideal king as one who cares for the needy. Deuteronomy 24:19-21 contains the law of gleanings, God's method of providing for the poor in the nation of Israel. Also, the law of the Jubilee Year in Israel provided for the control on an unbridled capitalism, so that land monopolies would not develop.

A major argument presented by Thieme in support of his basic presupposition is that men can and will more readily respond to the gospel in a free society. The history of the early church is evidence to the contrary. Likewise, the history of the church in Ethiopia during the fascist oppression demonstrates the opposite. The fact is that the church frequently grows more rapidly under persecution and the lack of freedom than it does in a free society.

Not only are parts of his doctrine of establishment based on an erroneous presupposition, but also his teaching on the priest nation lacks firm scriptural basis. Thieme's view that the United States is God's priest nation for this generation has virtually no exegetical support. In fact, the only reference he makes is to God's appointment of Israel as a priest nation (Ex. 19:6). The application of this reference to the United States is inappropriate; for Israel was theocracy, and the United States is not. The only other evidence he can suggest is his own

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<sup>171</sup> It should be acknowledged that certain specific parts of Thieme's laws of establishment rest on sound exegesis (e.g. capital punishment and a nation's right to internal and external protection, and much that he says is hard to disagree with practically). However, in his teaching that freedom is a prime virtue, he fails to give a proper emphasis to justice for the oppressed and compassion for the helpless (Dt. 10:18, 19; 27:19).

<sup>172</sup> Further evidence that freedom is a blessing and not a virtue can be seen in God's ending of Israel's freedom in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, not as a result of their having slaves, but because of their idolatry, immorality and injustice in direct disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

survey of history. It is true that at different periods in history a certain nation or nations have been instrumental in providing freedom for the dissemination of the gospel and the teaching of the Word of God, but to call such nations priest nations is not only unsupportable biblically, it directly contradicts the New Testament. It is wrong to apply theocratic status to a modern nation. The church is God's theocratic people today (I Peter 2:5-10).<sup>173</sup>

## **THE MILITARY**

Thieme's training and experience in the military have provided him with a background that has made a significant impact on both his teaching on the role of the military in the life of the believer<sup>174</sup> and the general character of his ministry.<sup>175</sup>

### **National Right to Wage War**

Thieme builds a case for national participation in war. His arguments are built on his teachings concerning the divine institutions. Since volition demands freedom, and since God instituted nationalism, any nation has the right to go to war to defend its freedom. This seems to be supported by Romans 13:3,4, where Paul indicates that a nation has the authority to "bear the sword" as "a minister of God."<sup>176</sup>

Thieme is careful to say that "not all warfare is justified." War that is fought "for personal or political aggrandizement, such as the Nazi movement of World War II or the present Communistic aggression, is not justified warfare." To Thieme, just warfare is war to stop oppression and evil. It is also God's method of judging totally depraved nations and nations whose viewpoint is "incompatible with Divine Institution Number Four (Nationalism)."<sup>177</sup>

### **Christian Participation in the Military**

Since a nation has the right to wage war, Thieme concludes that a Christian has the responsibility to participate in the military to preserve his nation. He "can serve his country in the military, kill the enemy and at the same time

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<sup>173</sup> The implications of doing this involve the development of civil religion and a greater sense of loyalty to one nation than to the body of Christ worldwide.

<sup>174</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *War Moral or Immoral* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1974).

<sup>175</sup> Thieme is commonly referred to by his followers as the "Colonel," and military pictures and clippings are frequently found decorating the walls of both the church and the adjoining Berachah Tapes and Publications.

<sup>176</sup> Thieme, *War*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

fulfill the Biblical precepts of Christianity."<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, since the Old Testament contains commands by the Lord of Hosts to "annihilate the enemy," it may be concluded that "the divine perspective on how to fight a war is to "kill the enemy in a battle situation."<sup>179</sup>

Thieme's reaction to the conscientious objectors should be expected:

No one has the right either to shirk military service or to be a so-called conscientious objector on the basis of MORALITY, and certainly not on the principle of religion of CHRISTIANITY. From the standpoint of the Word of God, there is no such thing as a conscientious objector. There are cowards and people who are totally ignorant of Bible doctrine, but there is no Biblical basis for any American to be a conscientious objector.<sup>180</sup>

### **Principles for the Military in the National Entity**

As an expansion of his exposition of Nehemiah 4 (where Nehemiah established a civilian defense system during the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem), Thieme lists a series of principles to be understood and applied relative to the military in a nation. First, the national entity is to be protected by the exterior protection of the military establishment. Second, we should expect warfare to continue until the millennium. Third, Jesus Christ was the Lord of Hosts (armies) in the Old Testament. Therefore, it is Christ's plan to annihilate totally the enemy when the enemy is a degenerate society -- killing men, women and children." Fourth, armies can either defend or destroy freedom. Fifth, "national freedom and integrity depends on a superior army." Sixth, degeneracy in a nation is demonstrated through the lack of self-discipline and lack of respect for authority on the battlefield. Seventh, "universal military training is an important function of national life." Military training is helpful both in the military and in civilian life as well. Eighth, "military leadership is an index of national character." Ninth, claiming that the army of Joshua in the campaign of Jericho was better trained than the army of Israel in the wilderness, Thieme teaches that "training is absolutely necessary for effective military activity." Finally, "when nations lose wars, they lose their freedom."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>179</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Freedom Through Military Victory* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>180</sup> Thieme, *War*, p. 13.

<sup>181</sup> Thieme, *Freedom*, pp. 14-19.

## Critique

The most striking shortcoming of Thieme's teaching on the military is his absence of biblical exegesis. When he does include exegesis in the support of his principles, it is highly questionable. For example, he claims that 2 Chronicles 36:11-21 teaches that Zedekiah, the king, has no respect for authority in the nation, so his army lost in battle. Zedekiah's problem was not lack of respect for the authority of Jeremiah or of Nebuchadnezzar (as Thieme suggests) but one of a lack of respect for God.<sup>182</sup> Also he misses the point completely in the difference between the victory of Joshua at Jericho and the defeat of Israel in the wilderness. The whole point of the biblical account is that one group was right spiritually, and the other was not.

Thieme appears to place a great deal of faith in the ability of the military. He claims that national freedom is dependent upon a superior army, and he uses Napoleon's liberations of France as an illustration. This perspective, however, is completely contrary to much of the biblical evidence. Gideon's defeat of the Midianites, David's defeat of the Philistines and Hezekiah's defeat of the Assyrians all indicate that the issue is the power and intervention of God, not human military might. In fact, David wrote in Psalm 20, "Some boast in chariots and some in horses; but 'we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God" (Ps. 20:7, NASV).

Though it is appropriate to speak of the validity of a just war, and many Christian theologians have dealt with the issue of a just war in the past, Thieme's treatment of the question leaves much to be desired. First, he fails to distinguish between *herem* (holy war) and other types of war. *Herem* was the divinely ordained pattern of warfare for theocratic Israel toward certain enemies of God's designation. It frequently included divine orders to totally annihilate a city, Israel functioning as God's direct instrument of judgment. The United States is not a theocracy, and it does not have direct divine commands to annihilate enemies. Second, though the concept of a just war is a valid one, Thieme needs to further explain the criteria for just wars. For example, it can be shown that wars of self-defense are justified biblically.<sup>183</sup>

## SUMMARY CRITIQUE

We have attempted to examine ten doctrinal areas in this chapter. The areas were chosen because of the distinctive nature of Thieme's teaching on the doctrines considered and because these ten areas affect his teachings on the Christian life.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>183</sup> For example, I Samuel 11 implies divine blessing on Saul's defense of the Israelite city of Jabesh-Gilead

Most of the problems noted in Thieme's position in these ten areas center in his forcing of his categories and personal perspective on the Scriptures. In some cases, the negative theological and practical effects are negligible. In others they are significant. Seven doctrinal conclusions stand out as having significant negative ramifications: his view of Bible doctrine in terms of the pastor; his unique teaching that God's love is anthropopathic; his extreme analysis of the immaterial part of man; his passive description of grace expressions between men; his unbalanced view of social justice and freedom; his identification of America as a priest nation; and his overemphasis on the role of the military.

## CHAPTER III

### BASIC SPIRITUALITY

Doctrine concerning the basis for maintaining a relationship with God and appropriating the power of God in the production of divine righteousness is of paramount importance to the development of one's teaching on Christian living. Since the outset of Thieme's ministry he has consistently communicated a number of doctrines that are foundational to his view of Christian living. These are collected below under Thieme's own categories: fellowship and rebound, the filling of the Spirit, the faith-rest life, and mental attitude. There is also included a section on the doctrine of love, since it is very much a part of one's view of the spiritual life.

#### ***FELLOWSHIP AND REBOUND***

Although fellowship as a concept is distinct from spirituality in Thieme's system, it is appropriate to consider it in connection with his teachings on basic spirituality, since Thieme teaches that one who is in fellowship is automatically spiritual.

#### **Basic Emphasis**

Basic to Thieme's whole approach to Christian living is his teaching on how to maintain a fellowship relationship with God. His approach, for the most part, is an extension of the teachings of Lewis Sperry Chafer, as treated in his book *He That is Spiritual*.<sup>1</sup> One of the primary aspects of Chafer's teaching in this area was that our spiritual relationship with God is based entirely upon the grace of God. Thieme shows complete agreement in his remarks concerning the doctrine of fellowship and rebound, "Please note, this is in the framework of grace. There is no merit attached to acknowledging your sins; it is strictly on a grace principle." To further emphasize this principle he continues, "We don't earn, deserve or work for anything. GOD PROVIDES EVERYTHING!"<sup>2</sup>

#### **Categories of Fellowship**

According to Thieme, there are two kinds of fellowship. First, one enters into an eternal fellowship relationship with God at the point of salvation. Second, God

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That is Spiritual* (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Company, 1918).

<sup>2</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Rebound and Keep Moving* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), pp. 17,18.

desires for believers to continue in a fellowship relationship with him in time.<sup>3</sup> To communicate the differences between these two levels of fellowship, Thieme uses a simple teaching illustration (see Fig. 4).<sup>4</sup>

The top circle in the illustration represents the believer's eternal relationship with God based upon his position "in Christ." As Thieme puts it, "There is nothing in this universe, nothing in heaven above, on the earth or under the earth than can keep any person who has believed in Christ from God." He firmly teaches that "Once you have believed in Jesus Christ, you cannot lose your salvation."<sup>5</sup>

The bottom circle represents the believer's fellowship with God during the time that he lives between salvation and death or the rapture. For Thieme, one who is in fellowship is automatically filled with the Spirit, and therefore, spiritual. Hence, it is important to his entire approach to the spiritual life for one to understand how to enter into temporal fellowship with God. One who is in fellowship with God has all of the divine resources at his disposal, and the Spirit of God can control and empower him for producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23).

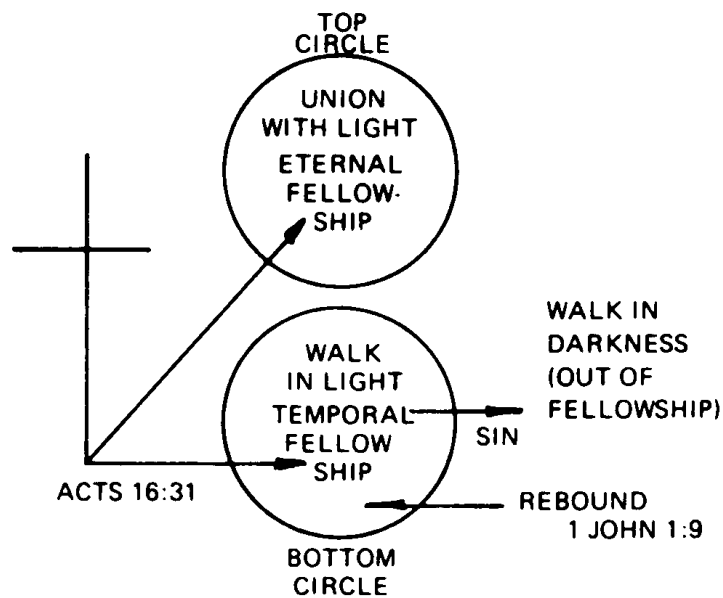


Fig. 4. Two Circles of Fellowship

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp.1, 2.

<sup>4</sup> R.B. Thieme, Jr., *Spirituality by Grace* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971), p. 37. This illustration is an adaptation of a diagram in Ruth Paxton's *Life On a Higher Plane*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 2, 3.

In Thieme's interpretation of I Corinthians 3:1-3, he applies the analogy of the bottom circle. One who is out of the bottom circle is the same as the person described in I Corinthians 3 as a carnal Christian. Another term that Thieme uses to describe the state of a person who is out of fellowship is the term "divine woodshed." By this he means that the believer who is involved in unconfessed sin is open to the discipline of God. His support for this teaching is I Corinthians 11:30, 31 and Hebrews 12:1-5.<sup>6</sup> The conclusion that one draws from such an analysis is that as long as a person remains in fellowship he is in a place of spiritual power and production and may be called spiritual. When he is out of fellowship, he is described as carnal and worthy of divine discipline.

These distinctions are "absolute" in Thieme's thinking. He writes:

You are either one or the other; you are not partially spiritual and partially carnal. Carnality is an absolute; spirituality is an absolute. We become carnal when we sin; we become spiritual when we get back into the bottom circle.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Mechanics of Fellowship: Rebound**

Thieme introduces his discussion on the mechanics of how to enter into fellowship with a discussion of the old sin nature. He says, "The old sin nature is the culprit -- the source of all personal sin." When a person receives Christ as Savior, he also receives a human spirit, and the Holy Spirit begins his permanent indwelling ministry. However, the believer still retains his old sin nature. The issue for the Christian life then becomes one of the control: Who will control the life of the Christian -- the Holy Spirit or the old sin nature? In order for the old sin nature to be dominated by the Holy Spirit, the believer must be forgiven and cleansed by God.<sup>8</sup>

The primary biblical source for Thieme's teaching on how to be forgiven and cleansed is I John 1:9. According to this passage, one who confesses his sins is both forgiven of those sins that he has confessed and cleansed from all unrighteousness. The Greek word for "confess" is *homologeō*, and Thieme teaches that it means "to acknowledge, to name, or to cite." He *strongly* denies that it means "to feel sorry" for your sins; it has no emotional connotation whatsoever. It does not mean to renounce your sins; it does not mean to have a guilty conscience. It means simply 'to acknowledge' them to God."<sup>9</sup> This practice of confessing sin to God is given the name "rebound" by Thieme. One who has been knocked out of his spiritual life by sin can quickly and easily respond under the grace of God by rebounding -- confessing his known sins to God.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-9,18,19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

## The Meaning of Temporal Fellowship

Thieme seems to define "fellowship" in two different ways. First, he seems to be saying that a person moves from an absolute state of carnality into an absolute state of spirituality. In this sense, one is automatically in fellowship the moment that he confesses all known sin. In his second description, "fellowship" means 'love.'" This second sense seems to carry with it a more positive relational aspect. He expands this second definition by explaining that one can love only "through doctrine; ... it is the exhale of doctrine from the soul to the person .... The more doctrine we have, the more happiness we will have because we can exhale toward God and respond to His love, as well as exhale love toward others from the right bank of the soul." <sup>10</sup>

## Critique

When Thieme emphasizes the grace of God and the simplicity of the biblical promise of forgiveness through confession, one can hardly find fault. In his teaching he has rightly shown that one must quickly deal with sin and be totally honest with God about it, in order for God, the Holy Spirit, to have any ministry through him. However, there are two major weaknesses in Thieme's approach. First, his interpretation of 1 John 1 makes fellowship absolute and mechanical instead of relative and relational. Second, he fails to guard his definition of *confession* against practical abuse.

Thieme's interpretation of 1 John 1 says that John is describing an absolute state into which one immediately enters at the moment he confesses known sins. However, when one examines the New Testament use of the word *koinonia* and the tenses which John uses in 1 John 1:7, one is struck with a different emphasis. Except in 1 Corinthians 1:9 (where one's eternal positional relationship with God is referred to), the normal connotation of *koinonia* is one of active, experiential, relational participation between two or more individuals involving something that they have in common.<sup>11</sup> When John, therefore, speaks of having fellowship with one another and with God, he is describing a continuing, personal, experiential relationship. In this context he also states something that is frequently overlooked. He says that the people who are continually being cleansed (present tense of *katharizo*) are also the ones who are continually in fellowship with one another. To use Thieme's diagram, John is saying that the cleansing by the blood of Christ in the life of the believer is a continuing process for those who are continuing to be in the "bottom circle." In other words, one can be walking in a fellowship relationship and have sin in his life, but he is promised that Christ's blood will continually cleanse him. That fellowship relationship is characterized by honesty with

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<sup>10</sup> Thieme, *Spirituality*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> See Acts 2:42; 11 Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 2:9; Philippians 1:5; 2:1; 3:10. Also see Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, s.v. "*koinonia*," pp. 439, 40.

God or confession of sins to God, but John's concept of fellowship is not one of a hop-scotch, in-and-out, absolute spiritual status. For John, the issue is one of an honest walk versus a dishonest, rebellious non-acceptance of the reality of sin in our lives. Temporal fellowship is broken, not by an act of sin, but by a rebellious rationalization of the sin which the Holy Spirit is pointing out to the believer through the Word of God. This means that fellowship is more than the absence of unconfessed sins. It is a positive, personal, responsive relationship with God, openly lived in the light of His revelation-the Scriptures.

At times in his books Thieme moves somewhat close to a relational definition of fellowship.<sup>12</sup> He would be wise to expand this aspect of his teaching, for teaching the doctrine of fellowship as a technique to enter an absolute state can produce in some a "mechanical spirituality" and can become a form of "legalism" or "dead orthodoxy."<sup>13</sup>

The second weakness of Thieme's teaching on the subject of fellowship involves a failure to guard his definition of *confession* against practical abuse. The root meaning of *homologeō* is "to speak the same thing," and normal translations of it include "acknowledge," "confess," "agree," "admit," and "declare."<sup>14</sup> Thieme does recognize that the word can be translated "acknowledge." However, he also says that it means "to name" or "to cite," and these last two translations fall short of the basic meaning of the term. Not only does Thieme fail to translate properly *homologeō* consistently, but he fails to emphasize the normal implications of agreeing with God about specific sins in one's life. Normally, if one truly admits to God that what he has done is sin, he is sorry that he has sinned against his Father, and he desires to see a change in his own life (Lk. 15:21). It is true that forgiveness is based on the work of Christ, and that all that is needed to appropriate Christ's provision for cleansing is to confess (or agree with God about) one's sins. It is also true that this does not require sorrow for sins or promises to do better; but neither does it rule out the normal expressions of one who truly takes God's attitude toward sin in his life. Unless the full ramifications of true agreement about (or acknowledgement of) sins are taught, there can be practical abuses of the doctrine of confession.

Without these clarifications the teaching of confession and forgiveness can possibly produce in the carnal mind a "license mentality."<sup>15</sup> In some cases it

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<sup>12</sup> He seems to contradict himself at this point; for, after describing fellowship in absolute terms, he equates fellowship with the relative stages of maturity. Thieme, *Spirituality*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> We use "legalism" as a term to refer to a mentality toward a law or practice that so emphasizes the outer form that the fundamental reality is disproportionately disregarded or overlooked (See Matthew 23). "Dead orthodoxy" refers to the state of believing the truth but not relating it to life.

<sup>14</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, s.v. "*homologeō*," p. 571.

<sup>15</sup> Some accuse Thieme of promoting a "license mentality" (See Larsen, *Aberrations*, p. 3). However, this is not the case. The problem lies in Thieme's lack of full clarification of the biblical emphasis.

can even result in a rationalization of the continuing existence of sin<sup>16</sup> and the repression of guilt, and this can produce emotional problems and even schizophrenia. The author has personally counseled people with such problems stemming from their abuse of Thieme's teaching on confession and fellowship.

## ***SPIRITUALITY AND THE FILLING OF THE SPIRIT***

### **Definition**

Spirituality is equivalent to the filling of the Spirit in Thieme's system. In defining spirituality, he first states that while Christianity is a relationship with Christ, spirituality, "in the broadest sense of the word, "is a relationship with the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Being spiritual or filled with the Spirit then involves a person's being under the control of the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

This definition of spirituality is expanded further by drawing some contrasts. One is filled with the Spirit (or becomes spiritual) at different times in his Christian life; this is in contrast to the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which takes place at the point of salvation and is permanent.<sup>19</sup> Also, spirituality is not to be confused with spiritual maturity. Spirituality is an absolute; maturity is relative and develops over a period of time.<sup>20</sup>

### **Characteristics of Spirituality**

Thieme observes that there are a number of false criteria for determining one's spirituality. He lists four major ones: morality, emotion, facial expression or superficial hypocrisy, and a second blessing.<sup>21</sup> From a positive standpoint the characteristics of spirituality can be summed up in the words of Ephesians 5:1. Paul says, "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children," and Thieme observes that the word *followers* literally means *imitators*.<sup>22</sup> This godly character is described further in Galatians 5:22, 23, in terms of the fruit of the Spirit.

The first fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5 is "love."<sup>23</sup> The rest of the fruit of the Spirit are different forms of love, Joy and peace are the characteristics

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<sup>16</sup> Psalm 66:18 clearly teaches that one who continues to harbor sin in his heart, even though he has named it, has no prayer fellowship with God. For example, one who confesses sins relating to a conflict with another brother, and yet does not settle the differences with him, still has sin in his heart. If this is rationalized, he can be troubled emotionally.

<sup>17</sup> Thieme, *Spirituality*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Thieme's definition of love will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

of love directed selfward. Long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness are love's expression toward the human race. Faithfulness, meekness, and temperance (or self-control) are the upward or Godward characteristics of love.<sup>24</sup>

One other result of the filling of the Spirit, according to Thieme, is that, when one is filled with the Spirit, he is completely controlled by the Holy Spirit and therefore cannot sin.<sup>25</sup>

## How to Become Spiritual

To clarify the real issues in becoming spiritual, as he sees them, Thieme has listed nine false emphases as to the means of spirituality. The first false means of spirituality he describes is "spirituality by personality imitation." This is imitating some outstanding Christian "in the matter of dress, speech or mannerism," such as "wearing black," or using spiritual language such as "Amen" or "Lord willing." Second, "spirituality by tabooism" is wrong!; that is, responding to "the big five: don't smoke, don't dance, don't go to movies, don't drink, don't play cards!" Third, is "spirituality by relativity," or comparing my weaknesses against the weaknesses of others.<sup>26</sup>

Three more suggested means of becoming spiritual that Thieme rejects are spirituality by asceticism,...spirituality by ecstasies....and spirituality by ritualism." Also he teaches that "spirituality by self-crucifixion is a twisting of Paul's exhortation in Romans 6. Finally, Thieme points out that a person cannot become spiritual through programs ("programs spirituality") or through "self-improvement."<sup>27</sup>

Then, Thieme clearly establishes his view as to how one becomes spiritual. Modifying Chafer's earlier teaching,<sup>28</sup> Thieme concludes that there are three primary ingredients in the process of becoming spiritual. First, one is spiritual when he has "no unconfessed sin" in his life. Second, one cannot quench the Holy Spirit in his life, and third, one cannot grieve the Holy Spirit in his life. Confession of sin we have already discussed, and we have noted that Thieme's term for confession is *rebound*. The other two aspects of becoming spirit" involve two areas of the old sin nature (see Fig. 5).<sup>29</sup> From the area of weakness in the old sin nature, sins are produced. Sins grieve the Holy Spirit. Therefore, at any point that a believer sins he is no longer filled with the Spirit. The second area of the old sin nature is the area of strength, which produces human good. Human good also hinders spirituality, and is described, according to Thieme, as quenching the

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<sup>24</sup> Thieme, *Spirituality*, pp. 55, 56.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-75.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Chafer, *Spiritual*.

<sup>29</sup> Thieme, *Spirituality*, p. 37.

Spirit.<sup>30</sup> Basically, then, Thieme teaches that sin and human good hinder spirituality and that confession of sins and restoration to fellowship automatically makes one full of the Spirit or spiritual.

