

DEFENSE AND CONFIRMATION OF THE GOSPEL

BROTHERS, HEAR OUR DEFENSE



CONCERNING
THE STATE OF
CHRISTENDOM

DCP
PRESS

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DCP is a project to defend and confirm the New Testament ministry of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and the practice of the local churches.

Phil. 1:7 – Even as it is right for me to think this concerning you all because you have me in your heart, since both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you are all fellow partakers with me of grace.

Editors' note: *The gospel*, as used on the cover and title page of this book (*Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel*), has a broader meaning than may be familiar to some readers. The fullness of the good news announced in the New Testament encompasses the entire operation of God to accomplish His purpose. The complete gospel therefore includes all of the truths unveiled in the apostles' teaching through "the word of the truth of the gospel" (Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13; Acts 2:42; Titus 1:9).

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PREFACE

This book is the third in a series that corrects errors in an article written by Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes rejecting a reassessment performed by the Christian Research Institute (CRI) concerning the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches. CRI, one of the earliest apologetics ministries in the United States to criticize those teachings, discovered, based upon extensive primary research, that they had erred in their earlier assessment. To correct the misinformation that had been propagated from their earlier writings, CRI published a special edition of the *Christian Research Journal* entitled “We Were Wrong.”¹ Shortly after the release of the special issue of the *Journal*, Geisler and Rhodes published a response on the Internet attacking CRI’s new findings.

The books in this series point out some of the more significant problems with their response. This book addresses Geisler and Rhodes’:

- Misrepresentation of Witness Lee’s biblical critique of the system of Christianity;
- Misrepresentation of Witness Lee’s biblical critique of Roman Catholicism; and
- Hypocrisy in applying a double standard with regard to their own criticism of the Roman Catholic Church in light of their misrepresentation of Witness Lee’s balanced and biblical critique.

¹ *Christian Research Journal*, 32:6, December 2009.

MISREPRESENTING WITNESS LEE'S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY

If we are going to voice differences, therefore, we have an obligation to make a serious effort to understand the person with whom we differ. That person may have published books or articles. Then we should be acquainted with those writings. It is not appropriate for us to voice sharp differences if we have neglected to read what is available. The person with whom we differ should have evidence that we have read carefully what has been written and that we have attempted to understand its meaning.¹

This statement sets forth the responsibility of polemic or apologetic writers to represent accurately and fairly the beliefs of those with whom they disagree prior to attempting to refute those beliefs. Norman Geisler expressed a similar sentiment in the preface to a book critiquing Islam that he co-authored:

It is our belief that it is not possible to evaluate another viewpoint fairly without first understanding it.²

It is patently unfair to present a differing perspective in such a way that those holding that view cannot recognize it and then to assail those whose beliefs are misrepresented.

Sadly, that is the exact method employed in "A Response to the Christian Research Journal's Recent Defense of the 'Local

¹ Roger R. Nicole, "Polemic Theology: How to Deal with Those Who Differ from Us," *The Founders Journal*, Issue 33, Summer 1998 (wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj33/article3.html). The author further details his observations concerning Cornelius Van Til and his research methods in Van Til's long-running dispute with Karl Barth. Nicole saw Van Til's copies of much of what Barth wrote and testified that Van Til had thoroughly researched Barth's writings as evidenced by his handwritten notes on nearly every page. This is a stark contrast to Geisler and Rhodes, who reject the need to further research Witness Lee's writings and demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the corpus of his work, let alone an accurate understanding of the portions of his teachings they misrepresent in "Response."

² Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), p. 13.

Church' Movement" (henceforth "Response"). In a section of "Response" entitled "Admittedly Regrettable and Harsh Statements about Other Religious Groups," Geisler and Rhodes make several onerous and inaccurate statements by which they misrepresent the teachings of Witness Lee. These statements were made concerning the third chapter of Witness Lee's book *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (henceforth *Practice*). In what appears to be an effort to convince their readers that the local churches despise all Christians and utter hate speech against their brothers and sisters, Geisler and Rhodes claim, in reference to that chapter, that:

Witness Lee...engages in a slanderous attack on "all of Christianity," "all Christians," "today's Christendom" "all Christianity," and "today's Catholic Church." He calls organized Christianity "deformed and degraded," containing "false teachers," who are "in their apostasy."