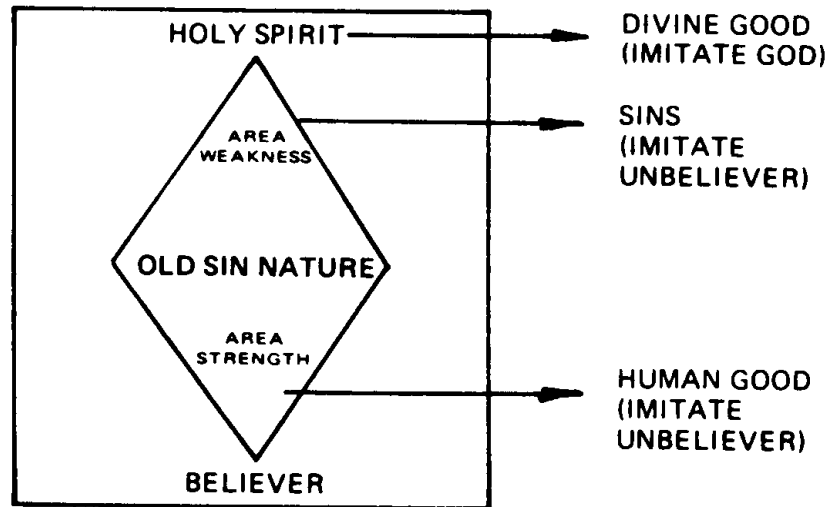


Fig. 5. Old Sin Nature

## Critique

Portions of the thrust of what Thieme teaches concerning spirituality are healthy, for he emphasizes the futility of attempting to become spiritual by human effort, and he stresses the necessity of spirituality's depending upon divine grace. Such an emphasis has led some to accuse him of teaching or allowing for license. In his discussion of false spirituality, Thieme addresses himself to this accusation:

There is also the mistaken idea that the Christian way of life by grace is a license for sin. I have actually been accused of telling people they can indulge in all the taboos! Nothing could be farther from the truth. This problem stems from a misunderstanding of grace and from legalism. Well-meaning believers are trying to get all the rest of the believers straightened out by imposing upon them their pet taboos. Now, many of these taboos should be observed, provided they are the results of spirituality and are not being observed as a means of trying to become spiritual. They will take care of themselves as the believer matures and understands the true basic concepts of Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-31,45.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 71, 72.

The problems in Thieme's teaching on spirituality do not lie in his emphasis on grace. Rather they involve his absolute view of spirituality and Spirit-filling, and his far too limited concept of the means to becoming spirit-filled.

At the heart of his wrong view of spirituality and spirit-filling is his understanding of the biblical terms, *spiritual* and *full of the Spirit*.

Spiritual (*pneumatikos*) is used biblically as a description of a life-style with emphasis on one's mental attitude, not of one who has confessed his sins. It is found in just three places: 1 Corinthians 2:15, 3:1, and Galatians 6:1. In 1 Corinthians spiritual is placed in contrast with the word *carnal* (*sarkinos* and *sarkikos*). In the context Paul describes the spiritual person as one with sound judgment, and the obvious thrust of Paul's argument is that there are two kinds of mental attitudes: being spiritually minded and being fleshy minded. This is also in keeping with his statement in Romans 8:6, where he speaks of the danger of being carnally minded. Viewing the term *spiritual* as a reference to a life-style with emphasis on one's mental attitude also makes sense in Galatians 6:1; only the spiritually minded are to attempt to restore a sinning brother.

Not only is Thieme's understanding of the term *spiritual* not in keeping with scriptural usage, but he also fails to recognize that the Scriptures speak of two different kinds of *filling of the Spirit*.<sup>32</sup> As a result, he has developed a view of the filling of the Spirit that is not in keeping with the biblical mentality. Using forms of *pimplemi* (*pletheo* in some lexicons), Luke describes the filling of the Spirit similar to the Old Testament filling of prophets. This filling had to do with giving special power by the Holy Spirit to speak forth God's truth. This usage is found in both the Gospel of Luke and in Acts (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17, 13:9). This kind of filling seems to have been an absolute kind; one was either filled or not. The other term for filling in the New Testament is *pleroo* and its cognate *pleres*. This is the word used in Paul's command in Ephesians 5:18. Normally this term is used to describe the life-style or life-characteristics of a person, similar to the term *spiritual*. This seems to be the way the term is used in Luke 4:1, Acts, 6:3, 5, 8; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52; and Ephesians 5:18. As such, being full of the Spirit is not an absolute term, but rather a descriptive term of a manner of life . . . a life in which the Spirit is usually allowed to direct the believer's thoughts and actions.

Since Thieme's analysis of the biblical terminology is incomplete, he has deduced the misconception that spirituality is an absolute. Some problems in his system immediately arise, of which he himself is already aware. If spirituality is an absolute, and if one enters into absolute control of the Holy Spirit by confession of known sins, then how is it that a believer can ever break fellowship with God; for, as Thieme puts it, "it is impossible for a person to sin who is under the

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<sup>32</sup> Timothy D. Crater, "The Filling of the Spirit in the Greek New Testament" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971), and Dwight Allan Ekholm, "The Doctrine of the Christian's Walk in the Spirit" (M.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973).

control of the Holy Spirit."<sup>33</sup> Thieme's only answer to this dilemma is that a Spirit-controlled believer, by an act of his volition, decides to stop being controlled by the Holy Spirit; then he sins. This, however, does not seem to answer the problem; for rebellion against the Holy Spirit is disobedience to the Scriptures and is therefore sin. A second dilemma in his system arises when the subject of human good is addressed. Thieme states flatly that "human good is not sin; therefore it is not subject to confession."<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he teaches that human good is produced when a person loses fellowship with Christ through the commission of unknown sins. A believer, therefore, can frequently find himself in an extremely frustrating situation: he senses that fellowship with God has been broken since he is operating in his own power and producing human good, but he cannot confess the human good to gain forgiveness, and he does not know what sins he has committed. His only hope is to commit some sin, then confess it, so that he can be restored to fellowship.

This evaluation of some of the ramifications of Thieme's absolute description of spirituality underscores the need for a careful analysis of the biblical terms, *fellowship*, *spirituality* and *filling of the Spirit*. Fellowship is relational; spirituality has to do with life-style and mental attitude; and filling of the Spirit can refer either to a description of a life-style in relative terms or to a special filling for power in ministering God's Word.

Thieme also has a far too limited view of the means of appropriation of the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. To some degree, Thieme points his students in the right direction. The Holy Spirit cannot act through a life of a person who refuses to confess his sins.<sup>35</sup> However, Thieme would do well to re-read and take seriously Chafer's entire discussion of spirituality. Although Thieme refers to the issues of grieving and quenching the Spirit, as Chafer does, he has made some critical changes in Chafer's explanation of their meaning. Chafer taught that there were three conditions for true spirituality. First, the Christian is not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph.4:30), meaning that he should avoid sin and confess it when he does commit sin. Second, the Christian is not to quench the Holy Spirit (I Thess. 5:19); that is, he is to yield to the Holy Spirit's leading in his life. Finally, Chafer taught that one is spiritual as he walks in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), living in "an unbroken reliance upon the Spirit."<sup>36</sup> Obviously, there is more to being empowered by the Holy Spirit than just confession of sin. Confession makes the believer a usable vessel, but the yielded, dependent life enjoys greater and greater spiritual direction and power. Chafer's approach is much more in keeping with the statements of Scripture<sup>37</sup> when considered in their contexts.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 30, 31.

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 11 for discussion of what should be included under "sin."

<sup>36</sup> Chafer, *Spiritual*, pp. 85, 105, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19; Gal.5:16

## **FAITH-REST LIFE**

One of the most valuable contributions that Thieme has made in the doctrines of the Christian life is his doctrine of "the faith-rest life." The practical, spiritual benefit resulting from the little book by the same name has been most significant in the lives of many, the author included. As one reads the book, *The Faith-Rest Life*, he is immediately impressed with the greatness of God and His Word, and he is drawn toward sound solutions to his every problem. A brief portion of the introductory section of the book exhibits the profitable nature of the volume.

We know we have a perfect position in Jesus Christ. But I wonder if we realize all that God has provided for us experientially? We are so busy seeking happiness, we are so busy hustling around trying to find something that will satisfy, that we ignore one of the great things in the Word of God—a place of perfect peace! A place of joy (inner-happiness)! A place of strength! A place of stability! A place of power! A place of impact! No matter what happens, no matter how difficult the circumstances, no matter how great the pressure, adversities or the problems of life, we can have this "peace of God which passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).<sup>38</sup>

### **Definition**

The "faith-rest life" is Thieme's name for the Christian's experience of having inner peace in the midst of problems through the application of particular faith "technique." This technique is quite simple, and it delineates exactly what is meant by "faith-rest." It is the claiming of God's promises which automatically results in entering into an experience of inner peace or rest.<sup>39</sup>

### **Exegetical Basis**

Thieme has chosen two very appropriate passages for the study of how to develop inner peace or rest. Most of his book on the subject is an exposition of Hebrews 3:7-4:16 and Isaiah 40. He notes that the Hebrews passage is built Psalm 95, which in turn is a response to the events of Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. Israel's grumbling in the wilderness provoked (Hebrew: *meribah*) the Lord to wrath because Israel failed to claim the promises of God by faith. The result was that they failed to enjoy the promised rest of God. Thieme observes that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews exhorts the Christian to learn from Israel's failure.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Thieme, *Faith-Rest*, pp. 5, 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-24.

## Description of the Faith-Rest Technique

In his very colorful and pointed book, Thieme describes the faith-rest technique in different ways. He draws a parallel between Israel's lack of water in the wilderness and the daily needs and problems of the Christian. He claims that there are "over seven thousand promises for time -and in writing," provided by God for the believer during this Age.<sup>41</sup> He emphasizes two of these promises: Romans 8:28 and I Thessalonians 5:18. Because everything works together for good for the believer, he should give thanks in everything. A thankful trusting heart is one that is at rest.<sup>42</sup>

Since the writer of Hebrews uses the word *Sabbath* to describe rest in Hebrews 4, Thieme also describes the faith-rest life as a "moment-by-moment Sabbath."<sup>43</sup>

## Critique

As we have already observed in the introduction to this section, Thieme as produced a valuable contribution to daily Christian living in his emphasis on inner peace as a product of claiming God's promises by faith. There are, however, some weaknesses in his exegesis and his presentation. First, he should be careful how he uses etymology. In his description of the Hebrew words for faith, he uses etymological illustrations to portray vividly the meaning of faith, but he leaves the impression that the illustrations are authoritative definitions of the terms.<sup>44</sup> Second, his overall teaching on faith-rest and the promises of God needs to be kept in balance by including teaching on the conditions that God frequently places on his promises<sup>45</sup> and also teaching on the New Testament emphasis on positive active obedience in the believer's experiential sanctification.<sup>46</sup>

## **MENTAL ATTITUDE**

Throughout his ministry, Thieme has emphasized the importance of right thinking. One's mental attitude affects his entire Christian life. In recent years Thieme has greatly expanded his teaching in this area, as he has developed his concepts of spiritual maturity. This is illustrated by the fact that the book,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 53, 54.

<sup>45</sup> For example, the peace of God promised in Philippians 4:7 is contingent on a series of conditions listed in verses 4-6. Another example is Philippians 4:19, where God promises to supply all of the Philippian's needs in view of their generous giving to the needs of others.

<sup>46</sup> See for example I Thessalonians 4:1-12.

*Mental Attitude Dynamics*, has been revised twice since its 1969 first printing -- in 1970 and 1974. Only the basic concepts of mental attitude will be considered in this section; the later expansions will be dealt with in the next chapter under the subject of maturity.

### **Importance of Mental Attitude**

To emphasize the importance of the study of mental attitude and the development of a divine viewpoint, Thieme states the correlation between the mind and the body. He observes, "Any mental attitude of fear, worry or anxiety any continuous mental tension-will eventually overflow and affect the body."<sup>47</sup>

Not only does mental attitude affect one's physical well being, but the health of the soul is also in jeopardy. In this regard, he remarks, "Mental attitude sins, plus the absence of Bible doctrine, lead to human viewpoint and can only produce disorientation to grace and agony of soul."<sup>48</sup>

### **The Two Viewpoints of Life**

Building upon the statements of Isaiah 55:7-9, Thieme constructs some clear distinctions between two perspectives or viewpoints: "the divine viewpoint" and the "human viewpoint." These two viewpoints are "completely antithetical," and the divine viewpoint is "infinitely superior to that of man." The unbeliever is "the enemy of God in his mind" (Col. 1:21), and the "believer constantly struggles between the divine and the human viewpoint." Basically, the "human viewpoint is represented by the fact that you must work for what you get." It also includes the norms, principles, and philosophies of Satan's world system, which Thieme calls "cosmos diabolicus." Fundamental to the divine viewpoint is the learning of "divine norms and standards which should govern our thought pattern," and source for the divine viewpoint is Bible doctrine.<sup>49</sup>

The results of these two viewpoints are diametrically opposed to one another. As the believer develops divine viewpoint through Bible doctrine, he gains "inner peace, a relaxed mental attitude, stability and inner happiness." Thieme states in contrast to this, when the right lobe (the heart) is "crammed full of human viewpoint, or when mental attitude sins such as pride, jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, implacability, guilt complex, hatred, etc., donate the mentality of the soul the result is inevitably self-induced misery."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Mental Attitude Dynamics*, (Houston, Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1974), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

## Areas of Mental Attitude

In order for the student to understand better the application of the concept of mental attitude, Thieme examines six areas in which mental attitude is significantly important. First, he teaches that *worldliness* is "a mental attitude of human viewpoint," and not an "overt act." Worldliness is not a description for a particular type of dress, cosmetics, or recreation. He teaches to the contrary, "The Bible teaches 'live and let live.' " Worldliness has to do then with a way of thinking, and it "includes slavery to circumstances, as well as 'spirituality' through legalism."<sup>51</sup>

The next two areas of mental attitude are closely related: the area of *inner happiness* and the area of *peace or confidence*. Thieme claims that Philippians 2:2 and Isaiah 26:3 are related to mental attitude, since the word *mind* is found in both passages. In these two passages, joy and peace are also referred to. He concludes then that joy and peace are a kind of mental attitude.<sup>52</sup>

*Stability* is the fourth area of mental attitude. Thieme wisely observes that "It is not what you do that stabilizes circumstances -- it is what you think!" This stable mentality is referred to in 2 Timothy 1:7 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2. To clarify what he means, Thieme says, "A person who can think under pressure is one who has a stabilized mental attitude."<sup>53</sup>

The fifth area of mental attitude is entitled *giving*. One of Thieme's most impressive and significant contributions to Christian life teaching is in the area of Christian giving. The details of this teaching will be presented in a later chapter. One major aspect of biblical giving, according to Thieme, is that it is "first of all a mental attitude."<sup>54</sup>

The final area of mental attitude is *love*. Thieme maintains that the primary emphasis of one of the Greek words for love (agape) is "found only in the mentality of the soul." It is entirely a mental attitude.<sup>55</sup>

## Critique

This approach to mental attitude is basically sound. It is extremely helpful to be able to differentiate between that which is human viewpoint and that which is divine viewpoint. There are, however, some aspects of Thieme's more recent teaching in this area that are open to question: specifically his doctrine of the grace apparatus for perception, which has become a key part of his present teachings on mental attitude. A detailed critique of this doctrine will be included in the next chapter.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 9, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-14.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 16, 17.

## DOCTRINE OF LOVE

The concept of love which Thieme has incorporated into his view of the spiritual life has far-reaching implications for the practical living of his students; for one's view of an expression of love is at the heart of the Christian life experience.

### Definition

Koine Greek has four major words for love: *agape*, *philos*, *storge*, and *eros*. Thieme has defined all four terms in his presentation of his doctrine of love, and he has laid special stress on *agape*, since it is by far the most prominent of the four terms used in the New Testament. In fact, *eros* is not found in the New Testament and *storge* is found only in compound words. In summary form, Thieme defines these four terms as follows: *Agape* is "mental;" *philos* involves "the entire soul;" *storge* is "relationship-type love" which is normally expressed as "love of parents or children;" *eros* is love "which is physical."<sup>56</sup>

In his definitions of love, Thieme is primarily occupied with the distinction between *philos* and *agape*. He first observes that Archbishop Trench related *philos* to the Latin *amo*; and *agape* to the Latin *deligo* -- the former being stronger" than the latter. He then proceeds to specifically define *agape* as "a mental attitude love, relating to the mentality of the soul, with emphasis on the exclusion of mental attitude sins: the relaxed mental attitude of the edification complex." *Philos*, on the other hand, is "a complete soul love," which involves not only the mentality, but also the self-consciousness, volition, emotions and conscience. Furthermore, all believers are "commanded to have *agape*-type love," by the "filling of the Spirit," initially. *Philos*-type love is never commanded, as it can only exist where the "believer is daily inhaling doctrine and erecting an edification complex. It is developed."<sup>57</sup>

Much of Thieme's teaching in this area is directed toward communicating the meaning of the term *agape*. He claims that it is primarily the absence of vindictiveness, implacability, hating, bitterness, and trying to run down other people. He teaches that the phrase, "having the same love," in Philippians 2:2 means "to have tranquility in the midst of the antagonisms, the battles, and the struggles of life."<sup>58</sup> He considers this to be an especially designed love for the Christian life:

It is a totally relaxed mental attitude. God had designed the Christian

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<sup>56</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Love* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1971), p.19.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19, 20.

<sup>58</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 2:2b Doc. of Love," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of sermon preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, II February 1974.

way of life so that you can have contact with hundreds and hundreds of people, even thousands in your lifetime and have total and complete tranquility of soul.<sup>59</sup>

Thieme explains that true *agape*-love is "objective," not "subjective." In other words, when a person has *agape*-love he does not get involved with the other person. A football player can objectively love a player on another team, but he does not allow it to interfere subjectively with his tackling that man in a game. One can love and at the same time "grind" others "into the ground" if he can do it "without mental attitude sins," that is, "without despising or hating or being antagonistic."<sup>60</sup>

### **The Development of Love**

How is love developed in the life of a Christian? In his exposition of Philippians 1:9 ("that your love may abound still more and More"), Thieme answers this basic question by stating emphatically that the source is knowledge of Bible doctrine.

How on earth can you have more and more and more love?  
By going out and being nice to a rattlesnake? By going out and giving blood to the North Vietnamese? NEVER! By encouraging the Communists? No! By trying to get rid of capital punishment? No! BY KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTRINE! KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTRINE! KNOWLEDGE OF DOCTRINE!<sup>61</sup>

The biblical support for this teaching is found in Thieme's exegesis of the last half of Philippians 1:9: *en epignosei kai pase aisthesei*. Thieme takes the *en* as instrumental and concludes that full knowledge (*epignosis*) and perception (*aisthesis*) are the means by which love is developed.

An interesting application of this concept of the development of love is the way Thieme exhorts his people relative to the development and maintenance of friendships. He teaches that a person who truly loves Jesus Christ is one who can truly love people. Then he makes the application that one should pick his friends on the basis of their attitude toward God. Then he deduces that "the attitude of a person toward doctrine inevitably is the attitude of the person toward God." His final conclusion is that "great friendships are made on the basis of doctrine." In the context of Thieme's definition of Bible doctrine, one under his pastoral

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Thieme, *Love*, p. 10.

authority must be governed in the development and maintenance of friendships by the commitment of one's friends to the teachings of Bob Thieme.<sup>62</sup>

### **Production from Love**

One may ask the question as to what is produced by mental attitude, *agape*-love. Thieme's answer, based upon Philippians 1:11, is that one who truly loves God on the basis of Bible doctrine will "automatically produce divine good" ("fruit of righteousness"). In his teaching, however, he emphasizes only the passive relaxed mental attitude and fails to present any positive qualities of kindness or goodness toward other people.<sup>63</sup>

### **Categories of Love**

Thieme differentiates between divine love and human love. He claims that when *love* is used to describe the character of God, it is used only as an anthro-popathism.<sup>64</sup> Human love is divided into three categories. Category 1 love is that kind of love which is a "response to the love of God." One must develop the capacity for this type of love, and this is done by the erection of "the edification complex of the soul, . . .by the function of GAP."<sup>65</sup> This process will be explained in the next chapter. Category 2 love is defined by Thieme as love directed "toward the opposite sex." This can only be fully developed in a relationship with one's "right man" or "right woman." This concept will be further explained in chapter VI of this dissertation. The third category of love is that which is involved in friendship. At this point Thieme comes closest to describing positive aspects of love. Referring to I Samuel 18:1, 3, 4, he describes category 3 love as being motivated to give on the basis of its capacity.<sup>66</sup>

### **Critique**

The basic definition of the four Greek words for love that Thieme teaches is correct. However, Thieme fails to describe all of the aspects of *agape*-love, and he also fails to emphasize the place of *philos*-love in the relationships between believers in the body of Christ.

*Agape*-love, it may be admitted, is primarily a mental attitude. Thieme is also right in pointing out that *philos* is basically a stronger kind of love than

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<sup>62</sup> Thieme tape, "Phil. 2:2b."

<sup>63</sup> Thieme, *Love*, pp.13-16.

<sup>64</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977. See also the discussion of the nature of God in chapter II of this dissertation.

<sup>65</sup> Thieme, *Love*, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-28.

*agape*.<sup>67</sup> However, *agape*-love includes more than just the mental attitude; it also, includes a person's volition, and it is frequently defined in terms of positive actions, not just a relaxed mental attitude. Ethelbert Stauffer, in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, acknowledges that *agapan* has "little of the warmth of *philein*," and that "often it means no more than 'to be satisfied with something.'" He also says that "it relates more to the inward attitude" in, certain contexts. However, Stauffer observes that *agapan* normally "takes on the meaning of 'to prefer,'" and "'to esteem one person more highly than another.'" Furthermore, "*agapan* is a love which makes distinctions, choosing and keeping to its object." He says that often it should "be translated 'to show love;' it is a giving, active love on the other's behalf."<sup>68</sup> Obviously, *agape* includes the volitional choosing of its object and the commitment to do something in behalf of the object. Archbishop Trench also recognizes this aspect. He says that *agape* involves choice and selection," as well as "respect and reverence."<sup>69</sup> Thieme's complete definition of *agape* is "a relaxed mental attitude." This is a poor and limited definition because it fails to recognize the volitional aspects of love.

Thieme's definition also fails to include the active expression of giving or acting in behalf of the good of the object. As has been stated above, Stauffer sees the active aspect in the normal use of the term. This active aspect is also clear in the New Testament usage. It would seem strange indeed to insert "relaxed mental attitude" in the place of "love" in Romans 5:8. Certainly God was proving more than His relaxed mental attitude when Christ died for sinners. Paul states that giving financially is a proof of *agape*-love (11 Cor. 8:24); *agape*-love involves serving one another as slaves (Gal. 5:13); the Christian walk of love is to be an imitation of the giving-love of Christ (Eph. 5:2); the Thessalonians were commended for the labor of love; and Paul's description of love includes the expression of kind or good acts (I Corinthians 13:4 uses the present tense of the middle deponent *chresteuomai*). An even more pointed description of *agape* love is that of the Apostle John's. After stating that God's love was demonstrated through the giving of Christ to die on the cross (I Jn. 3:16; 4:9), he declares that true love gives to a brother's needs.

Even if Thieme were correct in his passive definition of *agape*, his approach to the doctrine of love would still be unbalanced. For the New Testament writers used compound forms of *philos* to exhort the believers in their relationship

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Chevevix Trench in his *Synonyms of the New Testament* observes that *diligere* answers to *agapan*, and *amare* to *philein*. Then he quotes Cicero (Ep. Fam. xiii, 47) to illustrate: "*Ut scires ilium a me non diligere solum, verum etiam amari.*" *Diligere* implies "esteem" and *amari*, "warm affection."

<sup>68</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Bethud Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, s.v. "agapao, agape agapetos," by Ethelbert Stauffer, 1(1965):36, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (London, 1980; reprinted., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdyans Publishing Company, 1960), pp. 41,42.

toward another: *philadelphia* (brotherly love), *philostorgos* (family affection), and *philoxenos* (affectionate expression to strangers, hospitality). In Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; and 1 Peter 1:22, these terms are clearly used with reference to the relationships between believers in general, not just between close friends for family members. It is also interesting to note that Peter closely ties *agape* with *philadelphia* in 2 Peter 1:7. His point is that as you grow in brotherly love (affection) in the body of Christ, you can more readily give to one another volitionally. Biblical love is clearly more than Thieme's relaxed mental attitude.

One other error should also be pointed out. Thieme wrongly encourages his people to build friendships on the basis of commitment to his teaching. A study of the scriptural contexts where the words for "friend" are used does not reveal such a concept. On the contrary, such a view tends to contradict the biblical emphasis of expressions of unity in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-3, 1 Cor. 12; Col. 3:12-4).

### **SUMMARY CRITIQUE**

Thieme has made some positive contributions to the doctrines of the spiritual life, notably the importance of vividly understanding and consistently living in accordance with grace principles in confession of sins and in the claiming of God's promises by faith. In addition, he has shown the importance of the distinctions between the human and divine viewpoints.

However, much of these positive contributions is neutralized by the significant weaknesses we have observed in Thieme's system and exegesis. Fellowship is more than a state of Christian existence, and confession (or rebound) is more than a mechanical naming of sins. "Spirituality" and "filling of the Spirit" have a different connotation in Scripture than Thieme teaches, and one is not totally under the control and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit simply by confessing known sins; obedient yielding is also a requisite. Finally, possibly one of the most serious errors is that Thieme's teaching on love is far too limited, and it can easily provide a doctrinal rationalization for the sins relating to cold indifference (See James 2:14-18).



## CHAPTER IV

### SPIRITUAL MATURITY

In recent years Thieme has developed a new set of doctrines relating to the Christian life. Most of these doctrines can be classified under the heading, "spiritual maturity." Since most of the teaching in this area is distinctive for Thieme, he describes much of his new teaching as "doctrinal breakthroughs." New teaching demands new terminology; therefore, Thieme has produced a highly technical vocabulary to communicate his new concepts. Terms such as *maturity barrier*, *super-grace*, *ultrasuper-grace*, and *grace apparatus for perception* have a central place in these new teachings. As these new doctrines and terms arise, Thieme quickly integrates the concepts into other doctrines, as is illustrated in the revisions of earlier works (such as *King of Kings and Lord of Lords*, *Mental Attitude Dynamics*, and *Dying Grace*).

#### **OBJECTIVE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

Spiritual maturity is extremely important to Thieme's entire approach to his ministry. He sees it as *the* objective of the Christian life and, therefore, of the church.

#### **The Context of the Christian Life**

In his attempt at clarifying life's objectives, Thieme considers it important for his students to understand the larger context of life in which they are called to live. Whether the believer likes it or not, he is situated in "enemy territory" -- in Satan's world system (or *cosmos diabolicus*). The Christian is "locked in invisible but deadly combat with an unseen, mighty foe -- the Devil and his demonic army (Eph. 6:12)." This is what Thieme calls the "angelic conflict." The objectives of the Christian life are directly related to the state of war in which the Christian finds himself.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Objective Described**

Using the analogy of the battle cry, "follow the colors," Thieme vividly describes the biblical challenge to reach God's objective of spiritual maturity in Satan's territory. The phrase, "follow the colors," according to Thieme, in the history of warfare was "the command to join the fray and strike a mortal blow

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<sup>1</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Follow the Colors* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1975), p. 2.

against the enemy; to fight to attain the high ground-the place of victory."<sup>2</sup> Thieme teaches that Jesus Christ "won the strategic victory by his substitutionary death on the cross, his burial, resurrection, ascension and session at the right hand of the throne of the Father." Tactical victories in the spiritual warfare are the objectives of the Christian between the first and second advents of Christ, and each step in the growth of a Christian is a tactical victory. He summarizes succinctly what is involved:

As we once exploited the strategic victory of the Cross by personal faith in the Son of God (Acts 16:3 1), so we are now exhorted to FOLLOW THE COLORS by a consistent intake of Bible doctrine. By means of that same doctrine resident in our souls, we advance to the HIGH GROUND OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY. Once we have seized the high ground of super-grace, which constitutes the normal Christian live, we are commanded to HOLD that position by continued positive volition toward Bible doctrine and unflinching application of the divine viewpoint to every decision in life!<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the central and overruling objective of the Christian's life is not serving Christ or even developing Christ-like character. It is reaching a high level of maturity, measured in terms of one's accrued knowledge of Bible doctrine and his degree of positive volition toward that doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Objective Seen in Relation to Christ's Death**

An interesting aspect of the teaching on the objective of the Christian life is the recurring reference to Christ's words on the cross: "Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." (Luke 23:46). Thieme observes that this is a quotation of Psalm 31:5, where the psalmist says "Into Thy hand I commit my Spirit; Thou hast ransomed Me, O Lord, God of Truth." (NASV) Thieme claims that when Jesus said He commended His spirit to the Father, He was also implying the content of the rest of Psalm 31:5. He translates the word, *ransomed* by the term, *delivered*, and then he teaches that Christ was sustained "throughout His ministry and His deaths on the cross" by the truth (Bible doctrine) of the God of Truth. From this type of reasoning he concludes, "In His dying breath, He passed on the colors to the Royal Family. It is our mission to follow Bible doctrine to the high ground of the super-grace life!"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Thieme, *Reversionism*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

## Analysis of Maturity: The Edification Complex of the Soul

Thieme has coined a term to describe the elements in the life of a mature believer: "the edification complex of the Soul. The term, and the concept related to it, help to clarify the first major stage in reaching the objective of maturity.<sup>6</sup> Thieme frequently uses this doctrinal term in his exegesis, interpreting many biblical terms to refer to spiritual maturity in the way Thieme describes it in the edification complex.<sup>7</sup>

*Biblical basis for the term.* Thieme first defends his use of the term, *edification complex*, by a study of *oikodomia* and its cognates. The Greek term obviously refers to the erection or building of a house or structure. Then he examines the New Testament use of *oikodomia* in three major passages:

First, the objective in the communication of doctrine from the pastor-teacher is the erection of the Edification Complex (Eph. 4:11, 12). Second, a local church with a maximum number of Edification Complexes is prosperous and has dynamic impact for Christ. Third, the objective of Phase Two is the erection of an Edification Complex, not speaking in tongues (I Cor. 14:3, 3, 12, 26). Fourth, we have the principle that human knowledge puffs up, but the function of GAP in the sphere of love edifies or builds up -- erects an ECS (I Cor. 8:1).<sup>8</sup>

*The floors of the Edification Complex.* In order to spell out carefully what is involved in spiritual maturity, Thieme lists five aspects of maturity under the analogy of floors of the Edification Complex. The first floor is "grace orientation." Grace orientation is the believer's knowledge of his place and purpose in the plan of God. Thieme puts this in even more specific terms, "it is a maximum assimilation of Bible doctrine to the point where you become cognizant of the character of God, the plan of God and the blessing of man."<sup>9</sup> (See Fig. 6.)<sup>10</sup>

The second floor in the Edification Complex is the "mastery of the details of life." Thieme teaches that a person with the divine viewpoint has so designed his life that Bible doctrine is in first place and everything else is merely a detail

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<sup>6</sup> The stages of maturity beyond the parts of the edification complex are super-grace and ultra-super-grace.

<sup>7</sup> Thieme reads his "edification complex" into "light" in Ps. 43:3, 119:130; Eph. 5,8,13; and I John 2:8-11; "glory of God" in Jer. 13:16 and I Cor. II: 7; "fullness of God" in Eph. 3:19; "imitators of God" in Eph. 5:1; Christ at home in your hearts in Eph. 3:17; "Christ formed in you" in Gal. 4:19; "the new man" in Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10; "obeying the truth" in I Pet. 1:22; and "the perfect work" in James 1:4.

<sup>8</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Edification Complex of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), pp. 8, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68, 69. See also discussion of grace in Chapter 11 of this dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 26.

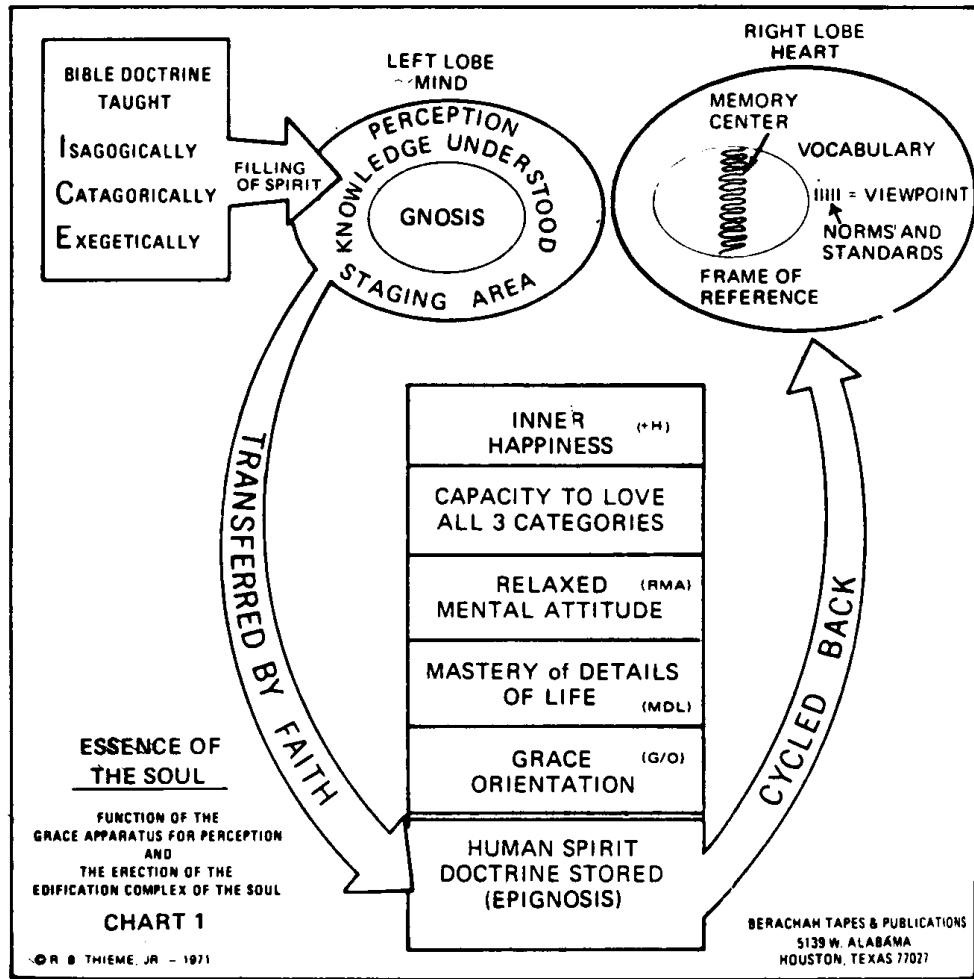


Fig. 6. The Edification Complex of the Soul

(money, material things, friends, pleasure, success, health, sex, loved ones and status symbols). This mastery of the details of life is what Paul describes in Philippians 4:9-12: "to be content."<sup>11</sup>

The third floor of the Edification Complex is a "relaxed mental attitude" (RMA). Thieme's basis for his teaching on relaxed mental attitude is his definition of the term, *agape*, as we have already seen in the previous chapter. The relaxed mental attitude (or *agape*-love) is dependent upon the "undergirding of both grace orientation and the mastery of the details of life."<sup>12</sup>

The fourth floor is described as "capacity to love." Again, this floor is the product of the first three floors. This type of love is described in the New Testament by the term, *philos*. Thieme claims that *philos*-type love is "never commanded" in the Scriptures, only *agape*-type love. We are commanded to have a relaxed mental attitude (*agape*-love), and this helps to build the foundation for the capacity for "total soul love" (*philos*-type love). Once one has matured to this level, he is capable of all three categories of love: responding to God's love by occupation with the person of Christ, love directed toward one's right man or right woman; and love directed toward friends.<sup>13</sup>

The top floor of the Edification Complex is "inner happiness," described by Thieme as "Plus-H" or "the penthouse of the Edification Complex." This is the "full joy" of I John 1:4 and the "joy unspeakable" of I Peter 1:8. Apparently Thieme is contrasting this kind of joy with the fruit of the spirit, which is also described as joy. According to Thieme, full joy or inner happiness is the product of Bible doctrine once the fourth floor of the Edification Complex has been erected.<sup>14</sup>

## Critique

The most glaring shortcoming of Thieme's analysis of the objective of the Christian life is that he does not present a balanced view of what the objective is. The Christian's life objectives include not only developing grace orientation, mastery of the details of life, a relaxed mental attitude, the capacity to love, and inner happiness, but they should also include the development of a deeper personal relationship with Christ (Phil. 3:10a) learning how to tap divine power in prayer and daily living (Phil. 3:10b), learning what it means to be identified with Christ in his suffering (Phil. 3:10c), serving God so that everything one does glorifies God (I Cor. 10:31), and completing every responsibility God has given to us for the course of our lives (2 Tim. 4:7).<sup>15</sup> This last objective includes one's

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<sup>11</sup> Thieme, *Edification*, pp. 73, 74.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-84.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84-90.

<sup>15</sup> See discussion of 2 Timothy 4:7 in section on rewards in this chapter.

part in fulfilling the great commission of Christ to disciple the nations (Matt. 28:19, 20). This lack of balance is not merely academic. It is a serious defect in Thieme's teachings for it produces students who are either negative or indifferent toward active evangelism and ministering to the needs of others.<sup>16</sup>

Also, although Thieme has emphasized some of the characteristics of spiritual maturity found in Scripture, he leaves a wrong impression of what fully constitutes maturity. Paradoxically his teaching is at the same time both an oversimplification and also an overly complex system. The terminology makes the teaching seem complex, but the analysis itself is simplistic, as it reduces an extremely broad concept to just five characteristics. The Scriptures describe spiritual maturity in terms of Christ-likeness (Eph. 4:13), and the character of Christ involves much more than Thieme's description of the Edification Complex.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, it should also be observed that Thieme's statements concerning the "mastering of the details of life" disregard the biblical approach to one's priorities. Thieme makes family and friends secondary to Bible doctrine. This is an extremely dangerous approach (as illustrated in the cults such as the Children of God who define commitment to God in terms of commitment to their leaders' teachings, and then place the group above family and other relationships). A healthy set of priorities should place one's personal relationship with God first (Lk. 14:26), family second (I Pet. 3:1-7; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 5:8; and John 15:13), and one's relationship to a teacher and his doctrine at a much lower level of priority (3 John 9, 10).

## ***PROCESS FOR GROWTH***

In order to reach the objective of spiritual maturity, the believer goes through a growing process. Thieme teaches that God has made special provisions by grace, which Thieme calls the "grace apparatus for perception" (GAP), and the proper function of those provisions in the life of the believer (function of GAP) will produce spiritual maturity. The new believer cannot simply read the Bible for himself to mature; he must also engage in the function of GAP.<sup>18</sup>

### **Review of Thieme's Model of the Immaterial Part of Man**

In Chapter II, we presented a brief summary of Thieme's doctrine of the immaterial part of man. In this we noted that Thieme distinguishes between the

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<sup>16</sup> Sharon Farmer in an interview, 29 September 1977, stated that she became so involved in her own maturity through the intake of doctrine that she almost completely stopped witnessing to lost friends.

<sup>17</sup> Thieme's five floors of the edification complex are important parts of the characteristics of maturity. However, he is arbitrary in his selection of these particular traits alone.

<sup>18</sup> See documentation under critique of doctrine of right pastor in Chapter V.

soul and spirit of man. He also distinguishes between the mind and the heart and describes them as the left lobe and the right lobe of the soul. The left lobe is the aspect of the human mentality that perceives content. The right lobe consists of a frame of reference with a memory center, a vocabulary, norms and standards, and one's viewpoint. The mind (or left lobe), the heart (or right lobe), and the human spirit are the three parts of the human immaterial soul that are involved in the process of GAP.

## **Human IQ and Spiritual IQ**

Thieme is convinced that any believer can understand Bible doctrine and grow thereby.<sup>19</sup> He teaches that God has provided a grace plan that "makes it possible for a believer who may be only a few degrees above moron to understand the same doctrine as a believer who is a genius."<sup>20</sup> Understanding and categorization of Bible doctrine is not based upon human IQ, educational background or natural perspicacity. From his exposition of Ephesians 3:18 and I Corinthians 2:9-11. Thieme concludes that there is a difference between one's spiritual IQ and one's human IQ. Human IQ is a measurement of one's basic intelligence. Spiritual IQ is indicated "in the Hebrew by the noun CHAKMAH, often translated 'wisdom.' In the Greek, it is designated primarily by the word *epignosis*, which is usually translated 'knowledge,' ....."<sup>21</sup>

The Greek term, *epignosis*, is used by Thieme as a technical term to describe the end product of the process or function of GAP. It is knowledge which is understood and fully possessed. It is "doctrine in the human spirit and/or in the heart or right lobe."<sup>22</sup> One with *epignosis* is a person with divine wisdom or spiritual IQ.

## **Grace Provisions for Learning Doctrine**

In keeping with his emphasis on grace, Thieme teaches that the whole process of spiritual growth is dependent upon God's grace. He lists nine provisions that make learning doctrine possible: (1) the formation and preservation of the canon of Scripture (Matt. 24:35; 1 Pet. 1:23); (2) divine authorization for the local

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<sup>19</sup> Thieme, *Super-grace*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

church as a classroom for learning doctrine (Col. 2:7; Heb. 10:25)<sup>23</sup>; (3) the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher for the authoritative communication of doctrine (Eph. 4: 1 1; I Tim. 1: II; Titus 2:1 5); (4) the royal priesthood of the believer, for the freedom and privacy of reception of the doctrine <sup>24</sup> (I Pet. 2:9); (5) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the proper function of GAP (I Cor. 2:9- 16; 6:19; 1 John 2:27); (6) the rebound technique as the grace means of filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18; 1 John 1:9); (7) the provision of the human spirit as the secondary target of GAP <sup>25</sup> (Job 32:8; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; Eph. 1: 17); (8) God's grace in the human anatomy (such provisions as human brain cells and the bodily functions that allow a person to be able to learn anything); and (9) provision of divine laws of establishment for the protection of the freedom and privacy of the local church.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Mechanics of GAP**

Thieme acknowledges that the mere intellectual intake of facts falls far short of true spiritual maturity. He maintains that the individual believer has certain responsibilities for the process to take place. Among these are his positive volition toward doctrinal teaching without being distracted by some feature about the communicator, his recognition of the authority of the pastor-teacher and a willingness to submit to his authority and to accept academic discipline, his concentration on the message, and his acceptance by faith of the doctrine which is being taught. In order to communicate these concepts, Thieme has constructed an elaborate system. It involves five stages of operation which utilize the grace provisions listed in the preceding section. It is therefore called the "grace apparatus for perception" (GAP).

The first stage is called "operation 'ICE.'" This is the application of Thieme's study methodology in his teaching approach. The three letters of the acronym, *ICE*, stand for isagogics, categorical teaching, and exegesis. A more detailed study of this methodology is found in Chapter 1.<sup>27</sup>

The second stage is called "operation gnosis." Thieme uses the Greek, *gnosis*, since it means "knowledge understood objectively." In other words, basic com-

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<sup>23</sup> Thieme qualifies this provision by stating that a local church does not qualify to do this unless it "provides consistent and accurate doctrinal teaching;" otherwise, the believer should use tapes (GAP, p. 10). There is some validity to this emphasis on sound teaching. However, there can be two practical abuses of this perspective: first, the measurement for determining sound teaching can become Thieme's system, interpretation and terminology, instead of the Scriptures themselves and historic, evangelical doctrine; second, the implication is that one should use only Thieme's tapes, and ignore the rich provision of sound teaching from other capable Bible teachers in the body. (Note the Corinthian heresy in I Cor. 1-3 and note also the plural in Eph. 4:1 1).

<sup>24</sup> The doctrine of privacy will be discussed in Chapter V.

<sup>25</sup> GAP and the human spirit will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>26</sup> Thieme, *GAP*, pp. 1-21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 22.

prehension of spiritual truth must take place before maturing can take place. Three basic factors are required before one can even have the basic comprehension of spiritual truth: positive volition (Luke 8:18), recognition of the authority of the pastor-teacher (I Cor. 16:15, 16; 1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17), and concentration (Mark 4:23; Luke II: 28; 2 Pet. 1: 19). All three of these must be carried out while a person is being filled by the Holy Spirit (which in Thieme's system means that they have no unconfessed sins.).<sup>28</sup>

Stage three is "operation epignosis." James speaks not only of hearing the word but also of doing the word. The step in the process that moves toward doing the word, Thieme calls, "operation epignosis." This is the critical part of his entire process; it is "the decisive point in the assimilation of doctrine." *Gnosis* (comprehended truth) must be converted to *epignosis* (full knowledge); that is, knowledge in a form that can affect the entire mentality of the soul (frame of reference, conscience, viewpoint, etc.) and can produce application in the form of divine good. How does one actually convert *gnosis* to *epignosis*? Since the system must be nonmeritorious --"compatible, with grace," it must be by means of "faith-rest," that is, it is mixing the promises and *doctrines* of God with Faith; i.e., believing God, God's Word." One develops *epignosis* by having a positive volition toward doctrine and believing what is taught.<sup>29</sup>

Once a person possesses *epignosis* he automatically begins to produce divine good. Turning to-a key passage on application, James 1:21, Thieme interprets the word *emphuton* to mean "impregnated." Then he lists four categories of children produced by the impregnated word (*epignosis*):

Conception in the human spirit leads to four categories of children: (1) the frame of reference children (basis for learning advanced doctrine), which are born through the cycling of EPIGNOSIS into the right lobe. (2) the application -- the exhale out the left bank of the soul toward God (worship, prayer, etc.) and from the right bank toward man (relaxed mental attitude, divine good, etc.). (3) the eyesight children: EPIGNOSIS is sight to the soul (perception of spiritual phenomenon). (4) the edification complex children: grace orientation, mastery of the details of life, relaxed mental attitude, capacity to love in all three categories (God, opposite sex, friends), and inner happiness.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth stage in the function of GAP is called "operation heart." The third stage involves the deposit of *epignosis* in the human spirit. Stage four moves *epignosis* from the human spirit to the human heart where it can be applied. The heart, as we have already noticed, is that part of the soul's mentality that

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-24.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-29.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

includes the memory center, frame of reference, vocabulary and categories, viewpoint, and norms and standards. *Epignosis* is transferred from the human spirit to the heart (or right lobe) as the person applies a doctrine, comprehended and believed, to his frame of reference. Thieme does not explain exactly how this is done for the first time, but he explains that once some doctrine is stored in the frame of reference in the right lobe (heart) a "vacuum pump" is created, and from then on *epignosis* is drawn from the human spirit into the frame of reference and memory center automatically. He then presses his analogy and further analyzes the process in the heart's memory center. The memory center has two valves: "the top valve conveys doctrine to the vocabulary and categories (SUNESIS in the Greek); the bottom valve, to the norms and standards (SUNEIDESIS)." Once doctrine has affected all of the areas of the right lobe (or heart), it is "relayed to the 'launching pad' for application to experience." At this point it is called "SOPHIA or 'divine wisdom'."<sup>31</sup>

The fifth and final stage of GAP is "operation glory." This is the accumulation of doctrine in the human spirit and soul until the believer reaches 'maturity or super-grace.' At this point the believer "glorifies God (Eph. 3:14-21)."<sup>32</sup>

## Critique

One's first reaction to this extremely complex analysis of the maturity process is that it is totally absurd, and that Thieme must not be serious -- but apparently he is serious. After making some observations about the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom and about the significance of the term *epignosis*, he begins to believe his own detailed description of the soul and spirit and to push it to extremes far beyond any biblical teaching. One striking characteristic of Thieme's in-depth analysis in this area is the almost total absence of sound exegesis. The statement in James 1:21 concerning the implanted word (*emphuton logon*) is expanded without any exegetical basis to describe four of Thieme's own categories of production. A brief reference to Peter's reminding of believers to remember certain doctrines is supposed to be a sufficient biblical base for the concept of the memory center "valves."

Although it is proper to observe the special emphasis that the term *epignosis* has, Thieme has overstated the distinctions between *gnosis* and *epignosis*. Knowledge (*gnosis*) does not have the highly technical sense employed by Thieme. It is used of the knowledge in the mind of God (Rom.11:33), and it is also used of one of the building blocks in the structuring of Christian character in 2 Peter 1:5 (Here the term seems more in keeping with Thieme's concept of *epignosis*.). It is probably best to take the term *gnosis* to refer to knowledge in general, including at times *epignosis*; *epignosis* does, however, seem to have a more spe-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,pp. 29, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,p. 34.

cialized use: Christian knowledge which "carries with it a corresponding manner of life."<sup>33</sup>

There are two primary problems with Thieme's concept of the process of growth (the function of GAP). First, it demands a view of the pastor-teacher that is not in keeping with the biblical statements nor with the biblical mentality. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Second, the entire process that Thieme propounds can be reduced to one phrase: *Be positive toward and believe what is taught*. Not only does this concept dangerously produce a blind dependency on a pastor-teacher, but it fails to encompass the clear scriptural pattern for growth. Paul's classic passage on spiritual maturity, Ephesians 4, indicates two aspects of the process that Thieme has overlooked. First, verse 16 teaches that spiritual growth takes place through the contact and interaction of the members of the body of Christ, as every spiritual gift in the body functions and ministers to other gifts. Second, the subject of "speaking the truth in love" in verse 15 is "we." In the context this means the whole body of believers.

Not only does the process of spiritual maturity involve all of the members of the body ministering to one another, but the biblical pattern requires application of truth, not only as a result of maturity but as a part of the process of growing itself. Christ taught that a volitional decision to obey God's will would result in discernment (John 7:17). He also taught that the building of our spiritual house and its stability depends upon acting upon the teachings of Christ (Matt. 7:24-27). Also the writer of Hebrews taught that a key element in spiritual maturity is the discernment between good and evil, and he indicated that practical exercise (*hexin*) was necessary to develop mature discernment. The maturing process is not sitting under a particular, authoritative pastor-teacher every night of the week and responding with positive faith. It is the loving communication of the truths of God's Word by all of the members of the body, expressing the particular illumination that the Holy Spirit gives to each person in accordance with his particular gift. The pastor-teacher and the evangelist (Eph. 4:1 lb) are to equip the saints (all believers) with the tools for personal Bible study and application; the saints, in turn, carry out the work of service for the purpose of building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). Each individual Christian grows as he responds to the truth so communicated to him. That response includes both attitude changes and overt actions.