Even in this short section, there are numerous serious errors. Geisler and Rhodes:

- Misapply Witness Lee's references to "false teachers" and ignore his interpretation of the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30);
- Misrepresent Witness Lee's statement about "all Christians";
- Ignore Lee's positive appraisals of fellow Christians;
- Mischaracterize Witness Lee's critique of Christianity based on their own definitions, not his;
- Misconstrue Witness Lee's biblical critique of the system of Christianity as:
 - Being deformed as shown in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-33);
 - Being degraded according to the course of church history; and
- Disregard the focus and content of Witness Lee's teaching in the subject chapter.

It is evident that in "Response" Geisler and Rhodes intend to convey to their readers that Witness Lee purposely, harshly, and

injuriously criticized all his fellow believers without basis and that Lee's statements about "false teachers" and "apostasy" applied generally to those throughout evangelicalism. In the same section, they refer to Lee's teaching as "harsh," "lamentable," and "inexcusable."

Shortly after the portion quoted above with its accusation of slander, Geisler and Rhodes also accused Witness Lee of libel. In the same section, they said, "If ever there were grounds for religious libel, this would be it." The most intrinsic, crucial matter in any accusation of slander or libel is that the statements in question must be examined in context and proven false in order for the accusation to stand. Curiously, Geisler and Rhodes did not attempt to challenge the truth of Witness Lee's statements.

Witness Lee Rightly Labels Modernists as Apostate False Teachers

On examination of the context of Witness Lee's criticism of Christianity, it is difficult to fathom the visceral intensity of Geisler and Rhodes' reaction. They complain vociferously that Witness Lee "calls organized Christianity 'deformed and degraded,' containing 'false teachers,' who are 'in their apostasy'" as if these false teachers were genuine, Bible-believing teachers. Rather than a blanket condemnation of evangelical teachers, Witness Lee addressed a specific category of persons—those who deny some of the essential elements of the common faith. In speaking of the parables in Matthew 13 as descriptions of the outward appearance of the kingdom of God or the equivalent of Christendom, Witness Lee said:

One parable shows us that while the wheat is growing the enemy of the Lord comes and sows tares amidst the wheat (vv. 24-30). This means that the false believers, the nominal Christians, were sown into the so-called church. In degraded Christianity there are many false or nominal Christians...

In today's Christianity there are also modernists, who do not recognize the inspiration of the holy Word and deny the

Lord's incarnation through the virgin Mary. They say that the Lord's death was not for redemption but only a kind of martyrdom. They believe that the Lord was martyred on the cross for His teachings which were different from the Jewish traditional religion. They also deny the resurrection of Christ and all the miracles in the Bible.³

Immediately following, Witness Lee spoke of how he and his contemporaries rose up to fight against modernism when it was brought to China in the early part of the twentieth century. Concerning the modernist teachers, he referred to 2 Peter 2:1, which says:

But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

It is concerning these modernists that Witness Lee said, "The false teachers *at Peter's time, like today's modernists* in their apostasy, denied both the Lord's person as the Master and His redemption" (emphasis added).⁴ Geisler and Rhodes omitted the words shown in italics above that connected "false teachers" to "in their apostasy" and lifted them from their explicit qualifiers to create a false impression. This is a misrepresentation of Witness Lee's words.

No one can deny that there are modernists in today's Christianity, false teachers who are in apostasy and who trouble the genuine believers with their destructive heresies such as those Witness Lee listed above. It is difficult to imagine Geisler and Rhodes objecting to these statements of criticism about modernist or liberal theologians and their teachings. Geisler and Rhodes are not known as champions of modernism or of those who deny the inspiration of the Scripture, the virgin birth of the

³ Witness Lee, *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), pp. 25-26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

incarnate Son of God, the vicarious death of Christ on the cross for our redemption, or His resurrection for our justification. One is left to wonder why they would object to Witness Lee describing those who teach such things “false teachers” who are “in their apostasy.”