Thieme's GAP approach is totally off-balanced. Not only does it fail to enhance true spiritual growth, it actually can inhibit true growth by giving the believer a false sense of maturity, not unlike the "puffed up" believer in I Corinthians 8: 1.

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<sup>33</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, s.v. "*ginosko, gnosis, epiginosko, epignosis*," by Rudolph Bultmann, 1(1964):707.

## **STAGES OF GROWTH**

One of the more recent developments in Thieme's theology is his analysis of the advanced stages of growth through which a believer can go if he continues to function with GAP. Thieme claims to have discovered some new categories in the spiritual lives of men like Paul, Abraham, and Moses. The primary terms used to describe these advanced stages of growth are *super-grace* and *ultra-super-grace*.

### **General Categories of the Plan of Grace**

Thieme has arranged God's gracious provisions for man according to five types of grace. First, "saying grace" is a way of referring to phase 1. It is the work of the Trinity in accomplishing our salvation. Second, "living grace" is a description of God's provisions in phase 2. It "includes all that the Trinity must do in order to keep the believer alive in the Devil's world." It includes both daily needs, such as food, shelter, transportation and clothing as well as Bible doctrine and GAP. Third, "super-grace" refers to "the higher ground of the tactical victory of the angelic conflict and the objective of the Christian life." It is an advanced stage of spiritual maturity. Fourth, "dying grace" is God's gracious provision whereby he transfers the "super-grace believer into heaven under conditions of special blessing, whereby dying becomes even greater than living." Finally, "surpassing grace" is a term for what is involved in phase 3: "the special blessings and rewards that belong to the super-grace believer in eternity."<sup>34</sup>

It is obvious that Thieme has coined a number of terms from the word, *grace*, and the coined terms carry a much broader significance than the root meaning of the word *grace*.

### **Description of the Stages of Growth**

According to Thieme, God has a great amount of blessing that he desires to give to man by grace. However, unless the believer is mature enough to have a capacity to receive and to utilize properly the blessings, normally God is restrained from providing these grace-blessings. The stage of spiritual maturity to which one must attain in order to be so blessed has been named "super-grace" by Thieme.

In order to understand better this stage of maturity, one needs to have a picture of the life of one who becomes completely mature. At the moment a person receives Christ as Savior he is positionally in Christ and is guaranteed ultimate sanctification. He is called a "baby" Christian. As he begins to grow, he enters into the stage called "sophomoreship," and progresses until he erects his "edification complex." At this point he can break the "maturity barrier,"

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<sup>34</sup> Thieme, *Follow*, pp. 9-15.

and move into "super-grace." Thieme distinguishes between the early phase of super-grace and the later phase by designating them "super-grace A" and "super-grace B." Then, if he lives long enough and continues to grow by regular attendance at Bible class and the function of GAP, he crosses "no man's land" into 'ultra-super-grace." If he should die as a super-grace believer or an ultra-super-grace believer, he is assured of "dying grace" blessings. Then he enters into eternity future where all believers are guaranteed ultimate sanctification, but where super-grace and ultra-super-grace believers receive "surpassing grace riches" (or rewards, "crowns" in the New Testament).<sup>35</sup>

The basic distinction between super-grace and ultra-super-grace is that the former is the stage of spiritual maturity in which the believer has developed the capacity for receiving great blessings from the grace of God, and the latter is the stage in which the believer receives maximum opposition by the satanic forces of evil. This opposition to the ultra-super-grace believer only intensifies the blessing of super-grace. This opposition often comes from "reversionistic"<sup>36</sup> believers.<sup>37</sup>

## Scriptural Basis

Thieme builds his argument for the existence of stages in spiritual growth from the biblical references to the difference between babes and mature Christians (Heb. 5: 1 1-14; Eph. 4:11-16; Rom. 15: 1-6; 1 Cor. 3:1-3). He also recognizes the stages in the life of the mature believer, Paul, as exemplified in Philippians 3 and 2 Timothy 4.<sup>38</sup> With this basic framework, Thieme then does a detailed exegesis of James 4:6 as a basis for the term, *super-grace*. The two words, *meizona ... charin* (translated, "greater grace"), he claims, refer to additional gracious provisions that God promises for believers who have matured through the function of GAP.<sup>39</sup> He concludes that the meaning of the term *greater grace* fits the definition of his coined term, *super-grace*, and he even adds the word *super* to the word *grace* in verse 6 (where the only word James uses is *charin* (grace). Then he presses another of his doctrinal categories (GAP) on the text and gives the following explanation:

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<sup>35</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 3:15b Doc./Mental Attitude; Technical Vocabulary," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 2 January 1976.

<sup>36</sup> "Reversionism" will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>37</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 4 Doctrine of Maturity, Pts. 1-4," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 15 Much 1976.

<sup>38</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977. In Philippians 3:15 the word *teleioi* (translated "perfect") actually means "mature," which Thieme defines as one with a constructed edification complex and labels as a "super-grace believer."

<sup>39</sup> Thieme, *Super-Grace*, pp. 25, 26.

He gives believers GREATER GRACE -- and that's SUPER-GRACE! But the Holy Spirit gives super-grace through His teaching ministry of doctrine (John 14:26; 16:12-15; 1 Cor. 2:9-16). God the Holy Spirit, in other words, is the One who enables GAP to function.<sup>40</sup>

Thieme sees that the Holy Spirit graciously provides GAP through which super grace status can be attained, and thus the Spirit supplies super-grace status itself. This interpretation is seen in Thieme's translation of James 4:5, 6:

Or do you presume that the Scripture says to no purpose, face to face with you as a jealous person, (the Spirit who dwells permanently in us deeply loves; moreover, he gives GREATER GRACE, on which account he says) that God opposes the arrogant, but gives (super) grace to the humble.<sup>41</sup>

With his exegesis of James 4 and the example of the progress in the life of Paul as a basis, Thieme then proceeds to observe stages of growth in the lives of many biblical saints, and he freely attaches his technical term, *super-grace*, to any passage that he is exegeting which includes a reference to certain godly qualities, normally expected in the life of a mature believer.

The teaching of the ultra-super-grace status is the result of observing that Paul was already in super-grace status when he wrote the book of Philippians. Yet he said that he had not reached the goal God set before him for his life. In 2 Timothy, Paul stated that he had reached the goals of his life. The obvious conclusion then is that there is something beyond super-grace. Thieme calls this "ultra-super-grace."

## Critique

This unique, systematic study of spiritual growth and stages of maturity is another example of the weakness in Thieme's methodology. He has allowed his own categories and definitions to dominate his exegesis. It is readily admitted and commonly taught that one may speak in general terms of the stages of Christian growth: baby, child, youth, old man (Heb. 5:13; Eph. 4; and possibly I John 2:12-14). However, James 4 is not dealing with spiritual maturity. The subject of the passage is friendship with the world versus submission to God.<sup>42</sup> Had Thieme's frame of reference been that of a "biblical theologian" instead of that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p.630-31.

of a "systematic theologian" only, he would have been governed by James' thought forms and could have avoided a series of erroneous additions to his concepts of maturity.<sup>43</sup>

The major problem with Thieme's interpretation of James 4 is that he has forced the meaning of one of his own theological terms onto one of James' terms, and then hails James' teaching as exegetical support for his doctrine. Thieme defines super-grace as "that stage in the Christian's life which lies beyond the point of spiritual maturity and which appropriates and utilizes God's grace toward maximum function and production."<sup>44</sup> However, James used the term *greater grace* to refer to "undeserved favor of all kinds" which God provides for "the lowly or humble" who "realize that they have nothing," and who "are happy to receive God's rich grace which satisfies their souls."<sup>45</sup> Thieme's theological frame of reference is the subject of maturity, but James' frame of reference is the contrast between friendship with the world and haughtiness, on the one hand, over against friendship with God and humility, on the other. The humble friend of God need not fear, God will supply him even more grace.

Also when one examines Thieme's teachings, he is impressed with the arbitrary divisions he makes in the growth process. Thieme himself admits that such lines of demarcation as the "maturity barrier" cannot be clearly defined in the Scriptures or in life. He sees this terminology primarily as a teaching tool to communicate the concept that greater growth results in greater blessing from God.<sup>46</sup> Since his exegetical basis is so weak, Thieme should clarify regularly the fact that much of his terminology is the product of teaching technique and not exegesis, especially in view of his dogmatic insertion of his coined terms into his "corrected translations" of Scripture.

Although it is not a necessary result of the teaching, without safeguards this teaching can produce some false mentalities in Christian students of the teaching. One could develop a view toward the Christian community as being divided into classes of Christians, some of whom would be superior, super-grace believers, and others just sophomores.<sup>47</sup> Also, for some this could deteriorate into a works spirituality: legalistically attending Bible class every night of the week so as to be able to reach super-grace. Furthermore, this whole concept of maturity can leave someone with an over-simplistic view of the spiritual life -- just attend Bible class, pay attention, believe what is taught, and you will automatically grow to the state of super-grace. This leaves little room for the biblical emphasis on time

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<sup>43</sup> In order to arrive at his interpretation, Thieme must force a parenthetical clause into verses 5 and 6 of James 4, beginning with *epipothei*. There is nothing in the context, nor in the syntax, that would demand such a parenthesis.

<sup>44</sup> Thieme, *Super-grace*, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Lenski, *Hebrews and James*, p. 630.

<sup>46</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>47</sup> It should be added that Thieme in an interview, 14 June 1977, specifically stated that a person cannot, at a particular point; in his life, say that he is in super-grace.

for personal prayer fellowship with God, personal Bible study and life situation exercise of the truth as it is applied.

## ***THE DIVINE RESPONSE TO GROWTH***

As one develops spiritually, according to Thieme, God responds with special blessings to the degree that the believer has developed the capacity to receive and handle those blessings. Since the only method by which a person can grow spiritually is to be under the teaching of his right pastor, students of Thieme are highly motivated to daily attend Bible class or listen to tapes. These blessings can be categorized into two parts: blessings in life and rewards in eternity.

### **Blessings in Life**

As the result of the "strategic victory of the Cross," Christ is able to distribute the "spoils of victory" to believers. This, according to Thieme, is taught in Isaiah 53:12. Furthermore, these great blessings are reserved only for the "super-grace believer."<sup>48</sup> Following is Thieme's interpretative translation of Isaiah 53:11, 12:

From sorrow of His (God the Father's) soul, he shall see (Christ bearing our sins); he will be satisfied. By knowledge of Him (Christ), my righteous Servant (Christ) will justify the many believers; for He and only He will bear their punishment for sin (literal translation, Isa. 53:11). Therefore, I (God the Father) will distribute the gain (plunder of victory) to Him (Christ) because of the many (believers). Then He will distribute the gain to the great ones (super-grace believers) . . . (lit. trans. Isa. 53:12).<sup>49</sup>

Thieme categorizes these blessings into two major parts. First are the temporal blessings: "promotion, wealth, success, social and sexual prosperity," the second are spiritual blessings: "occupation with Christ, God's happiness, super-grace capacities for life, love and freedom."<sup>50</sup> Not every believer receives every one of these blessings when he is mature enough to have the capacity to receive blessings in their fullness. Thieme teaches that each individual believer has a set of planned blessings especially designed for him to be given to him when he has matured enough to have the capacity to receive and properly utilize the blessing. Thieme calls this set of blessings one's "super-grace paragraph." The term, *super-grace paragraph*, indicates one extremely important aspect of this teaching.

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<sup>48</sup> Thieme, *Follow*, pp. 12, 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

All of these blessings which God has reserved for each individual believer cannot be OVEN by the grace of God until the believer reaches super-grace status in his spiritual growth.<sup>51</sup> He concludes, "The greater portion of the blessing which God has designed for believers is related to the super-grace status of growth in the spiritual life."<sup>52</sup>

## Rewards in Eternity

Thieme observes that the New Testament uses the emblem of crowns (*stephanoi*), and the Old Testament uses the analogy of ruling over cities, to picture the rewards that God has reserved for certain believers in eternity future. He teaches that these crowns are awarded for degrees of spiritual maturity. The crown of righteousness, in 2 Timothy 4:7, 8, will be given to all believers who break the maturity barrier and become either super-grace or ultra-super-grace believers. The crown of life in James 1: 12 will be given only to ultra-super-grace believers who have been surrounded by satanic persecution and maximum pressure and endured the suffering while constantly loving Christ. The crown of glory, in I Peter 5:4, will be given to those pastor-teachers who, through personal study, mature themselves and lead their people to ultra-super-grace status. The crown related to joy, in Philippians 4:1, will be given to those believers who break the maturity barrier and experience true inner happiness.

Thieme's approach to the crowns (*stephanoi*) of Scripture centers in his study of the Roman army. Although he recognizes that the athletic analogy is found in Scripture and that the wreath-crowns were given to victors in the athletic competition, he chooses to emphasize the Roman use of the wreath-crown as a "medal of honor." The Latin equivalent for *stephanos* was *corona*, and the *corona* was primarily used as a military decoration. He then attempts to relate the analogy to the subject of the biblical rewards by indicating that the more mature the person becomes the better soldier he is in the spiritual warfare. Thus, he is worthy of the wreath-crown rewards.<sup>53</sup>

These blessings in eternity future are categorized as "surpassing grace" blessings, based upon Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:7: "In order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." These blessings are reserved for the super-grace and ultra-super-grace believers who have claimed the "super-grace paragraph of blessing in time."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 2 Via 2 Tim. 4 Three Wreath Decorations SG Subscript 3," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 27 December 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Thieme, Follow, p. 14.

## Critique

It seems to be a valid conclusion that one's maturity provides him with a greater capacity to handle whatever comes to him in life. Paul speaks of this in Philippians 4:11-13. However, one is hard pressed to find any New Testament support for the notion that God measures out temporal blessings to believers during the church age according to their level of maturity. The motivation for spiritual maturity in the Scriptures is not one of looking for more material blessings. Rather, it is in order that the individual believer might both glorify God through his life and in order that he might have the joy of coming to know God, to know the power of the resurrection of Christ, and to know the fellowship of Christ's suffering (Phil. 3:1-10).

When it comes to explaining the analogy of the wreath-crowns, Thieme allows his military frame of reference to govern his exegesis. The only explanation of the wreath-crown in the context of rewards for believers in the New Testament is that it is the reward for winning in athletic competition. Nevertheless, whether the analogy is a military one or an athletic one, Thieme has overlooked the significance of the analogy as it relates to maturity and action or service. Thieme concludes that the service or action of a person has nothing to do directly with rewards; rewards are given for one's status of maturity. However, assuming, the military analogy to be true, the Roman wreath-crown was not awarded to a soldier because he had attained a particular rank; he could receive the wreath-crown at any rank, for it was awarded for heroic action.<sup>55</sup> In the case of the athletic analogy, the wreath-crown was not given for being in shape; it was for completing and winning the race.

Admittedly, spiritual maturity is a critically important issue, but the emphasis of the rewards in eternity in the New Testament is on production. Paul had finished his course (2-Tim. 4:7), which must have included both his preparation for running the course (spiritual maturity) and the actual running of the life that God had designed for him (service and response to the circumstances of life).<sup>56</sup> The believers at Philippi and Thessalonica (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19) were the product of Paul's ministry; that is why they are referred to as crowns. The shepherds in I Peter 5:14 will be rewarded for the way they have acted in theft shepherding ministry, serving as examples to the flock, not lording it over them. The crown of life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10) will be given for heroic action; that is, undergoing and standing up under persecution even until death. Neither James nor Christ (in Revelation) state that such persecution will not come on a person until he reaches an extremely highly mature status.

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), pp. xxii, 296.

<sup>56</sup> Note also the emphasis on production, not maturity, in Jesus' parable of the pounds (or minas) in Luke 19:11-27.

Most of Thieme's teaching in this area is based upon assumptions, humanly devised categories and poor exegesis. It, therefore, is quite unsound and results in a faulty conclusion that rewards will be based entirely on one's level of maturity.

## ***HINDRANCES TO GROWTH: REVERSIONISM***

Evangelicals have, in the past, described a Christian who began to live contrary to the Scriptures as a backslider. Thieme's coined term for such a person is *reversionist*.<sup>57</sup> Over the years Thieme has coined other terms to describe various hindrances to spiritual growth: terms such as *emotional revolt of the soul* and *scar tissue on the soul*. In his more recent studies, he has included these under reversionism.

### **Definition**

In its simplest terms, reversionism is "a negative status toward Bible doctrine in phase 2." It is characterized by a "failure to function under GAP," and "perpetual carnality." It should be distinguished from carnality, however. Carnality and spirituality are absolutes in Thieme's system, and they depend upon who is in control of the believer's life, the Holy Spirit or the Old Sin Nature. On the, other hand, reversionism is relative, though it results in carnality most of the time.<sup>58</sup>

### **Biblical Basis**

Recognizing that the Scriptures refer to a believer's walking contrary to the will of God, in rebellion against God, and continually characterized by different forms of carnality, Thieme determined to group these various sinful situations under one overall heading. He chose the term *reversionism*, and deduced a definition. Since God's will is revealed through His Word, and since Bible doctrine is the categorization of God's Word, it follows that any rebellion against God's Word is rebellion against God, and any rejection of Bible doctrine is rebellion against God's Word. With this basic concept in mind, Thieme lists ten different ways in which the Scriptures describe reversionism: "drifting off course from grace" (Gal. 5:4); "being an enemy of the cross" (Phil. 3:18); "uncircumcision of heart" (Jer. 9:25, 26); "failing of the grace of God" (Heb. 12-15); "a tortured soul" (2 Pet. 2:7, 8); "an unstable soul" (2 Pet. 1:14); "having left first love"

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<sup>57</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>58</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Hebrews 12:3," *Doctrine of Reversionism*, magnetic tape, reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 20 September 1974; Thieme, *Reversionism*, pp. 10,11.

(Rev. 2:4); "fallen" (Rev. 2:5); "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:15, 16); "life of deceit" (Psa. 7:14).<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Thieme observes that various epistles in the New Testament emphasize different types of reversionism. Galatians emphasizes, legalistic reversionism. The Corinthian epistles emphasize phallic (or lascivious) reversionism. The Book of James emphasizes monetary reversionism. The Book of Hebrews emphasizes religious and ritualistic reversionism.<sup>60</sup>

## Stages of Reversionism

Thieme outlines eight stages through which a person goes when he is involved in reversionism. The first stage is the "reaction stage." It includes discouragement, boredom, disillusionment, and is accompanied by loneliness, self-pity, and frustration. It involves a rejection of authority, particularly that of the right pastor-teacher and extends to personality conflicts with other members of the congregation. It also involves the development of mental attitude sins (pride, jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, implacability, self-pity, or guilt complex) and frequently is accompanied by vengeance (attempting to build one's happiness on someone else's unhappiness).<sup>61</sup>

The second stage of reversionism is a frantic search for happiness. This search for happiness soon becomes an alternative for the daily, consistent, persistent function of GAP. This search for happiness can move in one of two major directions: asceticism, with the emphasis on attaining certain experiences, and lasciviousness (drunkenness, fornication, drug addiction, other illicit sexual activities, etc.). The third stage in the development of reversionism is an intensification of either lasciviousness or asceticism.<sup>62</sup>

The fourth stage of developing reversionism is the emotional revolt of the soul (ERS). Thieme teaches that the mentality of the soul is to control the emotions. When the emotions revolt and take charge of the person, he cannot be responsive to God and His Word. In his exposition of 2 Corinthians 6:11,12, Thieme observes that the term *bowels* is symbolic in the Scriptures for one's emotions. Paul says that the Corinthians were not limited ("straightened") by him and the apostles, but that they were limited by their own emotions ("bowels"). He also concludes that the believer is to separate from believers that are in reversionism to the point of emotional revolt of the soul, since they can "cause stumbling, ruin and misery," according to Romans 16:17, 18. In this passage, Thieme interprets the term *belly* to refer to the emotions also.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Thieme, *Emotional*, pp. 17, 20.

The fifth stage in reversionism is negative volition toward Bible doctrine. As a result of the factors involved in the first four stages, the believer becomes confirmed in a strong negative attitude toward Bible doctrine, and he becomes disoriented to the factors involved in living under grace. This negative attitude toward Bible doctrine is characterized first by indifference toward the teaching of doctrine and becoming too busy for attending Bible class. Then antagonism or personality conflicts develop with the pastor-teacher or his authority. This spreads to antagonism or personality hang-ups toward other members of the congregation. This is also accompanied by a failure to utilize God's "living grace provisions" such as GAP, and it results in active campaigning to destroy someone's ministry.<sup>64</sup>

The sixth stage is called "the blackout of the soul." This is based upon an exposition of Ephesians 4:17, 18.<sup>65</sup> Negative volition toward Bible doctrine produces a vacuum called "mataiotetes" (Grk. *metaioteti*). Through this vacuum is sucked false doctrine or "doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:1).<sup>66</sup>

Stage seven in the development of a reversionistic believer is "scar tissue of the soul." This is Thieme's term for "hardening of the heart" in Ephesians 4:18. He teaches that the apertures of the soul (that is, the openings in the soul through which Bible doctrine enters and expressions of divine good toward man and love toward God are exhaled) begin to be covered over with scar tissue from unconfessed sin in the life. In other words, if the believer does not deal with his rebellion against Bible doctrine and with sin in his life, he can cut off his capacity to respond to God and express divine good to men. At salvation all scar tissue is removed from the lungs of the soul instantaneously. To prevent more scar tissue from growing, the Christian must immediately recover through rebound and the daily function of GAP. If scar tissue is not dealt with, the person can enter "a disaster situation." The Pharaoh of the Exodus and Judas Iscariot are illustrations of "maximum scar tissue" on the soul of an unbeliever. Saul is an illustration of maximum scar tissue on the soul of the believer.<sup>67</sup>

The eighth and final stage of reversionism is called "reverse process reversionism." At this point the believer has moved 180 degrees away from occupation with Christ and has become occupied with false doctrines, pseudo celebrities, pseudo friends, and the wrong woman.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Thieme, Tape of "Heb. 12:3."

<sup>65</sup> Thieme sees justification for some of the other stages of reversionism, in the order he presents them, in this passage. Thieme, *Reversionism*, pp. 27-36.

<sup>66</sup> Thieme, Tape of "Reb. 12:3."

<sup>67</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Scar Tissue of the Soul* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1972), pp. 16-18.

<sup>68</sup> Thieme, Tape of "Heb. 12:13."

## **Stages of Discipline**

Thieme sees God's bringing discipline against the reversionistic believer in three stages. First is the stage of "warning." Revelation 3:20 is a warning to the reversionistic believers at Laodicea. The second stage is the "intensive" stage. This usually occurs during the final four stages of reversionism. It is described in Psalm 38:1-14: maximum physical infirmities, loss of health, etc. The final stage is the sin unto death (I John 5:16).<sup>69</sup>

## **Categories of Reversionism**

To clarify more fully what Thieme means when he speaks of reversionism, following are six categories of reversionism, according to Thieme: lascivious or phallic reversionism (2 Cor. 12:21, Eph. 4:19; 5:5; Col. 3:5; Rev. 2:14, 20-23); legalistic reversionism (Col. 2:16-18; Heb. 5:1 1-6:16); monetary legalism (Eccles. 5:10-16; James 4:13, 14; 5:1-6; Rev. 3:14-20); alcoholic and narcotic reversionism (Isa. 28:1-9; Gal. 5:20); anti-establishment reversionism (Rom 1:18-32; Hos. 4:1-7); and mental attitude reversionism, usually accompanied by verbal reversionism. He also refers to what he calls "psychotic reversionism" (2 Pet, 2:15-19).

## **Critique**

As is the case in much of Thieme's teaching, for the sake of his categories, he frequently reduces too much to one term. By so doing, he can, without his students' being aware, force Scripture after Scripture through the funnel of his concept of what Bible doctrine is. Thus, based upon Thieme's definition of reversionism, it would seem that it would follow automatically in the minds of his students that anyone who rejects Thieme's autocratic authority or questions his doctrine should be tagged a reversionist.

Much of what Thieme teaches relative to the emotional revolt of the soul, blackout of the soul and scar tissue of the soul seems to have some valid scriptural support. One could wish that he could furnish more solid exegetical support for some of the other stages of reversionism and for the particular order of the stages.

## **SUMMARY CRITIQUE**

It is helpful to be reminded of the importance of spiritual maturity and the key place that sound Bible teaching has in the development of spiritually mature believers. There are, however, four major difficulties that we have observed in

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

this evaluation of Thieme's teaching on spiritual maturity. First, he fails to fully comprehend all of the biblical objectives for the Christian life. Second, his exegesis is so dominated by his personal categories and definitions that often a trustworthy, dependable exegesis is completely lacking, especially in his discussion of the stages of maturity. Third, he has a far too limited view of the maturity process. Maturing must include also the application-exercise of the truth that is learned. Finally, he misses the emphasis on obedient service by faith in the biblical teaching on rewards.



## CHAPTER V

# THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LIFE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

### ***BASIC ECCLESIOLOGY: LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT***

Though not necessarily distinctive, Thieme's view of the local church is foundational to his other ecclesiological teachings, and thus it is important to have a brief overview of his teaching on basic ecclesiology with regard to church government.

#### **Thieme's Position**

There are two aspects of Thieme's basic ecclesiology that are significant to the lives of his followers. First, he believes in the autonomy of the local church. This is illustrated by his recent canceling of his pastors' conferences at his church so as to avoid any tendency toward becoming a denomination. His influence over other ministers is a matter of their voluntary utilization of his teaching.

Second, Thieme accepts basic Baptist ecclesiology<sup>1</sup> with regard to church government. He believes in congregational government under the rule of one pastor. In the recently revised constitution of Berachah Church, there were included the following statements:

The leadership of this Church is vested in the pastor whose absolute authority is derived from the Scripture (Hebrews 13:17, 13) ... Under the authority of the Pastor, the Deacons shall administer the affairs of this Church which are not delegated or reserved to the Pastor, Church Officers, or others.<sup>2</sup>

Building his case on the teachings in Hebrews 13:7, 17, Thieme rejects all other forms of church government as falling short of the Scriptural teaching:

Fundamentalism is divided into many camps with regard to authority in the local church. Some groups do not believe in a pastor at all, and some think there should be a plurality of elders (multiplicity of pastors). Others believe that authority should be vested in one or two boards or

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, however, that although Thieme is Baptist in his view of certain aspects of church government, he does not share the view of some Baptists that does not recognize the universal church.

<sup>2</sup> Berachah Church Constitution, 1976 Revision, pp. 4, 5. See the appendix for complete copy.

in some form of hierarchy. But the Bible teaches that the *final* human authority in the local church is the pastor.<sup>3</sup>

The argument propounded by Thieme is that verse 7 of Hebrews 12 exhorts the believers to "remember" (*mnemoneuete*) their leaders (*hegoumenon*) who spoke the Word of God to them, and this means for them to "be concentrating on them (right pastor-teachers), who themselves are ruling over (guiding by teaching) you all, pastors who have communicated to you the Word of God (Bible doctrine)." Verse 17 also exhorts the believers to "obey" and "submit" to their leaders (*hegoumenois*). Thieme concludes, "Who has the rule over you? The Deacons? No! The Scripture plainly states that those 'who have communicated to you the Word of God' are the only ones who have authority over you."<sup>4</sup>

### **Critique**

Thieme's position, as we have noted, is basically a form of Baptist polity: the autonomy of the local church and congregational government with one pastor leading the congregation. Although the major problems in Thieme's ecclesiology stem from an abuse of the biblical role of the elder (which will be discussed in the next section), it should be observed that there are exegetical weaknesses in Baptist polity. Such weaknesses open the way more readily for the errors and abuses of Thieme's doctrine of right pastor.

Congregational government (Baptist polity) was a reaction against the hierarchal system of the Roman Church and the state churches of the Reform movement but it retained the Roman mentality toward having a priest in a local church. The Scriptures, however, imply a form of church government similar to that of the synagogue -- a church's being ruled over by, not one, but by a group of elders. The biblical evidence for this view is extensive. First, the very passage that Thieme uses to support his position (Heb. 13:7, 17) refers to the leaders of the Hebrew Christians in the plural. This is consistent in both verses 7 and 17, as well as verse 24. Notice also that there is some question as to whether or not one can identify the people in verse 7 with those in verse 17. Verse 7 uses past tenses in the Greek and the term *mnemoneuete* means "to remember" or "to keep something in mind" that has occurred in the past. Probably the author has in mind the early leaders of the church who established the church by the teaching of the Word of God. The emphasis of verse 17 concerning the present leaders is that their primary ministry is one of ruling. All elders are to be "apt to teach," and all elders are to rule the flock, but the Hebrew Christians are reminded of the special teaching ministry of the founders of their church. Whether or not this inter-

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<sup>3</sup> Thieme, *Divine Establishment*, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.

pretation is accepted, it must be admitted that Hebrews 13 refers to the leaders of the church in the plural.<sup>5</sup> This is consistent with the rest of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

According to Acts 20:28, compared with Acts 20:17, the elders (*presbuteroi*) are the same as the overseers or bishops (*episkopoi*), and this group of men is exhorted by Paul to shepherd or pastor (*poimainein*) the flock of God. This position of pastoring overseer-elder is referred to in the plural both in verse 17 and in verse 28. When Paul addresses these men at Philippi, he refers to them in the plural (Phil. 1: 1). Only when referred to generically is this position ever referred to in the singular (I Tim. 3:1, 2).<sup>7</sup>

Also it should be noted that the term *pastor* and the term *teacher* are used to refer to spiritual gifts in the body, not to a ruling office. In Ephesians 4:11, these two terms are linked very closely and probably refer to a combination gift held by certain people in the body of Christ. However, in the context of Ephesians 4 the subject is not church government, but spiritual gifts in the body of Christ (note verses 4, 8 and 16). It is conceivable that a church could have a number of gifted pastor-teachers, as well as gifted pastors and gifted teachers, and that these would minister both as authoritative elders (dependent upon their spiritual maturity) and as non-authoritative members of the body in person-to-person relations. One thing is clear, the Scriptures do not single out one person with a particular gift and set him over a local body as an absolute ruler.

One other observation concerning autocratic pastor rule is in order. Government, whether it is church or state, is made up of people, and people are sinners by nature. The structures which God establishes recognize this truth. A system of checks and balances is necessary to control the sin nature even in a Christian, since no Christian always operates on the basis of a spiritual mentality all the time. A plurality of elders with opportunity for congregational participation in major decisions lends itself more readily to the control of the sin nature.

## **DOCTRINE OF RIGHT PASTOR**

At the heart of Thieme's entire system of teaching on the Christian life is concept of "right pastor." It is an integral part to his grace apparatus for perception (GAP), and, therefore, responding to one's right pastor is critical to spiritual growth.

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<sup>5</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1964), pp. 394,395,407,408,415.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 148-50; and Gary Inrig, *Life In His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), p. 102-105.

<sup>7</sup> Another explanation for the plurals lies in the possibility that Luke and Paul have in mind all of the elders in a city, each overseeing a separate house-church. In either interpretation, nevertheless, there is a plurality of leadership that can serve one another and the local church in a "check and balance" relationship. Thieme's interpretation fails to recognize any leadership plurality, and thus opens the way for a pastoral abuse of power.

## Statement of the Doctrine

In the preceding section we considered Thieme's basic ecclesiology. At that point, we noticed that Thieme believes that each church has only one elder, the pastor. That pastor-elder has the final authority in the affairs of the church. Also, the members of the church are required to submit to him as their teacher. Thieme adds a few additional concepts and comes up with the doctrine of right pastor: at any given time, in the will of God, each individual-believer has a divinely designed plan for his spiritual maturity. This plan involves one particular pastor with whom to be identified. For maximum growth, the believer must respond in faith to his right pastor's teaching.

Thieme's method of arriving at the doctrine of right pastor can be understood in terms of the following four statements. First, every church has one, and only one, pastor-elder, who has absolute authority over that church and the responsibility to teach the members of that church the Word of God. Second, each believer can only be in one church at a time. Third, God has a plan for every part of every life, and that plan must, therefore, include one's church and pastor. Fourth, therefore, there is only one pastor for each person at a time, and the individual believer is commanded by God to totally submit to the authority of that pastor.<sup>8</sup>

Thieme is careful to emphasize that the authority of a pastor-teacher extends only to his own local church. He claims to desire to avoid any resemblance to the development of a denomination. He also shows a great deal of respect for the authority of pastor-teachers in other churches.<sup>9</sup> A form letter from his executive secretary, which was approved by Thieme, illustrates this attitude:

Concerning what action you should take within your own church, you must understand that according to the Scripture, each local church is autonomous and the pastor-teacher is the final authority. His responsibility as unto the Lord is to communicate Bible doctrine to his congregation, and the responsibility of the congregation is to respect his spiritual gift and obey his authority.

If the pastor does not fulfill this responsibility it is not the prerogative of any member of his congregation to "straighten him out." Creating dissension with the local assembly is never condoned by the Bible. It is unprofitable to debate or argue, as nothing is accomplished (Titus 3:9). If you remain in this church, you must respect the authority of the pastor-teacher. Never should there be an issue made of his teaching nor an usurpation of his authority.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Thieme, *Establishment*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>9</sup> Thieme interview, 14 June 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine S. Tapping, "Form Letter Personal Counseling and Leaving a Local Church" unpublished form letter, Berachah church, Houston, Texas, n.d.

Three major characteristics stand out in Thieme's teaching on right pastor. First, submission to the authority of the pastor is fundamental. Second, as a part of the function of GAP, one's view of his right pastor involves unquestioning belief of what he teaches. Third, the believer is to assume a position of complete dependence on his pastor-teacher for all profitable learning of the doctrines of Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

### **Implications Relative to Separation**

As we noticed in the preceding chapter, Thieme teaches that the growing believer should separate from the reversionistic believer who is involved in emotional revolt of the soul. Reversionism, we noticed, involves rebellion against the authority of one's pastor. Therefore, major disagreements with Thieme's teaching could be interpreted as reversionistic, and therefore worthy of separation. Application of this doctrine has affected numerous relationships between friends and family members.<sup>12</sup> One former member of Berachah Church relates how she attempted to apply this doctrine of separation by breaking off any relationship with her sister when her sister expressed major disagreement with Thieme.<sup>13</sup>

### **Critique**

At the heart of Thieme's doctrine of right pastor is a questionable concept of church government. However, even if Baptist polity is accepted, Thieme has added some elements to the Baptist view of the pastor which are clearly contrary to the biblical pattern and which produce some dangerous spiritual by-products. We will examine Thieme's three basic distinctive concepts first; then we will list a series of dangerous implications of such a doctrine.

*Basic view.* First, he has an unbalanced view of spiritual authority. Pastoral or elder leadership authority extends to the overseeing of the operation of church ministries, the maintenance of sound teaching in the local church and the protection of the believers' souls from false doctrine (I Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28, 29; Heb. 13:17). It clearly involves leadership by example, not by lording over or "bullying" the flock (I Pet. 4:3; Heb. 13:7). Thieme has added to these clear biblical directions. He claims that he must be the final source of doctrine for all in his flock, and that the individual believer cannot study Scripture for himself. Not only does the Scripture *not* teach such a view of doctrinal learning, but it teaches the opposite. Spiritual growth, Paul says in Ephesians 4, involves two major ingredients that are contrary to the Thiemite doctrine: first, the gift of

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<sup>11</sup> Thieme, *Establishment*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>12</sup> Sharon Farmer interview, 29 September 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Alice Blickle, Houston, Texas, 13 October 1977. Mrs. Blickle further stated that her sister proved to be 'more grace oriented' than she was, since her sister continued to show love to her.

pastor-teacher is an equipping gift (verse 12, *katartismos*) designed to prepare all believers (the saints) for doing the job of ministering and edifying; second, maturing takes place as *all* the members of the body minister the truth of God to one another in love (verses 15, 16), not just one select, gifted person.

Second, he confuses faith in biblical truth with a faith in a particular teacher (i.e. one's right pastor). At no time does Scripture exhort the believer to single out one particular teacher as his final doctrinal authority. On the contrary, there is precedence for diversity of teachers. At Antioch the thriving, missionary church was ministered to by five prophets and teachers (Acts 13: 1). Ephesus had both the personal and epistolary ministries of both Paul and John, and also had the ministry of Apollos and of the elders of Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28; 20:17-35). In 3 John, the apostle condemns Diotrophes for attempting to lord it over the flock, forcing division between his followers and other teachers in the body of Christ. Thieme's right pastor doctrine could very well be called the "Diotrophes doctrine."

Third, he gives a false impression as to the believer's personal responsibility relative to testing the reliability of teachers and relative to his own personal study. For Thieme, once one joins a church fellowship, he is to unquestioningly respond to the pastor's authoritative teaching and rely on this pastor to do his study for him. This contradicts the biblical example of the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11) and the clear exhortations to test the doctrine of teachers (1 Cor. 12:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3; Gal. 1: 6-10). It also contradicts the intent of the gift of pastor-teacher. According to Ephesians 4, it along with the gift of evangelist and the temporary gifts of apostle and prophet were primarily given to the church to prepare or equip the saints to minister and edify the body of Christ. It would seem strange indeed to think of one's being equipped to minister as a self-sustaining, contributing unit in the body of Christ, and yet unable to be self-sustaining in his own personal study of Scripture.

*Implications.* The implications of Thieme's teaching in this area are far-reaching. Although the concept of right pastor does produce an efficient church operation and simplifies the believer's learning process,<sup>14</sup> the negative results of such a teaching far outweigh the advantages.

First, Thieme's approach produces division. Thieme's commendable attempts to discourage division by his teaching notwithstanding, division continues to develop. If one wants the product of Thieme's intellectual research and "breakthroughs," he must soon adopt Thieme as his right pastor, even if he lives in another city. This frequently results in either an emotional or physical separation from a local body. In fact in many cases, Thieme encourages people to separate from other churches if their appetites for doctrinal teaching of Thieme's type is not being met. Following is an excerpt from a form letter also quoted in part above:

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<sup>14</sup> William O. Menefee to Joe L. Wall, 20 October 1977. Menefee is a successful Houston businessman who expresses a deep appreciation for Thieme's ministry to him. Formerly he served as the lay director for the Houston area Campus Crusade for Christ.

Therefore, if you find the teaching of that church incompatible with your norms and standards concerning Bible doctrine, then only you can make the decision whether or not to separate yourself. As long as you are oriented to Bible doctrine and understand the significance of the ritual of baptism any pastor-teacher can baptize you. As far as communion is concerned, church membership is not necessary to partake of the Eucharist, although some churches do limit communion to their own membership. Therefore, you can take communion anywhere if it is available to you or it may be possible that you will find other believers who are also listening to tapes to join with you in this most significant memorial. These are functions which will be provided for you by the Lord in His own time.<sup>15</sup>

To assist groups that separate from local churches to form tape groups Thieme, through his executive secretary, distributes information on how to establish a tapers' church:

The following information constitutes suggestions for organizing a tape class. It must be understood, however, that in the final analysis, each group must form its own discipline.

It is advisable to stabilize a group of believers who wish to gather together and hold Bible classes and formal church services. These meetings may be held in a school, a large home, a funeral chapel, or any other location available and suitable for this purpose....

If you decide to incorporate as a church, it will be necessary for you to draw up a Charter within the requirements of your state. You will need three male officers to act as Chairman, Treasurer, and General Administrator for your church group. Enclosed is a Berachah Church doctrinal statement for your information.

Biblically, it is perfectly legitimate for the believer to obtain doctrinal teaching which is vital to his spiritual growth by means of a tape recorder....<sup>16</sup>

Taper churches are strange indeed in the context of Thieme's ecclesiology. By extending his right pastor authority through his tape methodology, he has not only produced division in various communities, but he has produced numerous situations that contradict his own ecclesiology: churches having no authoritative pastor-teacher on the scene to exercise discipline and oversight, but which seem to carry some of the traits of a denomination.

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<sup>15</sup> Tapping, "Form Letter, Leaving."

<sup>16</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Tape Group Information," unpublished form, Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, n.d.

Second, a combination of Thieme's authoritative methodology and the doctrine of right pastor produces both a mentality and an emotional response that makes it difficult for many students to relate to any other teacher. One former student related how she was saved under Thieme's ministry and how valuable those first two years of studying under Thieme were (1961-63). She confided, however, "I had a hard time hearing anyone else" who was ministering the Word after we moved to Dallas.<sup>17</sup> Another student, who had spent his entire life until age 18 under Thieme's ministry, stated, "When I went to Stephen F. Austin (College), I had a barrier and a rebellious attitude against any other teacher of the Word." He further observed that his attitude had been "a result of the teaching and ecclesiological viewpoint taught by R. B. Thieme, Jr."<sup>18</sup>

This extreme emphasis on authority can also result in an irresponsible submissive attitude. Although Thieme may not directly encourage such an attitude, his doctrine of right pastor and his authoritative methodology does. Denny Rydberg quotes a member of Berachah Church as stating, "if the Colonel told us to build a whore house on the back lot of the Church, we would do it without questioning."<sup>19</sup>

Third, this doctrine and its accompanying methodology can easily produce a man-centered mentality. The manager of a Christian radio station in Houston states that he has a number of friends who say that they can only be taught by Thieme. No one else can teach them anything. He goes on to relate that "one active member says that at the end of each age God raises up a prophet or spokesman, and he believes that Bob Thieme is the man for this age."<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, the doctrine of right pastor produces an unhealthy situation for a local body. If the local body is exposed only to one spiritual gift, and that in the life of one personality, there will tend to be a one-sided mentality developed in the lives of the people.

Fifth, there are problems related to the basic humanity of the pastor. Every pastor-teacher is a sinner by nature.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, no pastor-teacher is perfect in his interpretation of Scripture. In view of the fact that the Scriptures indicate that an elder-pastor is to be an example to the flock (I Pet. 5:3), if a given flock is restricted to the authoritative teaching of one man in the body of Christ, there will be a large gap in the example lived before that particular flock. Also, Thieme's concept of authority discourages a critical evaluation of his teaching, so his students are not only limited by having only one pastoral example, but

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Judy Montgomery, Houston, Texas, 23 September 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Dean interview, 22 September 1977.

<sup>19</sup> Rydberg, "Sieg Heil," p.24.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Peter Steigerwald, station manager, KHCB-FM radio, Houston, Texas, 23 September 1977.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Thieme's personal prejudices against blacks (described as "melanoderms") and Chicanos comes out dogmatically in his teaching. Note magnetic tape reproductions of messages preached at Berachah Church: "Philippians 4:4," 22 February 1976; "Genesis 14:10," 21 September 1976; "Genesis 15:5," 8 October 1976; "Genesis 15:6," 10 October 1976.

they must accept the errors which he teaches along with the truth without any functional means for discriminating between the two.

Sixth, as much as Thieme emphasizes the importance of growing spiritually, the application of the doctrine of right pastor actually has a retarding effect on growth. With the dependency upon one's right pastor, one is moved a step beyond "milk," but he isn't taught how to carve the meat and to chew it up. Students of Thieme who consistently apply the doctrine of right pastor easily get hooked on a "bottle of strained meat," that is, doctrine that has gone through the Thieme grid. The job of the pastor-teachers in the body is to prepare or equip the saints (Eph. 4:12). This means that the individual believer should be trained so that he can be self-sustaining both in the spiritual combat of life and in his ministry to the rest of the body. Thieme, on the other hand, discourages personal Bible study<sup>22</sup> and ridicules anyone who attempts it unless he is a trained pastor-teacher.<sup>23</sup>

Seventh, an extensive emphasis on the doctrine of right pastor can produce a fear of leaving a local church. If Bible doctrine is defined in terms of that which one's pastor-teacher communicates, then leaving his authority, in the minds of many, is tantamount to leaving God or moving into reversionism. This is similar to the emotional slavery developed by the authoritative leaders of some of the newer, false cults.

Eighth, we have already noticed that this extreme view of the pastor can result in a warped view of separation. Biblically, separation is not related to the issue of a pastor-teacher. Separation is for extreme immorality, a rebellious spirit, the causing of division in the body, and doctrinal heresy. Students of Thieme who break relationships with friends and/or family over the Thieme issue are totally out of line biblically.<sup>24</sup>

Ninth, this concept of the pastor can produce a false sense of superiority in a pastor-teacher. It can also engender an independence that hinders interaction with others in the body and that makes his own personal spiritual growth difficult in many areas.

Tenth, a harsh, authoritatively demanding pastor-teacher can produce some unwanted results in some students such as a cold, overbearing, aggressive attitude, that leaves little room for differences of opinion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil 3 via 11 Timothy 4:8 Doc/Surpassing Grace (SG3)," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, 26 December 1975. He says that if you read the Bible, "you're not going to get anything out of it ... you'd better come to Bible class . . . or listen to a tape." See also Thieme, *Super-grace*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Thieme, Tape of "Phil 3: 15b."

<sup>24</sup> See the passages on separation: I Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1; 2 Thess. 3:6-15.

<sup>25</sup> Telephone interview with Randy Price, student, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 23 September 1977. Mr. Price a long time Thieme taper himself, indicated further that, while in college, he noticed that those students on a steady diet of Thieme tapes became more narrow and unaccepting of divergent points of view, and unwilling to discuss openly spiritual things with other believers. Those tapers who had a balanced diet of tapes, books and church services under other pastors, he observed, tended to be more balanced and to develop true spiritual qualities.

## **DOCTRINE OF PRIVACY**

A common problem among Christians is the tendency to interfere in other people's business when it is not their responsibility. Recognizing that the Scripture condemns such activities, Thieme has coordinated the scriptural teachings concerned with this subject into one category and has entitled it the "Doctrine of Privacy."

### **Foundational Doctrines**

There are two foundational doctrines which underlie Thieme's doctrine of privacy. First, he claims volition is one of the divine institutions for mankind. He deduces from this that every man must have freedom to exercise his volition. From this he concludes that "privacy is the innate right of the human race...." It, along with "life and ownership of property, are basic concepts of human freedom."<sup>26</sup>

The second foundational doctrine is the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. Thieme teaches that every believer is a member of the "Royal Priesthood." In this role, according to Colossians 3:17, he has the responsibility to do everything for the Lord, and not for man. He must have privacy "to fulfill his mission in Phase Two (i.e. the time between salvation and the rapture or death)."<sup>27</sup>

### **Explanation of the Doctrine**

By privacy Thieme means the right to seclusion. It is the human right "whereby each individual member of the human race possesses the right to retire from the company of others and remain in seclusion from the knowledge or observation of others." It means that every individual is to be able "to exercise his freedom uncoerced."<sup>28</sup>

Certain implications stem from this teaching. First, "no believer has the right to intrude into the privacy of another believer." A church visitor should be left alone unless he wants to be communicated with. Support for this view is found in John 21:21, 22, where Peter is reprimanded by the Lord for not minding his own business. Second, this should rule out judging another person's views concerning doubtful things (Rom. 14:4, 10). Third, it should result in an attitude of "live and let live" (2 Thess. 3:11, 12). Finally, it is a sin to violate another's privacy (I Tim. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:15).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Thieme, *Divine Establishment*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

## **Critique**

Thieme's support for his doctrine of privacy seems weighty. However, when closely examined, it displays a series of unwarranted conclusions. First, he claims that the concept of human volition rules out coercion in the area of spiritual things, but he has no biblical or logical grounds for concluding that an innate right of man is the right to seclusion. Second, for one to point out that Jesus did not want Peter to be concerned about John's future because it was none of his business does not mean that Jesus wanted Peter to break off communication with John about any personal needs Peter could help him with. Third, the clear exhortations of Scripture to mind one's own business that Thieme builds his case on (Rom. 14:4, 10; 2 Thess. 3:11, 12; 1 Tim. 5:13; 1 Peter 4:15) do not rule out what is clearly the business of believers: exhorting one another (Heb. 10:25), bearing another's burdens (Gal. 6:1, 2), edifying one another by "truthing" in love (Eph. 4:12-16), showing concern for one another's needs (Phil 2:4), and expressing brotherly love and hospitality to strangers (Rom. 12: 1 0; I Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22).<sup>30</sup>

Although there is a sense in which the Scriptures teach that one should respect another's privacy, Thieme's teaching on the subject does a great injustice to the concept of the functioning of the church as a body, and it hinders the proper functioning of the body's caring for one another and bearing one another's burdens.

Thieme's doctrine of privacy contains a great deal of truth; however, truth out of balance can become error, and can have injurious effects in the lives of Christians. An emphasis on privacy that lacks the balance of the biblical teaching concerning the interdependency and communication in the body of Christ can hinder healthy spiritual growth (as described in Ephesians 4:16) and can easily degenerate into an attitude of coldness and indifference. It is even possible that an emotionally troubled individual, committed to privacy, might fail to seek Christian counsel during a time of crisis.

## **SUMMARY CRITIQUE**

In our study of Thieme's ecclesiology, we have observed that he teaches and practices an extreme form of congregational government and single pastor rule. We have also become painfully aware of the numerous practical problems that result from Thieme's faulty concept of the right pastor. Finally, although Thieme teaches much that is true concerning the privacy of the individual in the church, the general tendency of his emphasis leaves one with an unbalanced view of the relationships between believers in the body of Christ.

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<sup>30</sup> Note also that Philip intruded on the privacy of the Ethiopian eunuch to share the gospel with him (Acts 8).

## CHAPTER VI

### OTHER SIGNIFICANT DOCTRINES

Some of Thieme's most positive doctrinal contributions are those which he developed early in his ministry. Among these are his teachings concerning marriage, divine guidance, prayer, doubtful things, suffering, and giving. In recent years, Thieme has expanded his earlier teachings in most of these areas; however, this has resulted in weakening his conclusions in such a way that the student sometimes is prone to make applications that run counter to the biblical life-style.