Many Christian teachers criticize the false teachers in Christianity. For example, Mike Gendron, Proclaiming the Gospel Ministries, is a Christian teacher who has many articles posted on the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute website, where many of Geisler’s articles are also posted. Gendron’s comments concerning false teachers and Christendom echo Witness Lee’s. Gendron states:

What are we to do with the false teachers within Christendom? We are to expose their false teachings and refrain from participating in their endeavors (Eph. 5:6, 11).⁵

The context of Gendron’s statement shows that he is speaking of the same “false teachers” as was Witness Lee, that is, those who are broadly within the system of Christianity but who deny the essentials of the faith. Yet, Gendron has not been misrepresented by Geisler and Rhodes nor has he been accused of slander and religious libel by them. Those who have written similar statements are far too numerous to mention in this article.⁶

Witness Lee’s use of the words “false teachers” who are “in their apostasy” in reference to today’s modernists is a legitimate application of the Bible. Geisler and Rhodes simply selected a few of Witness Lee’s words—ripped from the original sentence, severed from context—and strung them together in the most incendiary way to incite their readers to reject, perhaps even

⁵ Mike Gendron, “The Vatican’s Call for Unity” (Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, Nov. 2001) www.johnankerberg.com/Articles/_PDFArchives/roman-catholicism/RC1W1201.pdf.

⁶ See “Biblical Critiques of Christianity – Selected Bibliography and Biographical Notes on Sources Cited.”

despise, Witness Lee and the local churches. This is neither fair nor truthful; rather, it is the apologetic equivalent of the anarchist's bomb—angry, lawless, and indiscriminately damaging. Therefore, it is Geisler and Rhodes' article, not the speaking of Witness Lee, that is laced with “harsh” and “regrettable” words.

Did Witness Lee Assail “All Christians”?

By placing the words “all Christians” in quotation marks in their accusation referenced above, Geisler and Rhodes accused Witness Lee of directly slandering all genuine believers. Such an accusation should be supported by the text in question, but it is not. An examination of the chapter shows that their charge is false. In fact, the term “all Christians” appears only once in the chapter in a passage which is far from being either slanderous or harsh. Witness Lee stated:

When we talk about Christianity in such a way, this does not mean that we do not love all Christians. We love all of our brothers and sisters in the Lord, yet we have to admit that today's Christendom is absolutely far off from God's eternal plan.⁷

A statement of love toward “all of our brothers and sisters” hardly seems to be an attack on all Christians. Yet, this is the premise Geisler and Rhodes assert. It is simply astounding that they could have read the chapter (this phrase occurs in the introductory portion of the chapter) and come to the conclusion that this mention of “all Christians” was a “slanderous attack.”

These two brief sentences contain yet another important factor that seems to elude Geisler and Rhodes. That is, in the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches, there is a definite, consistent, and crucial distinction made between the system of Christianity, which is open to criticism, and the Christians themselves, who are to be loved and received as brothers and sisters. As Lee further stated in the chapter in

⁷ Witness Lee, *Practice*, op. cit., p. 25.

question, “We love all our Christian brothers and respect them, yet we cannot agree with the system they are in.”⁸ This important distinction was conveniently overlooked by Geisler and Rhodes.

Witness Lee did speak critically of the system of Christianity and the condition of Christendom, but not in the manner that Geisler and Rhodes would have their readers believe. Regardless of whether Geisler and Rhodes disagree with Witness Lee’s view of Christianity as a system, it remains incumbent upon them to present his teachings accurately. Only when they have fulfilled this prerequisite are they free to argue certain points if they so wish, but in doing so they must remain within the bounds of truth, proper scholarship, and decency. To conceal the fact that Lee’s criticism was directed toward the system of Christianity, not the believers, as they clearly did by including the term “all Christians” in their accusation, is inexcusable.

Witness Lee’s Appreciation of Christians in the Denominations

In “Response” Geisler and Rhodes ignored the positive statements Witness Lee made about the believers in the same chapter of *Practice*. The failure to point out the references to loving and respecting all Christians, as noted above, is an example of such neglect. As a further example, in speaking of his experience as a young person who was saved in China many years ago, Witness Lee states:

We [Lee’s generation of young Christians] thank the Lord for sending the western missionaries to China to bring us the gospel. They told people that Jesus is the Son of God who became a man and died on the cross for our sins. They said that if we believe in Him we would receive the forgiveness of our sins. We heard the proper preaching of Christ being our Savior. These missionaries also brought us the real name of

⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

Jesus Christ, and we treasured this. They also brought the Bible with them, providing us with one of the best Chinese translations of the Bible. We thank God for these three things: the gospel, the name of Jesus, and the Bible.⁹

It is clear from this statement that Witness Lee appreciated the missionaries who brought such priceless things to China. He then explained that the practice of the local churches, starting in the 1920s, was to reject the unscriptural practices that the missionaries also brought with them. He enumerated several of these unscriptural things throughout the chapter. Contrary to the accusations of Geisler and Rhodes, it is once again clear that it is not the believers or the Christian faith which are the subjects of Witness Lee's criticism but a system with which there is disagreement because it does not adhere to the Scriptures.¹⁰ Surely Geisler and Rhodes would agree that it is right to hold to Christ, to hold to the gospel, to hold to the Bible, to love and respect all Christians, and to reject unscriptural practices. However, they ignored this and other similar statements that are crucial to understanding the teaching of Witness Lee and the stand of the local churches. By doing so, Geisler and Rhodes falsely represented a Christian teacher and misled their readers.

Witness Lee Criticized the System of Christianity, Not Christians

When Witness Lee spoke of *Christianity*, he spoke of the system of Christianity, not the individual believers. In his usage *Christianity* is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of institutions, including many that are only nominally Christian. His use of the term *Christendom* was similar in meaning and

⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁰ Witness Lee is not alone in criticizing the system of Christianity. Please refer to "Biblical Critiques of Christianity – Selected Bibliography and Biographical Notes on Sources Cited." which addresses what some other Christian teachers say about the system of Christianity and how believers should view it relative to God's eternal purpose for the church.

scope. These distinctions are crucial to understanding Witness Lee's teaching on this subject. Geisler and Rhodes should have pointed this out to their readers and, as a result, appropriately tempered their accusations.

Although some Christian teachers, perhaps Geisler and Rhodes among them, define *Christianity* as meaning either the believers or the items of the common faith, in *Practice* Witness Lee's usage of *Christianity* meant neither of these, as was made clear in the chapter in question. A proper apologist should first endeavor to understand an author's definition of terms and then communicate his teachings according to his definition. This Geisler and Rhodes failed to do in "Response."

Witness Lee's Criticism of Christianity Is Based on the Bible

Geisler and Rhodes also neglected to point out to their readers that Witness Lee's criticism of the system of Christianity has a strong scriptural basis and that his interpretation of the Bible passages is based on the work of many respected Bible expositors throughout church history. In the third chapter of *Practice*, Witness Lee taught from Matthew 13 concerning the parables of the tares in the field, of the mustard seed that grew into a big tree,¹¹ and of the woman who hid leaven in fine flour.¹² His teaching in *Practice* concerning Babylon was based upon

¹¹ Other expositors who have understood the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32 in a similar way as Witness Lee include John Nelson Darby, Robert Govett, W. E. Vine, A.W. Pink, G. Campbell Morgan, G. H. Lang, J. J. Ross, Herbert Lockyer, John F. Walvoord, and Ray Stedman.

¹² Other expositors who have understood the parable of the woman, the leaven, and the fine flour in a similar way as Witness Lee include John Nelson Darby, Robert Govett, C. I. Scofield, W. E. Vine, G. H. Lang, A.W. Pink, G. Campbell Morgan, J. J. Ross, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Herbert Lockyer, Lehman Strauss, and John F. Walvoord.

Revelation 17,¹³ and his teaching concerning hierarchy and ambition was based on the Lord's words in Matthew 20:20-28 and 23:1-12. Witness Lee contrasted the Lord's simple way of meeting with people in John 12 and Matthew 14 with today's practice of gathering a crowd to listen to a speaker. These teachings, based in the Scripture, comprised much of the chapter Geisler and Rhodes addressed, yet they failed to mention Witness Lee's scriptural basis for his words. He was not slanderously attacking Christians as Geisler and Rhodes inveigh; rather, he was teaching the Bible and applying the Bible to today's situation. While Geisler and Rhodes may disagree with Witness Lee's interpretations of these passages, they remain obligated to acknowledge that his criticism of the system of Christianity was based in the Bible. This Geisler and Rhodes did not do.