#### ***RIGHT MAN - RIGHT WOMAN***

##### **The Doctrine Stated**

Thieme's earlier teachings on marriage have been expanded and refined under the doctrinal category, right man-right woman. At the heart of this doctrinal category is "the concept that God has designed one specific man for one specific woman. Each member of the human race has a right opposite number, except in special cases where a person has the gift of celibacy."<sup>1</sup> There is one woman and only one woman in the world who is perfectly suited for every man; also there is one man and only one man perfectly suited for every woman.<sup>2</sup>

##### **Biblical Support**

Thieme begins his argument in support of his doctrine of right man-right woman by emphasizing that God is perfect, and his plan or design is perfect for each man. Then he exegetes portions of Genesis 1 and 2 to show that God carefully designed Adam and the woman, and that the woman was made to be a complement, or counterpart to the man. Then Thieme does a study of I Cor. 11 to show the kind of relationship that God intends to exist between the man and the woman. In this context he points out that both the man and the woman are "totally dependent upon each other" (see verse 11). This is followed by an exposition of Proverbs 5:1-22, in which Thieme repeatedly emphasizes the sinfulness and harm of fornication, because it is not with one's right man or right woman.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Adam's Rib* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications), 1973, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-54.

## Critique

The doctrine of right man-right woman is an interesting suggestion, and Thieme, in his book on the subject, has done a very capable exposition to prove the importance of remaining true to one's wife or husband. However, he has completely failed to prove his thesis. To say that God made Eve especially for Adam does not necessarily prove that there is only one woman for each man in the world. Nor do the biblical warnings against infidelity or premarital experimentation with sex lead one to the conclusion that there is only one mate designed for each person. These warnings only serve to teach that the person to whom one is married is the only right person to love sexually. These warnings say nothing about the selection of a spouse.

The primary problem with Thieme's approach, beyond his lack of biblical evidence, is in the use of the word *right*. To label something or someone "right" implies that all others are wrong. It adds an unwarranted moral dimension to the issue of one's choice of a mate, moving such decisions from the realm of wisdom to the area of moral choices. Furthermore, the use of the term right excludes all possibilities for varying degrees of compatibility. One must conclude that a couple is either perfectly compatible or they are wrong for each other. A better set of terminology would include such terms as *best*, *better*, *good*, and *poor decisions* relative to marriage, and would include such factors as the personalities of the two, their degree of maturity, and the timing involved. The implications of the Proverbs is that the choice of a spouse involves wisdom to make the best selection, not special revelation to show one the *right* selection. Examples of this emphasis on wisdom include the following: a man is to learn from his father (Prov. 5:1, 2); he is to have a home where love is (Prov. 15: 17); he should look for a woman whose virtues resemble the woman in Proverbs 31; and he should avoid an adulterous woman (Prov. 5:3-5, 7-14) and a woman who has no clear spiritual objectives (Prov. 5:6). This is a much different approach from Thieme's overly romantic concept that each person is to look for that perfectly right counterpart, so he can live happily ever after. From a biblical viewpoint the only person one could call one's right man or right woman is the person to whom he is married at that time (Prov. 5: 15-23).

An additional problem develops in Thieme's view of right man -- right woman when one considers the contingent relationships between potential marriage partners. Suppose that man A has a right woman, and she is woman A, but while man A is waiting for woman A, woman A gets out of God's will and marries man B. It would be possible then for a man to miss his right woman due to no fault of his own. The absurdity of this situation is the result of faulty thinking concerning the absolute character of God's will for the life of an individual Christian. God's ultimate purposes have been set from all eternity, and his divine decree is eternal; however, God's direction for the life of each individual believer does not come in the form of a neatly packaged total plan. If God were to have a perfect plan, in the absolute sense, for each man, no one would ever experience

it, for every man is a sinner and repeatedly departs from God's direction. It is best to view God's direction for the individual believer as guidance to make the best decision possible. When they select their mates, young Christians should be encouraged to make the *best* decision possible in accordance with the scriptural principles and the illumination of the Spirit, as well as the counsel of spiritually mature believers. After marriage, Christians should be taught that the one to whom they are married is from then on clearly God's right man or right woman for them.

Making an issue of the difference between the use of *right* and the use of *best* may seem insignificant at first. However, the concept of a "right" spouse can produce some very serious, harmful consequences. First, young people may enter into marriage with an extremely romantic view that everything is going to go well since they think they have found the right mate. When conflicts arise (as they most certainly will), they may be tormented by the doubts that maybe they missed their right spouse. Second, some young people may use this teaching to justify premarital sexual relations to ascertain the "rightness" of their choice. Third, the doctrine may prevent a married couple from seeking to find solutions to their problems. Instead of recognizing emotional and spiritual immaturity in oneself and instead of applying biblical principles to the specific problems that arise, a couple may run from the real issues and blame their problems on a wrong choice when they got married. Fourth, in this kind of context, divorce can easily be rationalized, so one can go out to find his right mate.<sup>4</sup>

Thieme himself repudiates any view that would excuse divorce on the basis of this doctrine. However, there will continue to be unbiblical applications of the doctrine by many unless or until it is modified to agree with the scriptural mentality.

## ***DIVINE GUIDANCE***

### **The Doctrine Explained**

Among those doctrines included in Thieme's "basics series" is his teaching on how to find the will of God for one's life. He begins by describing three basic principles for divine guidance. The first principle he calls "knowledge of the will of God." By this he means that one must move from that which has already been revealed and can be known (the revealed Word of God) to the unknown. The second principle is "yieldedness to the will of God." This is based upon Romans 6:13 and Romans 12:1. This is "electing God's will to be final even before you know what His will is." Thieme argues that the yielded person is the one who is filled with the Holy Spirit, and his system teaches that one is filled by confession

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<sup>4</sup> Sharon Farmer, in an interview, 29 September 1977, referred to several people who had applied this doctrine in this way producing frustration in marriage and resulting in divorce in some cases.

of sins; therefore, he concludes that the basic issue in yieldedness is confession of sins. The third Principle is "guidance through spiritual growth." Conversely, "there are three hindrances to doing the will of God: ignorance, carnality and lack of growth."<sup>5</sup>

To emphasize the importance of the Word of God in divine guidance, Thieme lists seven specific things that are "declared to be the will of God." Included in this list are such things as accepting Christ as Savior, being sanctified, and being filled with the Spirit. The believer is also told to "give thanks in everything," endure suffering, trust the Lord, and to be productive.<sup>6</sup>

A very helpful exposition is Thieme's study of the way God led Peter, as recorded in Acts 11. The seven principles listed here are as follows: (1) "guidance through prayer (verse 5);" (2) "guidance through the mind" considered in verse 6); (3) "guidance through God's Word" (verses 7-10); (4) "guidance through providential circumstances" (verse 11); (5) "guidance through the Holy Spirit" (verse 12); (6) "guidance through comparison" (verses 13-15); and (7) "guidance through Scripture memory" (verse 16).<sup>7</sup>

## Critique

Although Thieme's summary of certain principles of divine guidance is helpful, two specific weaknesses in his teaching in this area should be observed. First, as we have already noticed, Thieme dilutes the biblical significance of the yieldedness in the spiritual life. It involves more than just naming of sins to God to be yielded to God.<sup>8</sup>

Second, he tends to conceive of the will of God in divine guidance as an absolute package, rather than the dynamic leadership of God who makes something good out of the messes we make of our lives. The principles of divine guidance in the Scriptures are not designed to help the believer search out and find parts of God's total plan that are hidden in the mind of God. Rather, divine guidance involves a step-by-step following of our shepherd through divinely provided wisdom to help the believer make the best possible decisions (James 1:5; see also numerous references in the Book of Proverbs relative to wisdom), and through the provisions of providence promised to those who do not lean on their own understanding but trust in the Lord (Prov. 3:5, 6).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Divine Guidance* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1966), pp. 2-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17.

<sup>8</sup> See discussion in Chapter IV above.

<sup>9</sup> See also discussion under "Right Man-Right Woman" above.

# PRAYER

## The Doctrine Explained

Early in the 1960's Thieme produced a series of tapes on basic doctrines. One of these basic subjects was the doctrine of prayer. In 1964 Thieme put this into booklet form under the title, *The Power of Prevailing Prayer*. Then in 1973 this book was revised and printed under the title, *Prayer*. Over the past 15 years there has been very little change in Thieme's teaching in this area. He continues to communicate some very helpful and sound principles.

Thieme lists six "basic principles of prayer." First, "Prayer is for believers only." One must have a personal relationship with Christ as Savior before he can truly open his mouth in prayer and say "Father."<sup>10</sup>

Second, "All prayer is to be directed to the Father (Matt. 6:9)." This is because both the Son and the Holy Spirit are engaged in the ministry of making intercession for us. Third, "Long prayers should be reserved for private prayers." Thieme teaches that public prayers should be short and to the point, and should generally be for something specific (Matt. 6.5-7).<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, private prayer can be broken down into four parts: confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and petition for one's own needs. Confession of sin is "the most important" (I John 1:9). Thanksgiving is taught in I Thessalonians 5:18 and Ephesians 5:20. Intercessory prayer for all saints is commanded in Ephesians 6:18. In the case of petition for one's own needs, the believer should not insult God by asking for things provided by Him in another way. For example, the believer need not pray for forgiveness nor for the filling of the Spirit, since Scripture promises both of these, according to Thieme, at the point known sins are confessed.<sup>12</sup>

Fifth, Scripture indicates "a number of reasons why prayer is not heard:" lack of faith (Matt. 18:19; 21:22; Mark 1 1:24) selfishness (James 4:2, 3), lack of compassion (Prov. 21:13), lack of domestic tranquility (I Pet. 3:7), pride or self-righteousness (Job 35:12, 13), failure to comply with divine will in what is asked (I John 5:14), lack of obedience (I John 3:22), and lack of the filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).<sup>13</sup>

Sixth, "Don't put out the fleece," He explains that in Judges 6, where Gideon put out the fleece, God responded because he is gracious and he tolerated Gideon's unbelief, but God had already given direction to Gideon, and the signs were unnecessary for guidance.<sup>14</sup>

Besides the principles of prayer, which have already been mentioned, Thieme has categorized different types of prayers as they are viewed with regard to the

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<sup>10</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Prayer* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1973), p.5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 6-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 9-12.

divine answers to prayer. These categories are intended to help the Christian understand that sometimes his petitions are answered and he does not even know it. Category I prayers are those in which the petition is answered positively, but the desire of the prayer is not given (Psa. 106:15). In other words, God sometimes gives up what we ask for even though it is not the real thing that we desire. Category 2 prayers are those in which God doesn't answer the petition positively, but does respond positively to the desire behind the prayer (Gen. 17:18, 19). Category 3 prayers are those in which both the stated petition is given as well as the heart's desire. (See I Kings 18:11-39, where Elijah's desire for God's glory was expressed in terms of a request for fire to come down from heaven.) Finally, category 4 prayers are prayers in which both the petition and the desire are answered in the negative by God. This is because of the carnality or other hindrances to prayer in the life of the believer.<sup>15</sup>

## **Critique**

Except for the inclusion of statements relating to Thieme's weak view of spirituality (which we have already discussed in an earlier chapter), his teachings on prayer are valuable contributions to the subject.

## ***DOUBTFUL THINGS***

### **The Doctrine Explained**

The doctrine of "doubtful things" refers to those issues that are not directly dealt with in the Scriptures. It is primarily related to the believer's "attitude toward the weaker Christian."<sup>16</sup>

Thieme draws a distinction between sin and doubtful things. In so doing he selects Proverbs 6:16-19 to describe the primary areas of sin with which God is concerned. He observes that many believers think only in terms of a few taboos, and that they are scarcely aware of the existence of extremely damaging sins in their own lives. Taboos are certain practices commonly condemned by many Christians, but not specifically condemned in the Scriptures. Among these, Thieme lists what he calls "the 'big five' -- don't drink, don't dance, don't smoke, don't go to shows and don't wear make-up!" He claims that many people "judge everybody on the basis of the taboos, yet they themselves are habitually committing sin after sin."<sup>17</sup>

From a study of James 2 and I Corinthians 8-10, Thieme draws three principles or laws governing ones response to doubtful things. First is the "law of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-25.

<sup>16</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Doubtful Things in Corinth* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1964), pp. 1, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-6.

liberty". This means that "biblically speaking, I have the right to do certain things. There are certain things that I can do that will not hurt me, nor will they disturb my spiritual equilibrium."<sup>18</sup>

The second principle is the "law of love." Thieme's introductory statement of this principle summarizes well his exposition of I Corinthians 8:

The second principle takes other believers into consideration. In this passage it is called "law of love." In effect this law says that because of my love for the weaker and often legalistic brethren, and in order to keep them from being highly critical or upset and disturbed, there are certain things which I have the liberty to do, yet I will refrain from doing them -- not because they are wrong in themselves, but because as a believer advanced in doctrine I want to help other believers rather than hinder them.<sup>19</sup>

Based upon I Corinthians 10:23, Thieme draws the third principle: "the law of expediency." This law is primarily directed toward the unbeliever. A Christian may have to make decisions in the area of doubtful things in order to maintain a testimony in his life before the unbelieving world.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, the law of liberty applies to the mature believer who, because of knowledge, understands that "aside from immorality, all things are lawful." This law, however, is superseded by the higher law, "the law of love," in many cases, and it is superseded by the "law of expediency" in other situations.<sup>21</sup>

## **Critique**

Some have questioned Thieme's consistent application of these principles in his teaching method.<sup>22</sup> However, the teachings presented by Thieme in his book, *Doubtful Things in Corinth*, are both valid and valuable if applied.

# **SUFFERING**

## **The Doctrine Explained**

In keeping with his common practice of analysis and categorization, Thieme has developed a number of classifications of suffering. First, suffering can be classified as suffering in eternity and suffering in time. Second, there are three cate-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> See discussion of Thieme's teaching method in chapter 1.

gories of suffering in time: the suffering of the unbeliever, the suffering of the believer, and the suffering of Christ during his incarnation.<sup>23</sup>

Thieme also divides the suffering of the believer into two types: undeserved suffering and deserved suffering. He then lists nine reasons for undeserved suffering:

Undeserved suffering:

- (1) To resolve the angelic conflict between the angels and God (Job 1 and 2).
- (2) To present and illustrate God's message to Israel (to illustrate divine truth). (Book of Hosea)
- (3) To learn obedience to the divine plan (Hebrews 5:8, Philippians 2:8).
- (4) To provide orientation to the grace of God (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).
- (5) To develop faith-rest and occupation with Christ (I Peter 1:7,8; Romans 5:3).
- (6) To demonstrate the power of God (2 Corinthians 11:24-33 with 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
- (7) To manifest the fruit of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:8-11).
- (8) To help others who suffer (2 Corinthians 1:3-24).
- (9) To witness for Christ (2 Corinthians 3:4; 2 Timothy 2:8, 9).

Deserved suffering:

- (1) Divine discipline (Hebrews 12:6).
- (2) Indirect action: Suffering because other believers get out of fellowship (innocent suffer with the guilty). (I Corinthians 12:12, 13, 26; Romans 14:7, 1 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 21).<sup>24</sup>

In the book, *Why Christians Suffer*, Thieme primarily carries through an exposition of I Peter 4. He teaches that verses 1-6 tell the believer how to orient his suffering through mental attitude (verse 1), doing the will of God (verses 2, 3), living a separated life (verses 4, 5), and living a spiritual life (verse 6). Then he draws four types of production from verses 7-11: the production of stability in prayer (verse 7), the production of love (verse 8), the production of hospitality (verse 9), and the production by the use of one's spiritual gifts (verse 10).<sup>25</sup>

The last part of the exposition concerns one's attitudes toward suffering and major categories of suffering. Verse 12 warns believers not to be shocked when suffering comes. Verse 13 exhorts the believer to rejoice in the midst of suffering. Verse 14 indicates that the believer should allow the Holy Spirit to turn suffering into blessing by providing an inner joy through fellowship with

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<sup>23</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Why Christians Suffer* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications, 1966), pp. 2, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-19.

Christ. Thieme concludes his study of suffering by pointing out that Peter recognized both suffering as a part of divine discipline (verse 15), and suffering as a part of divine blessing (verse 16). This suffering is in contrast with the suffering of the unbelievers (verses 18, 19).<sup>26</sup>

In recent years, Thieme has added to his doctrine of suffering. He now believes that as a believer enters the stage of maturity called "ultra-super-grace," God allows him to undergo extreme pressure and opposition from evil.<sup>27</sup> Because this suffering comes at an advanced stage of maturity, the suffering only intensifies the blessings of super-grace.<sup>28</sup>

## Critique

Thieme's earlier analysis of suffering and related Bible exposition were done quite well. It is a shame that in later years he has diluted the impact of his earlier teaching by some doubtful exegesis. Specifically, making generalizations about what God has planned for the very mature Christian, on the basis of the pattern of the apostle Paul's life, is not warranted. Also that which he claims is reserved for ultra-super-grace believers (i.e. the promise of turning cursing into blessing) is available to any believer who responds properly to his circumstances (Rom. 8: 28; Phil. I).

## GIVING

### The Doctrine Explained

One of the most striking examples of Thieme's application of his doctrine of grace is the doctrine of giving. Early in his ministry, Thieme produced some outline notes of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. These were later put into a more refined outline entitled, *Biblical Giving, Outline, The Ministry of Giving vs. The Gimmicks of Giving*, in 1967. These outline notes were revised again and put into a booklet in 1972 under the title, *Giving, Gimmick or Grace*. In each of these works the emphasis was placed on one of the classic New Testament passages on giving, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Thieme introduces his study of giving by an examination of the Old Testament law of tithing. He concludes that it was more than ten percent yearly and that tithing does not have direct application to the giving pattern for the believer. priest under grace. The giving plan for this present age Thieme calls "grace-giving." In order to better understand what is involved in the concept represented in this

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-26.

<sup>27</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., "Phil. 3 via 11 Tim. 4:5-8a Final Objective: Ultra-S-G," *Philippians*, magnetic tape reproduction of message preached at Berachah Church, 25 September 1975.

<sup>28</sup> Thieme tape, "Phil. 3:15b."

term, a summary of the 15 principles of giving that Thieme gleans from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 are included below:

1. Giving is a mental attitude of grace and inner happiness rather than the amount donated (2 Cor. 8:2).
2. Giving must be an expression of free will apart from human coercion, emotional revolt or legalistic pressure. Giving is an expression of the priesthood in privacy and freedom (verse 3).
3. Giving is a privilege associated with grace (verse 4).
4. Giving is a soul activity. The amount is never emphasized. Since giving commemorates God's grace, the believer must give on the basis of soul function and soul character. Giving is an extension of the soul life and must never be related either to the amount or to the stimulation of emotion (verse 5).
5. Giving is an extension of the daily function of GAP (verse 7).
6. Giving must never be forced or coerced but must be the result of grace orientation, Giving is love giving, not law giving. It is a Category One love response (verse 8).
7. Giving depends on grace orientation, and grace orientation depends on doctrine (verse 9).
8. Money given in the Lord's work must be properly administered (verse 19).
9. Rebound and resultant filling of the Spirit stimulates giving with proper motivation (2 Cor. 9:2).
10. Giving should never be associated with embarrassment or pressure. It is a mental attitude which demands the privacy of the believer to give as unto the Lord (verse 4).
11. Grace giving guarantees blessing. In grace giving, the believer gives of self first, then of money (verse 6).
12. Giving is a motivation from doctrine (verse 7).
13. In giving, God provides everything -- both the mental attitude and the money. To actually give money, the believer must be the recipient of both spiritual and material blessing from God (verse 8).
14. Money received from God is added in general life function; but money given by the believer in grace is multiplied. Grace giving experiences grace multiplication rather than grace addition (verse 10).
15. Emotional giving is not grace giving because emotional giving is rapport giving. Grace giving is divine good based on doctrinal motivation rather than human good based on emotional motivation (verse 13).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Giving, Gimmick or Grace* (Houston: Berachah Tapes and Publications 1972),pp 36, 37.

One thing stands out in Thieme's approach to Christian giving. He attempts to carry on his ministry, consistently applying grace-giving principles. Illustrative of this is the financial policy of Berachah Tapes and Publications:

### *FINANCIAL POLICY*

No price is placed on any of than materials for two reasons:

- (1) This is a grace ministry, dependent entirely upon the freewill offerings of believer-priests. To place a price on these materials is totally incompatible with grace.
- (2) Many of the people who are positive towards doctrine are financially unable to purchase books, materials, etc., of any kind. We do not believe in embarrassing or limiting positive volition -- RICH OR POOR!!

Therefore, no price list for tapes and publications is furnished. No money is requested. When the Lord motivates an individual, that individual is free to give. When any believer, regardless of financial status, is positive toward doctrine, he has the privilege of receiving the teaching of the Word of God! This is grace!<sup>30</sup>

### **Critique**

The earlier teaching on giving, that forms the core of Thieme's current publications on the same subject, is both sound and helpful. Also, his application of his principles to his own financial policy is commendable. However, the more recent presentation of his exegesis of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 employs a weak methodology, thereby forcing such Thiemite doctrines as his highly doubtful concept of GAP on the context of Paul's teaching. This adds nothing to the exposition. Rather it leaves one with serious doubts about the entire exposition.

### **SUMMARY CRITIQUE**

It is ironic indeed that one whose stated objective in life is to bring his students to a high degree of maturity should actually hinder the maturing impact of his earlier teachings by his so-called recent doctrinal breakthroughs. As a young man, the author was greatly influenced in a healthy fashion by Thieme's teachings in all six of the areas considered in this chapter. However, at the present time, he

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<sup>30</sup> "Doctrinal Bible Studies on Tape," catalogue produced by Berachah tapes and Publications, Houston, Texas, January 1976.

would find it difficult to recommend many of the current, revised tapes or publications dealing with most of these subjects. Thieme's recently developed categories too greatly dominate his study and teaching to allow for consistently reliable exegesis.

Also, one current doctrine discussed in this chapter demands special consideration -- the doctrine of right man-right woman. This teaching is both unsound exegetically and harmful practically in certain situations where it is applied.



## **CHAPTER VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

The thesis of this dissertation is that R. B. Thieme, Jr., is a gifted brother in Christ who has had some significant exegetical and theological contributions to make to the body of Christ, but that certain of his current teachings and emphases, will not bear up under close exegetical scrutiny and, therefore, have resulted in faulty and erroneous doctrinal and practical conclusions, which, though still within the limits of historic Christian orthodoxy, tend to affect negatively the lives of his disciples and to hinder the maintenance of Christian unity. A brief summary of the concluding critiques of each chapter will demonstrate the basis for this thesis.

#### **RECAPITULATION OF EVALUATIONS**

In Chapter I it was concluded that Thieme must be included in the circle of orthodox Christianity, but that his highly debatable teaching on the blood of Christ will not stand up under close scrutiny. It was also pointed out that Thieme's basic methodology, ICE, sounds good at first, but it too readily allows sound exegesis to be dominated by human categories and emphases, thus producing a weak foundation for his growing theological system. Unless this methodology is corrected, his future teaching will become more and more vulnerable to erroneous conclusions.

In the second chapter ten doctrines, foundational to Thieme's teaching on the Christian life were considered. Of these doctrines, certain ones stood out as highly questionable concepts. His view of Bible doctrine subtly allows a pastor-teacher to press his own personal interpretations and doctrinal systems with the same authority as the Scriptures themselves. It was noted also that Thieme's view of God's love as an anthropopathism cannot be accepted. Although his views of divine sovereignty and the angelic conflict are basically dependable, his analysis of the immaterial part of man forces far too much on the biblical terminology involved. Portions of his teaching on sin and evil, at first, appear to have some validity, but the problems raised by a careful word study of the terms involved, in comparison with the extensive implications drawn by Thieme in his system, leaves the entire teaching in this area open to question. It was also observed that Thieme's teachings with regard to the doctrine of grace and the people of God are basically sound except for his emphasis on a passive description of grace in human relations. Finally it was shown that his analysis of what he calls "divine establishment" and the place of the military appears to be more of an expression of Thieme's own personal opinions and political and social prejudices, rather than the product of consistent, sound exegesis. This has resulted in an unbalanced view of social justice and freedom, an unwarranted description of the United States as a priest nation, and an overemphasis on the role of the military.

The third chapter dealt with doctrines concerning basic spirituality. To the degree that these doctrines depend on the teachings of Chafer they are true to the scriptural emphasis. However, Thieme's modifications leave the believer with some wrong impressions, especially with regard to a mechanical view of confession and fellowship, an absolute view of the Spirit-filled life, and a view of the believer's responsibilities in living the Spirit-filled life that acknowledges only the need of confession to the exclusion of yielded obedience by faith. In addition Thieme's definition of "love" is greatly lacking.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation considered the subject of spiritual maturity. This is the area of study in which most of Thieme's more recent "doctrinal breakthroughs" have come. Although Thieme's doctrinal framework of biblical exposition appears to be extremely scholarly and complex, it is actually fraught with numerous unsupported presuppositions and unwarranted exegesis. The result is unbalanced doctrine which misrepresents the biblical emphasis on the Christian's life objective and fails to clarify the biblical method for true spiritual growth.

In chapter V Thieme's strong emphasis on two major doctrines was observed: the doctrine of right pastor and the doctrine of privacy. It was noted that the doctrine of privacy, as Thieme presents it, can easily be abused and result in Christian living that contradicts the biblical exhortation to brotherly love and fellowship. Of a more serious nature is Thieme's teaching concerning right pastor. This doctrine has a number of negative ramifications that can cause harm to the expression of true Christian unity and to the development of balanced spiritual lives.

The sixth chapter dealt with six different doctrines related to the Christian life. It was observed that all six, in the earlier form in which Thieme taught them, were sound and valuable contributions to the development of balanced, healthy Christian lives. However, it was noted that more recent revisions of these doctrines are beginning to affect most of them negatively, and the doctrine of right man-right woman was singled out as both exegetically unsound and practically harmful to some marital situations.

Of these many doctrines considered, certain doctrinal weaknesses and errors stand out as having the most serious, practical ramifications: Thieme's limited and mechanical view of the spiritual life, his emphasis on levels of maturity (exclusive of service) as the believer's life objectives, his doctrine of GAP, his doctrine of right pastor, his teaching on right man-right woman, and his definition of love.

To critically evaluate a man's doctrine and its practical ramifications is of little value unless concrete suggestions are forthcoming to correct and improve his teaching<sup>1</sup> and unless positive advice is communicated to those affected by

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<sup>1</sup> Specific suggestions to Thieme himself were included in the original dissertation and were personally handed to Thieme by the author.

his teaching. There follows, therefore, three lists of recommendations: one to pastors under Thieme's influence, one to his students and one to other Christian leaders.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO PASTORS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE MINISTRY OF R. B. THIEME, JR.**

The author is indebted to Bob Thieme for his contribution to him as a young man through his commitment to grace and solid, well organized exegesis of the Scriptures in the years between 1956 and 1961. The author also senses a potential for a truly valuable contribution theologically by Thieme to the body of Christ in this generation. However, weaknesses in his method of Bible interpretation, recent trends in his teachings and some of the consistent applications of these teachings, have limited the positive effectiveness of much of Thieme's present ministry. For this reason, the following suggestions are made, with the hope that they will have a positive effect on pastors under the influence of Thieme's ministry:

1. Carefully examine Thieme's more recent doctrinal developments, especially his doctrines of GAP, right pastor, right man-right woman, love, filling of the spirit and the stages of maturity as life objectives -- in the light of the teachings and exegesis of other sound Bible teachers and writers.

2. Commit yourself to do whatever you possibly can to encourage the expression of Christian unity in the body of Christ at large. Do not allow Thieme to become an issue that divides Christians.

3. In accordance with the discussion in Chapter 1, you would do well to expand on his study and teaching methodology to include a strong emphasis on biblical theology. You should also be careful to avoid abuses of exegesis by the dominance of a categorical approach. Avoid forcing theologically pregnant terms on your exegesis.

4. Encourage the people under your ministry to utilize the contributions of other spiritual gifts in the body besides your own.

5. Assuming you accept Thieme's ecclesiology, you would be wise to become the sole distributor of tapes to your congregation. Berachah Tapes and Publications will most likely cooperate, in view of their stated policy concerning local church autonomy and the authority of the pastor-teacher.<sup>2</sup>

6. You would be wise to regularly meet with respected Bible teachers and/or some of the more mature men in your congregation, to discuss any new theological concepts or unique exegesis.

7. You also should provide courses in Bible study methods for your people so as to wean them from a perpetual dependency on either Thieme or yourself for spiritual nourishment. Encourage your people to live as believer-priests in the area of their own personal study of Scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> Also, it seems that taper churches and telephone hook-up churches run counter to Thieme's own ecclesiology.

8. Do not allow your ministry to become unbalanced. Teaching is extremely important, but so is worship, evangelism and koinonia. Work at maintaining a balance of all four elements in the life of your church.

9. Move your church toward a healthy church life. Expand your eldership beyond yourself and encourage the exercise of all of the gifts in the body.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO STUDENTS OF R. B. THIEME, JR.**

This section is dedicated to those who are presently studying under Thieme or who may be potential students of Thieme's. The suggestions listed below may not apply to every student; however, they are appropriate suggestions in the light of the author's personal experience as a Thieme student, observations of current problems relating to Thieme students, and information gleaned from a number of interviews.

1. Check out anything new that Thieme teaches, by engaging in a personal study of the Word of God. This can be done fairly easily through the following means. First, read the text involved in its context from at least two different good translations. Second, use a good, exhaustive concordance (such as a *Young's Concordance*), and notice how particular words, that are significant to Thieme's new doctrines, are actually used in the Scriptures. The *use* of a word is the major basis for determining its denotative and connotative meanings. The *Young's Analytical Concordance* also includes a breakdown by the particular Hebrew or Greek words employed. Third, check with other sources, such as other Bible teachers or Bible commentaries; for in "a multitude of counselors" (Prov. 11:14) is deliverance. Be like the Bereans in the Book of Acts, who did not believe Paul until they had checked him out in the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Fourth, sift Thieme's teachings, so that you are able to screen out that which is truly biblical doctrine and that which is an extension of Thieme's opinions and personality. If you are unable to do such a sifting process, you would be wise to refrain from studying under Thieme at all.

2. Employ other sources of teaching, such as other Bible teachers and books written on Bible exposition and Bible doctrine, to help you develop a healthy, balanced Christian life.

3. Plan to become a personal student of the Scriptures, dependent upon the Lord and the Scriptures, and not dependent upon men. As soon as possible, move beyond the stage of sucking strained meat; learn how to carve and chew the meat of the Word of God for yourself.

4. If you are engaged in studying Thieme via tapes, commit yourself to a balanced diet, using a large number of taped studies by men like, Stanley Toussaint, S. Lewis Johnson, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Francis Schaeffer. If you find it difficult to establish your doctrinal categories, you might find it helpful to read *Major Bible Themes* by Lewis Sperry Chafer (recently revised and edited by John F. Walvoord).

5. As you listen to Thieme, be careful to draw only God's truth from the message, and avoid emulating Thieme's mannerisms. This word of advice is applicable, not only to students of Thieme, but to students of any teacher.

6. If you are in an evangelical church where Christ is honored and His Word is respected, do not feel that it is necessary to leave that church, in order to study under Thieme in a tape group or tape church. You need the ministry of the members of the body of Christ one toward another under the authority of church leadership (elders or pastors).

7. Make certain that any practice of separating from other believers is for reasons clearly stated in Scripture (gross immorality, rebellion against the church's elders, or doctrinal heresy). Do not allow a man or his distinctive teachings to be a basis for separation from friends or family.

8. Do not fall prey to the subtle sin of pride in knowledge.

9. Do not confuse your grasping of truth and the collection of information (either in your head or in a notebook) with truly being affected by truth and becoming mature.

10. Do not rationalize away the continuing existence of sinful actions and attitudes (such things as moral compromise, spiritual pride, loss of temper, or harsh, unloving responses to people), just because you have gone through the rebound mechanics.

11. Decide to express brotherly love to other believers in the body. Express it by faith, so that it can be the product of the Holy Spirit.

12. Do not let infatuation with a Bible class hinder you from having a balanced, Christian life including time to build healthy family relationships, time to develop Bible study tools, time to build bridges for evangelizing the unsaved, time to show hospitality, and time to meet various spiritual, material and emotional needs of other members in the body of Christ.

13. Learn how to be ministered to by ministers who use a different terminology than Thieme does.

14. Commit yourself to be a healing factor, and promote true expressions of unity. Do not let the Corinthian error affect you, that is, the error of building a pseudo-spirituality on a man-centered mentality.

15. Be sensitive to the hang-ups and taboos of other Christians. Do not allow your liberty to become a source of stumbling to others.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO CONCERNED PASTORS, ELDERS, AND OTHER CHURCH LEADERS**

The author has received numerous questions in recent years from other pastors and teachers in various parts of the country concerning how to respond to the effects of Thieme in their particular community. We shall conclude this dissertation with a list of suggestions that should help to some degree:

1. If Thieme material is beginning to develop Thieme disciples in your community, you would be wise to become aware of his basic vocabulary and

doctrinal framework. Then make certain that you have developed your own convictions in these areas based upon the Word of God objectively. Do not be caught attacking something you do not understand.

2. Especially become aware of those key doctrines that have the most serious effects on one's Christian life. See the first section of this chapter (pp. 151-153).

3. Avoid ridicule of either Thieme himself and his ministry or his technical vocabulary.

4. Become aware of Thieme's exhortation to his people concerning submission to the authority in their local churches and the avoiding of any divisive actions. See Chapter V (p. 130) of this dissertation for some of this material.

5. Relax and don't get "up-tight" over the Thieme issue. Sometimes your reaction can cause more harm than some extreme disciples.

6. Avoid an argumentative spirit.

7. Avoid attacking the personal life of Thieme or spreading any malicious gossip concerning him.

8. Demonstrate real love (both *agape* and *philos-love*) toward those who may be involved in what to you seems divisive.

9. Be positive; challenge your people along two lines: first, to become discerning concerning that which is biblical truth and that which is personal opinion; and second, to become dependent upon the Lord and His Word, not on men.

10. Feed your flock well. Place a high priority on the study of the Scriptures and your own personal spiritual growth as you apply the Word of God to your own life. Give your people solid meat to eat. If you are not fully prepared to provide teaching on the level that many of your people may need, utilize a diet from other sources: books and tapes of outstanding Bible teachers.

11. Emphasize true maturity, and encourage your people to grow, not just to gain more knowledge. See Chapter IV (pp. 112-113) of this dissertation for contrast between true maturity and Thieme's modern doctrine.

12. Discourage the use of tapes unless the person can follow the advice to students of Thieme listed in the preceding section of this chapter (pp. 154-155).

In any case, the "battle is the Lord's," so keep the issue on a spiritual level by constantly praying for all saints, in the power of the Spirit (Eph. 6:18).

*Soli Deo Gloria*

# APPENDICIES



## **APPENDIX A**

### **GLOSSARY OF THIEME'S DISTINCTIVE TERMINOLOGY**

1. **Angelic Conflict:** Unseen conflict in which the forces of Satan are warring against the forces of God.
2. **Apertures of the Soul:** Divine provisions in the makeup of the human Soul that allow for the intake of Bible doctrine and the exhale (or expression) of love to God and to man.
3. **Cosmic Evil:** The satanic system whereby Satan uses any method, love, human good, dialectic materialism, even violence if necessary to gain his objectives.
4. **Cosmic Wisdom:** The satanic attempt to bring order out of chaos in the world that he rules and to seek to introduce perfect environment as a pseudomillennium. The sum total of his doctrines by which he seeks to win his objectives in the angelic conflict. The antithesis of Christian doctrine.
5. **Cosmos Diabolicus:** Satan's world system.
6. **Divine Establishment, Laws of:** Principles set up by God for the protection, orderly function, survival and perpetuation of the human race during the period of the angelic conflict.
7. **Divine Institutions:** Principles set up by God for the perpetuation of the human race; viz., volition, marriage, family, nationalism.
8. **Dying Grace:** The mature believer's experience of physical death under the provision of grace and under the ideal conditions of happiness and blessing. There is usually minimum or no pain and always maximum soul stimulation so that the person departs from the physical body in a state of supreme happiness.
9. **Edification Complex of the Soul (ECS):** Immaterial "structure" in the soul of a mature believer; the foundation is doctrine stored in the human spirit. Composed of five "floors:" grace orientation; relaxed mental attitude; mastery of the details of life; capacity to love god, right man or right woman and friends; inner happiness.
10. **Essence Box:** The listing of the divine attributes.
11. **Emotional Revolt of the Soul:** Emotions dominating the mentality instead of responding to it. Contrary to the divine order whereby the heard or right lobe should control the soul.
12. **Epignosis:** Complete knowledge with emphasis on understanding God; usable doctrine resulting from accepting doctrine by faith.

13. **Evil:** The modus operandi of Satan as the ruler of this world. It is the genius of Satan whereby he distorts doctrine and establishment and disseminates his thought patterns.
14. **Faith-Rest Technique:** Mixing the promises of God with faith; i.e., believing God, God's Word.
15. **Fifth cycle of Discipline:** Destruction of a nation due to maximum rejection of biblical principles (Lev. 26: 33-39).
16. **Grace Apparatus for Perception (GAP):** The divine provision for spiritual growth whereby EVERY believer can understand EVERY doctrine, regular less of education or human IQ.
17. **Grace Pipe:** The way of describing the opening of a channel of blessings to the believer, because the divine integrity has been satisfied by the work of Christ.
18. **Heart:** The dominant or right lobe of the mentality of the soul where the conscience, norms and standards and viewpoint reside.
19. **19."ICE"Teaching:** Isagogics, categories, exegesis. Isagogics: The interpretation of the Bible in its historical setting.
20. **Logistical Grace:** Divine provisions to man in time for the maintenance of physical life (food, air, etc.).
21. **Mataiotes:** Greek word translated "vanity," as in Ephesians 4:17. This is a vacuum in the soul created by negative volition toward god or Bible doctrine.
22. **Maturity Barrier:** The demarcation between spiritual adolescence and spiritual maturity (or super-grace).
23. **Operation Footstool:** The termination of the strategic victory of the angelic conflict by which the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth to establish His kingdom and to remove Satan and all fallen angels. It constitutes a coup d'etat whereby Satan loses the rulership of the world to the Lord Jesus Christ (Psa. 110:1;Eph. 1:22;Heb. 1:13; 10:13).
24. **Phase One** - salvation; **Phase Two** - the Christian way of life, which begins one second after salvation and continues until either death or the Rapture; **Phase Three** - eternity.
25. **Plus H:** inner human happiness,
26. **Plus R:** God's perfect righteousness.
27. **Positional Truth:** Doctrine or truth describing the blessing provided for the believer by virtue of his position in Christ.

28. **Present Positional Truth:** Doctrine of the believer's position in Christ as it relates to Christ's present status (in heaven) and His character (his righteousness).
29. **Rebound Technique:** The believer's being restored to fellowship through confession of his sins (I John 1:9).
30. **Retroactive Positional Truth:** Doctrine of the believer's position in Christ as it relates to the past completed work of Christ (his death and resurrection).
31. **Reverse Process Reversionism:** The function of a reversionistic believer in which he rejects the true objects of love and enters into pseudo-love fanaticism toward false or inconsequential objects of love.
32. **Reversionism:** Recession from any stage of growth, including the partial or completed Edification Complex of the soul, super-grace, etc., through negative volition toward doctrine, scar tissue of the soul, emotional revolt and apostasy.
33. **Right Lobe:** The dominant lobe of the mentality of the soul, designated by the Greek word KARDIA (heart). The right lobe has four areas; frame of reference with memory center (final storage place for all knowledge and basis for learning new knowledge); conscience (norms and standards); vocabulary, conscience, frame of reference, leading to viewpoint of life on any given subject). Left lobe: NOUS (mind) - the preceptive lobe and staging area for knowledge.
34. **Right Man - Right Woman:** The concept that God has designed one specific man for one specific woman. Each member of the human race has a right opposite number, except in special cases where a person has the gift of celibacy.
35. **Royal Family of God:** Christ's family during the spiritual warfare of the church age; another name for the "church."
36. **Scar Tissue:** The concept of "hardening of the heart." Negative volition toward God or Bible doctrine puts scar tissue on the soul; i.e., the heart becomes "hardened" toward God and doctrine. Promiscuity, drug addiction, alcoholism, or any other frantic search for happiness puts scar tissue on the soul; i.e. no capacity for soul activity with other people or with God.
37. **Super-Grace:** The final stage of spiritual growth beyond the Edification Complex of the soul; the normal Christian life and function of the priesthood. The place of maximum utilization of grace in either adversity or prosperity and the area of reaping what God sows. Characterized by occupation with Christ, super-grace capacities (freedom, life, love, happiness, prosperity, adversity), and super-grace blessings (promotion, wealth, success, social life, right man or right woman, etc.).
38. **Ultra-Super-Grace:** An advanced state of maturity.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **DOCTRINAL STATEMENT OF DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

#### **Article I**

#### **THE SCRIPTURES**

We believe that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," by which we understand the whole Bible is inspired in the sense that holy men of God "were moved by the Holy spirit" to write the very words of Scripture. We believe that this divine inspiration extends equally and fully to all parts of the writings -- historical, poetical, doctrinal, and prophetic -- as appeared in the original manuscripts. We believe that the whole Bible in the originals is therefore without error. We believe that all the Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read, or understood until it leads to Him. We also believe that all the Scriptures were designed for our practical instruction. (Mark 12: 26, 36; 13:1 1; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Acts 1: 16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:22-23; 28:23; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 0: I 1; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:2 1.)

#### **Article II**

#### **THE GODHEAD**

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- and that these three are one God having precisely the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence, and obedience. (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1: 1-3; Rev. 1:4-6.)

#### **Article III**

#### **ANGELS, FALLEN AND UNFALLEN**

We believe that God created an innumerable company of sinless, spiritual beings, known as angels; that one, "Lucifer, son of the morning"-- the highest in rank -- sinned through pride, thereby becoming Satan; that a great company of the angels followed him in his moral fall, some of whom became demons and are active as his agents and associates in the prosecution of his unholy purposes, while others who fell are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; 1 Tim. 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6)

We believe that Satan is the originator of sin, and that, under the permission of God, he, through subtlety, led our first parents into transgression, thereby accomplishing their moral fall and subjecting them and their posterity to his own power; that he is the enemy of God and the people of God, opposing and exalting

himself above all that is called god or that is worshipped; and that he who in the beginning said, "I will be like the most High," in his warfare appears as an angel of light, even counterfeiting the works of God by fostering religious movements and systems of doctrine, which systems in every case are characterized by a denial of the efficacy of the blood of Christ and of salvation by grace alone. (Gen. 3: 1-19; Rom. 5:12-14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11:13-15; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-3.)

We believe that Satan was judged at the cross though not then executed, and that he, a usurper, now rules as the "god of this world;" that, at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years, and after the thousand years he will be loosed for a little season and then "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone," where he "shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Col. 2: 15; Rev. 20:1-3, 10.)

We believe that a great company of angels kept their holy estate and are before the throne of God, from whence they are sent forth as ministering spirits to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. (Luke 15:10; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 1: 14; Rev. 7:12.)

We believe that man was made lower than the angels; and that, in His incarnation, Christ took for a little time this lower place that he might lift the believer to His own sphere above the angels. (Heb. 2:6-10.)

#### **Article IV**

#### **MAN CREATED AND FALLEN**

We believe that man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, and that he fell through sin, and, as a consequence of his sin, lost his spiritual life, becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and that he became subject to the power of the devil. We also believe that this spiritual death, or total depravity of human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race of man, the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life, but is essentially and unchangeably bad apart from divine grace. (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 6:5; Ps. 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; 5:40; 6:53; Rom. 3:10-19; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:6; 1 John 3:8.)

#### **Article V**

#### **THE DISPENSATIONS**

We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on the earth through man under varying responsibilities. We believe that the changes in the dispensational dealings of God with man depend on changed conditions or situations in which man is successively found with relation to God, and that these changes are the result of the failures of man and the judg-

ments of God. We believe that different administrative responsibilities of this character are manifest in the biblical record, that they span the entire history of mankind, and that each ends in the failure of man under the respective test and in an ensuing judgment from God. We believe that three of these dispensations or rules of life are the subject of the Mosaic Law, the present dispensation of grace, and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom. We believe that these are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused, as they are chronologically successive.

We believe that the dispensations are not ways of salvation nor different methods of administering the so-called Covenant of Grace. They are not in themselves dependent on covenant relationships but are ways of life and responsibility to God which test the submission of man to His revealed will during a particular time. We believe, that, if man does trust in his own efforts to gain the favor of God or salvation under any dispensational test, because of inherent sin his failure to satisfy fully the just requirements of God is inevitable and his condemnation sure.

We believe that according to the "eternal purpose" of God (Eph. 3:1 1) salvation in the divine reckoning is always "by grace, through faith," and rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ. We believe that God has always been gracious, regardless of the ruling dispensation, but that man has not at all times been under an administration or stewardship of grace as is true in the present dispensation. (I Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; 3:9, A.S.V.; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4, A.S.V.)

We believe that it has always been true that "without faith it is impossible to please" God (Heb. 11:6), and that the principle of faith was prevalent in the lives of all the Old Testament saints. However, we believe that it was historically impossible that they should have had as the conscious object of their faith the incarnate, crucified Son, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifices depicted the person and work of Christ. We believe also that they did not understand the redemptive significance of the prophecies or types concerning the sufferings of Christ (I Peter 1:10-12); therefore, we believe that their faith toward God was manifested in other ways as is shown by the long record in Hebrews II: 1-40. We believe further that their faith thus manifested was counted unto them for righteousness (cf. Rom. 4:3 with Gen. 1 5:6 -, Rom. 4:5 -8; Heb. II: 7).

## **Article VI**

## **THE FIRST ADVENT**

We believe that, as provided and proposed by God and as preannounced in the prophecies of the Scriptures, the eternal Son of God came into this world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy, and become the Redeemer

of a lost world. To this end He was born of the virgin, and received a human body and a sinless human nature. (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:18; 3:16; Heb. 4: 15.)

We believe that, on the human side, He became and remained a perfect man, but sinless throughout His life; yet He retained His absolute deity, being at the same time very God and very man, and that His earth-life sometimes functioned within the sphere of that which was human and sometimes within the sphere of that which was divine. (Luke 2:40; John 1: 1-2; Phil. 2:5-8.)

We believe that in fulfillment of prophecy He came first to Israel as her Messiah-King, and that, being rejected of that nation, He, according to the eternal counsels of God, gave His life as a ransom for all. (John 1: II; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:6.)

We believe that, in infinite love for the lost, He voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb and took away the sin of the world; bearing the holy judgments against sin which the righteousness of God must impose. His death was, therefore, substitutionary in the most absolute sense -- the just for the unjust -- and by His death He became the Savior of the lost. (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:14; Heb. 10:5-14; 1 Peter 3:18)

We believe that, according to the Scriptures, He arose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He had lived and died, and that His resurrection body is the pattern of that body which ultimately will be given to all believers. (John 20:20; Phil. 3:20.)

We believe that, on departing from the earth, He was accepted of His Father and that His acceptance is a final assurance to us that His redeeming work was perfectly accomplished. (Heb. 1:3.)

We believe that He became Head over all things to the church which is His body, and in this ministry He ceases not to intercede and advocate for the saved. (Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2: 1.)

## **Article VII**

## **SALVATION ONLY THROUGH CHRIST**

We believe that, owing to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation however great, no attainments in morality however high, no culture however attractive, no baptism or other ordinance however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven: but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation, and only those thus saved are sons of God. We believe, also, that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who was made to be sin and was made a curse for us, dying in our room and stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the Apostles can add in the very least degree to the value of the blood, or to the merit of the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity with perfect and sinless humanity. (Lev. 17:1 1; Isa. 64:6; Matt. 26:28; John 3:7-18; Rom. 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 3:4-9; Titus 3:5; James 1: 18; 1 Peter 1: 18-19, 23.)

We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and that repentance is a vital part of believing, and is in no way, in itself, a separate and independent condition of salvation; nor are any other acts, such as confession, baptism, prayer, or faithful service, to be added to believing as a condition of salvation. (John 1: 12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 13:39: 16:3 1; Rom. 1: 16-17; 3:22, 26; 4:5; 10:4; Gal. 3:22.)

#### **Article VIII**

#### **THE EXTENT OF SALVATION**

We believe that when an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life, and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion as linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one may have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings and to know a fuller measure of divine power through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is, therefore, in no way required by God to seek a so-called "Second blessing," or a "second work of grace." (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5: 1; I Cor. 3:21-23; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2: 1 0; I John 4:17; 5:11-12.)

#### **Article IX**

#### **SANTIFICATION**

We believe that sanctification, which is a setting apart unto God, is threefold: It is already complete for every saved person because his position toward God is the same as Christ's position. Since the believer is in Christ, he is set apart unto God in the measure in which Christ is set apart unto God. We believe, however, that he retains his sin nature, which cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, while the standing of the Christian in Christ is perfect, his present state is no more perfect than his experience in daily life. There is, therefore a progressive sanctification wherein the Christian is to "grow in grace." and to "be changed" by the unhindered power of the Spirit. We believe, also, that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state as he is now sanctified in his standing in

Christ when he shall see his Lord and shall be "like Him." (John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18, 7: 1; Eph. 4:24; 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 10: 10, 14; 12: 10.)

#### **Article X**

#### **ETERNAL SECURITY**

We believe that, because of the eternal purpose of God toward the objects of His love, because of His freedom to exercise grace toward the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory blood of Christ, because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life, because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven, because of the immutability of the unchangeable covenants of God, because of the regenerating, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved, we and all true believers everywhere, once saved shall be kept saved forever. We believe, however, that God is a holy and righteous Father and that, since He cannot overlook the sin of His children, He will when they persistently sin chasten them and correct them in infinite love; but having undertaken to save them and keep them forever, apart from all human merit, He, who cannot fail, will in the end present every one of them faultless before the presence of His glory and conformed to the image of His Son. (John 5:24; 10:28; 13: 1; 14:16-17; 17:1 1; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2; 5: 13; Jude 1:24.)

#### **Article XI**

#### **ASSURANCE**

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude, and obedience. (Luke 10:20; 22:32; 2 Cor. 5: 1; 6-8; 2 Tim. 1: 12; Heb. 10:22; 1 John 5:13.)

#### **Article XII**

#### **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the blessed Trinity, though omnipresent from all eternity, took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the day of Pentecost according to the divine promise, dwells in every believer, and by His baptism unites all to Christ in one body, and that He, as the Indwelling One, is the source of all power and all acceptable worship and service. We believe that He never takes His departure from the church, nor from the feeblest of the saints, but is ever present to testify of Christ; seeking to occupy believers with Him and not with themselves nor with their experiences. We believe that His abode in the world in this special sense will cease when Christ comes

to receive His own at the completion of the church. (John 14:16-17; 16:7-15; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22; 2 Thess. 2:7.)

We believe that, in this age, certain well-defined ministries are committed to the Holy Spirit, and that it is the duty of every Christian to understand them and to be adjusted to them in his own life and experience. These ministries are: The restraining of evil in the world to the measure of the divine will; the convicting of the world respecting sin, righteousness, and judgment; the regenerating of all believers; the indwelling and anointing of all who are saved, thereby sealing them unto the day of redemption; the baptizing into the one body of Christ of all who are saved; and the continued filling for power, teaching, and service of those among the saved who are yielded to Him and who are subject to His will. (John 3:6; 16:7-11; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2: 20-27.)

We believe that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous hearings were temporary. We believe that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary sign of the baptism nor of the filling of the Spirit, and that the deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection. (Acts 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 13:8.)

### **Article XIII**

### **THE CHURCH A UNITY OF BELIEVERS**

We believe that all who are united to the risen and ascended Son of God are members of the church which is the body and bride of Christ, which began at Pentecost and is completely distinct from Israel. Its members are constituted as such regardless of membership or non-membership in the organized churches of earth. We believe that by the same Spirit all believers in this age are baptized into, and thus become, one body that is Christ's, whether Jews or Gentiles, and having become members one of another, are under solemn duty to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, rising above all sectarian differences, and loving one another with a pure heart fervently. (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2:42-47; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:3-10; Col. 3:14-15.)

### **Article XIV**

### **THE SACRAMENTS OR ORDINANCES**

We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only sacraments and ordinances of the church and that they are a scriptural means of testimony for the church in this age. (Matt. 28:19; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 10:47-48; 16:32-33; 18:7-8; 1 Cor. 11:26.)

**Article XV****THE CHRISTIAN'S WALK**

We believe that we are called with a holy calling, to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, and so to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit that we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. But the flesh with its fallen, Adamic nature, which in this life is never eradicated, being with us to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, needs to be kept by the Spirit constantly in subjection to Christ, or it will surely manifest its presence in our lives to the dishonor of our Lord. (Rom. 6:1 1; 8:2, 4, 12-13; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 2: 1 -10; I Peter 1: 14-16; 1 John 1:4-7; 3:5-9.)

**Article XVI****THE CHRISTIAN'S SERVICE**

We believe that divine, enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit upon all who are saved. While there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the same Spirit, and each is called to his own divinely appointed service as the Spirit may will. In the apostolic church there were certain gifted men -- apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers -- who were appointed by God for the perfecting of the saints unto their work of the ministry. We believe also that today some men are especially called of God to be evangelists, pastors and teachers, and that it is to the fulfilling of His will and to His eternal glory that these shall be sustained and encouraged in their service for God. (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11.)

We believe that, wholly apart from salvation benefits which are bestowed equally upon all who believe, rewards are promised according to the faithfulness of each believer in his service for his Lord, and that these rewards will be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ after He comes to receive His own to Himself. (1 Cor. 3:9-15; 9:18-27; 2 Cor. 5:10.)

**Article XVII****THE GREAT COMMISSION**

We believe that it is the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved that they are sent forth by him into the world even as He was sent forth of His Father into the world. We believe that, after they are saved, they are divinely reckoned to be related to this world as strangers and pilgrims, ambassadors and witnesses, and that their primary purpose in life should be to make Christ known to the whole world. (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Peter 1: 17; 2:11.)

**Article XVIII****THE BLESSED HOPE**

We believe that, according to the Word of God, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to

Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in the Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking. (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14.)

#### **Article XIX**

#### **THE TRIBULATION**

We believe that the translation of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 6:1; 19:21) during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven. The whole period of Israel's seventieth week will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We believe that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.

#### **Article XX**

#### **THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

We believe that the period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God's covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God. (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:15-25; 46; Acts 15:16-17; Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:105; Rev. 20:1-3.)

#### **Article XXI**

#### **THE ETERNAL STATE**

We believe that at death the spirits and sould of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon sould and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and sould of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 1: 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15.)

**APPENDIX C**  
**BERACHAH CHURCH CONSTITUTION**

**REVISED**

**ARTICLE I**

**Name**

The name of this Church shall be Berachah Church, A Texas Corporation, having its principal place of worship at 2815 Sage Road, City of Houston, County of Harris, State of Texas, hereinafter referred to as this Church.

**ARTICLE II**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this Church is to present exegetical, categorical and isagogical Bible teaching, standing unequivocally for the fundamentals of the faith as contained in the Holy Scriptures; and through the teaching of the Word in this Church, the sending out of missionaries, and the ordaining of pastor-teachers, present the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ both at home and abroad.

The thrust of this church is to communicate Bible Doctrine to believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for the purpose of attainment of spiritual maturity.

This purpose and thrust is accomplished through the daily teaching of the Word of God.

**ARTICLE III**

**Doctrine and Tenets**

A. Statement of Doctrine

The following basic doctrines contained in the Holy Scriptures are adopted:

1. The Holy Scriptures

We believe the Holy Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God, authoritative, inerrant, and God-breathed (II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:20-9 1; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12-13).

2. The Godhead

We believe in one Triune God, existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy

Spirit, eternal in being, identical in nature, equal in power and glory and having the same attributes and perfections. (Deuteronomy 6:4; II Corinthians 13:14).

3. The Total Depravity of Man

We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God but that in Adam's sin the race fell, inherited a sinful nature, became alienated from God, and is totally unable to retrieve his lost condition (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 3:22-23; 5:12; Ephesians 2:12).

4. The Person and Work of Christ

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man, without ceasing to be God, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, in order that He might reveal God and redeem sinful man; that He accomplished our redemption through His spiritual death on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice; that our redemption is made sure to us by His literal physical resurrection from the dead (John 1: 1-2, 14; Luke 1:35; Romans 3:24-25; 4:25; 1 Peter: 3-5); that the Lord Jesus Christ is now in Heaven, exalted at the right hand of God, where as the High Priest for His people, He fulfills the ministry of Representative, Intercessor and Advocate (Hebrews 9:24; 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1-2).

5. The Personality and Work of the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is a person who convicts the world of sin, indwells all believers in the present age, baptizes them into the body of Christ, seals them unto the day of redemption, and that it is the duty of every believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 1:13-14; 5:18).

6. Salvation

We believe that salvation in every dispensation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose efficacious death on the cross provided man's reconciliation to God. (Ephesians 2:8-20; John 1: 12; Ephesians 1:7).

7. The Eternal Security of Believers

We believe that all believers are kept secure forever (Romans 8:1, 38-39; John 10:27-30; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8).

8. The Church

We believe that the Church, which is now the body and shall be the bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism made up of all born-again persons of this age irrespective of their affiliation with Christian organizations (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-27; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

9. The Personality of Satan

We believe in the personality of Satan, who is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Job 1: 6-7; Matthew 4:2-11; Isaiah 14:12-17).

10. The Blessed Hope

We believe that the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord Jesus in the air to receive to Himself the dead in Christ and believers who are alive at His coming, otherwise known as the Rapture and Translation of the Church (I Corinthians 15:51-57; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14).

11. The Tribulation

We believe that the Rapture of the Church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel's seventieth week, the latter half of which is the time of Jacob's trouble, the great tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:15-21; Revelation 6:1-19; 21).

12. The Second Coming of Christ

We believe that the great tribulation will be climaxed by the (premillennial) return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth to set up his kingdom (Zechariah 14: 4-11; Matthew 24:15-25; 46; 11 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 20:6).

13. The Eternal State

We believe that the soul and human spirit of those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation do at death immediately pass into His presence, and there remain in the conscious bliss until the resurrection of the body at His coming, when soul, human spirit and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in the glory; but the souls of unbelievers remain after death in conscious misery until the final judgment of the Great White Throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:43; 11 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; II Thessalonians 1:7-9; Jude, verses 6-7; Revelation 20:11-15).

14. The Responsibility of Believers

To "Grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ", to the end that His life is consistent with the Lord's plan thus bringing both blessing to the believer and honor to the Lord.

15. Church Ordinances

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper to be observed until His return (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

16. Sovereignty

We believe that God, existing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is sovereign, and exercises supreme and absolute rule over all creation as a part of and consistent with the essence and attributes of deity. (1 Chronicles 29:11,12; Daniel 4:35; Psalms 24:1; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Timothy 6:15).

17. Spirituality

We believe that spirituality is an absolute condition in the life of a believer in this dispensation wherein he is filled or controlled by the Holy Spirit, walking in love and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that spirituality is distinct from maturity, that a believer becomes carnal through any act of mental, verbal or overt sin and that spirituality or fellowship with Christ is restored solely by personal confession of that sin to God the Father. (John 15:7, 8; 11 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 5:18; Romans 6:11-13; 1 John 1:9, 1 John 1:5; 2:2; 1 Corinthians 11:30,31).

18. Spiritual Gifts

We believe that God the Holy Spirit in grace and apart from human merit sovereignly bestows spiritual gifts to believers in this dispensation. Some of the permanent spiritual gifts which exist today are pastor-teacher, evangelist, administrator. We further believe that the temporary spiritual gifts ceased with the completion of the Canon of Scripture and these were: Apostleship, Prophecy, Speaking in Tongues, Interpreting Tongues, Healing and Working of Miracles. (1 Corinthians 12, 13; Ephesians 4:7-12; Romans 12:4-8). Any member practicing these temporary gifts shall be subject to immediate dismissal.

B. Tenets

1. This Church shall not at any time become a member, sanction, or support any denomination, association of Churches or religious organization of any kind.
2. This Church shall not solicit anyone to become a member. Those who desire to affiliate with this Church may do so by complying with the provision of Article V.
3. This Church shall not knowingly accept gifts from unbelievers nor make individual solicitation of funds or pledges among believers.

## **ARTICLE IV**

### **Church Government**

The leadership of this Church is vested in the Pastor whose absolute authority is derived from the Scripture (Hebrews 13:7, 13).

The Administration of the affairs of this Church under the leadership of the Pastor is vested in the Church Officers and the Board of Deacons.

A. Church Officers

The Church Officers shall include the Chairman, the Vice-chairman, the Treasurer and the Secretary. The Officers shall be appointed by the Pastor for an indefinite term of office, which shall be terminated by resignation, or removal by the Pastor. A member's qualifications to serve in the capacity of Church Officer shall be discerned and evaluated by the Pastor.

1. Chairman

The Chairman shall preside at all business meetings of the Members and of the Board of Deacons; shall have general supervision of the administrative affairs of this Church as provided in this Constitution and/or as directed by the Pastor; shall sign all instruments of this Church where applicable; shall be an ex-officio member of all committees; and shall perform all other duties incident to this office.

2. Vice Chairman

The Vice Chairman shall assist the Chairman as directed, and perform the functions of the Chairman during his absence.

3. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall be responsible for the receipt, deposit and disbursement of all funds and securities as authorized by the Pastor and Members; keep books of account, and shall render a current financial statement at the Annual Meeting of the Members, and such other reports which at the discretion of the Treasurer are essential to proper financial reporting. The Treasurer shall be responsible for the investment of surplus funds subject to the approval of the Pastor and the Board of Deacons. The Church accounting personnel shall be under the sole supervision of the Treasurer.

4. Secretary

The Secretary shall keep the Minutes of the business meetings of the Members and the Deacons; receive and issue notice of all business meetings of the Members and the Deacons; be custodian of the Corporate seal and records; keep current a roster of the Members with addresses; maintain a record of attendance at Deacons' meetings; sign instruments where required by law, and prepare the agenda of an business meetings of the Members and Deacons.

B. Deacons

The Board of Deacons shall consist of the Pastor, the four (4) Officers and fifteen (15) male members of the Congregation. If the Pastor has an Assistant, he too may be appointed to the Board of Deacons at the Pastor's discretion.

1. Appointment Procedure

The Pastor shall, with the assistance of the Church Officers, prepare a list of

appointees to be submitted to the Membership at the annual Business Meeting of Members, for ratification. An appointed Board of Deacons shall be ratified upon an affirmative vote of a majority of the members present and voting.

2. Term of Office

a. Each Deacon shall be appointed for a term not exceeding three (3) years, unless held over at the special request of the Pastor, and approved by the Board of Deacons.

b. The term of one-third (1/3) of the Deacons shall expire each year, except where a Deacon or Deacons should be held over at the special request of the Pastor and approved by the Board of Deacons.

c. A Deacon who has served a three-year term shall not be eligible for reappointment until one year has elapsed, unless otherwise requested by Pastor and approved by the Board of Deacons.

3. Qualifications

a. A Member who is a supported Missionary, an employee, or the spouse of an employee of Berachah Church shall not serve as a Deacon.

b. An appointee for Deacon must have been a member of Berachah Church for two years before being eligible to serve as Deacon, unless this requirement is waived by the Pastor in specific instances, and approved by the Board of Deacons.

4. Vacancy

A vacancy shall be filled by appointment by the Pastor, and approved by the Board of Deacons. A Deacon so appointed shall serve the unexpired term of his predecessor.

5. Regular Meetings

A regular meeting of the Deacons shall be held not later than thirty (30) days after the Annual Meeting of Members. Other regular meetings shall be held at such times and places as the Deacons may determine, but at least once a month.

6. Special Meetings

A special meeting of the Deacons may be called at any time at the request of the Pastor, the Chairman, or five Deacons..

7. Quorum

A quorum shall be one-half (1/2) of the total number of Deacons and officers. The acts of the majority of the Deacons present shall be the act of the Deacons unless otherwise specifically required by this Constitution.

8. Place and Notice of Meetings

All meetings of the Deacons shall be held at the principal place of worship of

the Church unless otherwise specified in the notice of same.

Notice of meetings shall be given in writing or by telephone at least three (3) days prior to such meeting, except in the case of special call meetings which can be called by the Pastor or Chairman at anytime. The purpose of the meeting need not be stated in such notice.

9. Duties of Deacons

Under the authority of the Pastor, the Deacons shall administer the affairs of this Church which are not delegated or reserved to the Pastor, Church Officers or others. The specific responsibilities of the Deacons shall include:

- a. Make provision for the supply of the pulpit in the event of a vacancy in the office of Pastor, or take full charge of all services for which the pulpit is not supplied during that vacancy.
- b. To cooperate with the Pastor in the shepherding of the membership of this Church, reconcile so far as possible all differences; keep order in the assemblies of the Members; act for the Members in the reception and dismissal of Members; supervise and administer the various activities of Berachah Church as indicated hereinafter by the standing and special committees.
- c. To assist the Treasurer in the supervision and administration of all funds; to hire and discharge personnel, except where reserved to the Pastor or specific Officer: to determine salaries and Missionary allowances; to hold title to all property in trust for the use and benefit of the Members, but shall not acquire or dispose of real property which is intended for, or used as, a Church facility, or contract for any loans on behalf of this Church except upon prior specific instruction and authority by the Members at a duly called business meeting; to take all necessary measures for the protection, management and upkeep of all property; to determine the use of the facilities of this Church for all extra or secular purposes; to render a written report to the Members at the Annual Meeting of the Members, outlining therein the activities of the Deacons for the past year and recommendations, if any, for the Members; to execute any special instructions of the Members adopted in a resolution at a duly called meeting of the Members.
- d. To interpret this Constitution.

10. Committees

The Committees shall be the standing Committees and Special Committees.

1. The standing Committees of this Church shall be:
  - a. Finance Committee; Chaired by the Treasurer;
  - b. Church Office Committee, Chaired by an appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor.
  - c. Prep School Committee, Chaired by the Pastor with a subordinate Superintendent responsible for day-to-day activities;

- d. Membership Committee; Chaired by appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor.
  - e. Missionary Committee, Chaired by an appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor;
  - f. Nursery Committee, Chaired by an appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor;
  - g. Property Committee, Chaired by an appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor;
  - h. Ushers Committee, Chaired by appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor;
  - i. Ordination Committee, Chaired by an appointee of the Chairman and approved by the Pastor;
2. Each Standing Committee shall be chaired by a Deacon or the Pastor, and shall have as members those Deacons and/or Members of the Congregation selected by its chairman and approved by the Pastor.
3. The specific duties of the Standing committees are as follows:
- a. Finance Committee shall be responsible, under the supervision of the Treasurer, for the supervision and administration of all ways and means of receiving, conserving and disbursing funds, and maintenance of proper insurance.
  - b. Church Office Committee shall be responsible for the operation and management of the Church Office, including office secretarial personnel and equipment, maintenance of church records and custody of membership fogs.
  - c. Membership Committee shall examine the qualifications of applicants for membership, and recommend qualified applicants to the Board of Deacons for approval; keep the Deacons apprised of Members who are sick or in need of financial assistance, and in general assist the Pastor as he may direct in matters affecting the Membership.
  - d. Missionary Committee shall be responsible for the administration of all missionary activities according to the policy approved by the Deacons and Pastor.
  - e. Nursery Committee shall be responsible for the administration and operation of the nursery facilities.
  - f. Prep School Committee shall be responsible for the approval of curriculum used in the Prep School operation, enlist and train faculty, and administer the day-to-day functions of Prep School.
  - g. Property Committee shall be responsible for the operation, use, maintenance and repair of all property, not specifically delegated to others, including all buildings, grounds, parking areas, mechanical equipment, and all equipment/furniture and fixtures appurtenant to the Church property. The

cleaning and maintenance personnel shall be under the supervision of this Committee.

h. Ushers Committee shall be responsible for the seating of the congregation at all public worship services; provisions for tellers at business meetings of the Members; preparation and distribution of the elements of the Lord's Supper.

i. Ordination Committee shall represent the Pastor in the evaluation of the written Doctrinal Questionnaires submitted by ordination candidates; arrange and prepare for verbal examination of candidates by the Pastor and Deacons.

4. Special Committees

Special Committees may be appointed by the Pastor or the Chairman for the execution of special activities not within the scope of the standing committee.

## **ARTICLE V**

### **Membership**

A. A Person shall qualify for membership who:

1. Believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal savior;

2. Acknowledges and accepts the authority of the Pastor as Right Pastor/Teacher.

B. Receiving Members

Any person desiring to become a member of this church who makes such request of the Pastor or Deacons and who meets the qualifications of this Article shall upon approval of the Deacons, be received as a Member into the fellowship of this Church.

C. Voting Member

The voting Members shall be limited to those Members residing in Harris and adjoining counties of Texas, who are 21 years old or older.

D. Associate Membership

Persons residing outside Harris and adjoining counties of Texas may be admitted as Associate Members in the same manner prescribed for Members, but shall not be eligible to vote or hold office.

E. Membership Roll

1. Periodic review of the membership role with a view toward changing the

status of individual members from "active" to "inactive" is the prerogative of the Pastor. The Pastor shall recommend such status changes to the Board of Deacons for their approval. Status may be changed from "inactive" to "active" by the same process.

2. A member who is on the inactive membership list shall not be eligible to vote or hold office.

3. A member may be removed and reinstated to the membership roles by action of the Pastor or Board of Deacons.

## **ARTICLE VI**

### **Worship Services**

Public Worship services shall be held when, and as often as the Pastor determines, or in the event a vacancy in the office of Pastor exists, as the Deacons determine.

The Pastor shall be the final authority in the regulation of all aspects of these services.

## **ARTICLE VII**

### **Business Meetings of the Members**

A. Place

All business meetings of the Members shall be held at the principal place of worship of this Church, unless otherwise specified in the notice.

B. Notice

The date, time, place and agenda of all meetings will be published in the Church Bulletin at least seven (7) days prior to such meeting(s).

C. Agenda

Items of business for consideration in business meetings will be restricted to the agenda stipulated in the notice of meeting. Issues and questions from the floor, departing from the agenda, will not be considered or voted upon.

D. Annual Business Meeting

There shall be an annual business meeting of the Members within six weeks of the end of the fiscal year; the exact date of same to be determined by the Deacons and the meeting shall be called by the Secretary by notice as herein-before stipulated.

E. Special Business Meetings

Special business meetings of the Members shall be called by the Secretary upon notice from the Pastor or the Deacons. The date, time, and purpose of said meeting, will be announced in the church bulletin.

F. Quorum and Conduct of Business

1. A quorum for the transaction of business shall be twenty percent of the voting Members. The majority vote of such members present and voting shall prevail unless the vote of a greater number is required by this Constitution.

2. In all business meetings, the Chairman of the Deacons shall preside, and in his absence the Vice Chairman; and if both be absent, a chairman shall be appointed by the Deacons.

3. In the transaction of business, the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order, Revised, shall be used in all cases not covered by this Constitution.

G. Voting

The Chairman of the meeting shall determine the method of voting, except the following shall be by secret ballot: The ratification of appointed Deacons; purchase, sale or transfer of real property; the calling of a Pastor.

## ARTICLE VIII

### Pastor

A. Call

1. In the event of a vacancy in the office of Pastor, the Chairman of the Board of Deacons shall appoint a Pulpit Committee, subject to approval of the Board. This committee shall be responsible for locating acceptable candidates and presenting them to the Board for consideration.

2. A candidate for Pastor shall be considered only after he has subscribed in writing to the doctrinal statement and Constitution of this Church. He shall be recommended to the Members in a duly called business meeting by at least a two-thirds (2/3) affirmative vote of the Board of Deacons.

B. Terminating A Pastor's Services The pastor may be recommended for dismissal by an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the total number of Deacons. Voting shall be in a duly called meeting of the Deacons. At least 30 days prior to such meeting, the Pastor under consideration shall be notified in writing of the reason(s) for the recom-

mended dismissal, and at his option may be represented by two Members, introduce evidence, present and cross examine witnesses. If the vote is for dismissal, recommendation shall be made by the Deacons to the Members and the services of the Pastor may then be terminated by at least a two-thirds vote of the Members present in a duly called business meeting by a roll call vote.

## **ARTICLE IX**

### **Missionaries**

#### **A. Support**

Support of duly qualified missionaries, or mission entities may be initiated by a recommendation to the Members by the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the Deacons present in a duly called meeting of the Deacons.

An affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the Members present in a duly called business meeting of the Members shall be necessary for approval of such support. Such support may be terminated by the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the Deacons present in a duly called meeting of the Deacons.

#### **B. Doctrinal Position**

A missionary or missionary entity shall subscribe to and abide by the doctrinal statement of this Church before any support shall be approved or continued.

## **ARTICLE X**

### **Licensing and Ordination**

#### **A. License**

A license to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be issued in the name of this Church to any man who in the judgment of the Pastor and Deacons is called of God to the work of the ministry, by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the total number of the Deacons. The issuance of such a license shall not bind this Church to a future ordination of the licensee.

#### **B. Ordination**

A commission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be granted in the name of this Church to any man by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the examining council administered by the Ordination Committee. The examining council will be composed of the Pastor and Deacons. The examining council shall thoroughly examine all such applicants as to personal salvation, spiritual gifts, doctrine, ministry, education and character.

C. Revocation

A license or ordination granted by this Church may be revoked upon recommendation by the Ordination Committee and an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the total number of the Deacons.

**ARTICLE XI**

**Fiscal Year**

The Fiscal Year of this Church shall begin on the first day of January and end on the last day of December each year.

**ARTICLE XII**

**Seal**

The Deacons shall provide a Corporate Seal which shall be in the form of a circle and shall have inscribed thereon the name of this Church.

**ARTICLE XIII**

**Amendments**

This Constitution may be amended by a vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the Members present at a duly called business meeting, provided the proposed amendment has been approved by the Deacons.



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