Deformed Christianity as Seen in the Parable of the Mustard Seed

In reference to Christianity, Witness Lee did use the words "deformed and degraded." While these words, especially isolated as they are in "Response," may strike some as stark; readers should pay close attention to how and why Witness Lee employed these terms. As was made crystal clear in *Practice*, his use of the descriptor "deformed" was based upon the parable in Matthew 13 of the mustard seed that grew against its nature into a big tree. Witness Lee said:

¹³ Among those who have shared Witness Lee's understanding that Mystery Babylon the Great in Revelation 17 refers to Roman Catholicism are William Tyndale, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Knox, John Wesley, John Gill, Albert Barnes, John Peter Lange, John Nelson Darby, Andrew Miller, G. H. Pember, Robert Govett, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, Charles H. Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, H. A. Ironside, C. I. Scofield, Arno C. Gaebelein, J. J. Ross, William R. Newell, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Louis Talbot, Lehman Strauss, Merrill F. Unger, John F. Walvoord, Walter Lewis Wilson, W. A. Criswell, and Donald Grey Barnhouse.

Another parable in Matthew 13 describes today's Christendom as a great tree with great branches that become a lodging place for birds (vv. 31-32). This is the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard is an annual herb, which shows that the church should be like an herb to produce food. Instead it became a tree, a lodge for birds, having its nature and function changed. These birds refer to Satan's evil spirits with the evil persons and things motivated by them (13:4, 19). They lodge in the branches of the great tree, that is, in the enterprises of Christendom.¹⁴

Today's Christianity is deformed because it has changed its form and nature from the simple entity presented in the Scripture. It is no longer a small herb good for food but has become a great tree with many branches that often offer cover for many evil things. Today's Christianity is a huge enterprise that bears little resemblance to the house of Simon the Leper with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany, a pre-figure of the New Testament church (John 12:1-3). Nor does it resemble the New Testament churches as shown in Acts and the Epistles. In contrast, today's Christianity is an organized institution with many bureaucracies—truly a great tree. Sadly, it is often from the higher branches of this tree, where the birds of the parable roost, that evil teachings and evil things descend upon the believers. Witness Lee is not alone in ascribing this parable to Christendom.¹⁵ Commenting on the mustard seed in Matthew 13, W. E. Vine says:

As the parable indicates, Christendom presents a sort of Christianity that has become conformed to the principles and ways of the world, and the world has favoured this debased Christianity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Witness Lee, *Practice*, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁵ See footnote 12.

¹⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company,) p 777.

Witness Lee's use of the word "deformed" has a strong scriptural basis and accurately describes the situation of modern Christianity. Granted, some may not consider this a pleasant subject. Witness Lee's speaking is frank and forthright, but it is neither harsh nor regrettable. It is a faithful, healthy, and true word to the benefit of all believers in Christ.

A Faithful Appraisal of the Degraded System of Christianity

To say that something is degraded simply means that it has fallen below its ordinary standards or that it has negatively changed in its function and structure.¹⁷ According to Witness Lee's teaching in *Practice*, the system of Christianity is degraded in its standards, function, and structure because it has developed "formalities and rituals," "regulations and unscriptural practices," "hierarchy" with "ambition" for position, and the "clergy-laity system." Today's Christianity is also full of divisions.¹⁸ It is these negative matters that kill the organic function of the members of the Body of Christ. In these passages, Witness Lee taught that to practice the negative things listed above is to take the worldly way rather than the God-ordained way revealed in the Bible. Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, recognized some of these same elements as signs of corruption and degradation:

All that God commits to men seems to follow the downward course of declension. This was true of Israel ... it is true likewise of the professing church. Leaven working in the pure meal symbolized the permeation power of certain forms of evil within the true Church itself. Leaven is universally the emblem of corruption working subtly. It means mere formality (cf. Matt. 23:14, 16, 23-28); unbelief (cf. Matt. 22:23-29); and

¹⁷In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/degraded.

¹⁸Witness Lee, *Practice*, op cit. All of these items are mentioned and expanded upon on pages 28-34 of *Practice*.

worldliness... The elect company of believers is ever beset with tendencies to formality, unbelief, and worldliness.¹⁹

An honest reading of current events testifies that today's Christianity is degraded. For example, two major denominations have voted to ordain homosexuals in their hierarchies and to approve of same-sex unions; two others narrowly turned down motions to do so. Divorce and immorality are rampant, so much so that there is little statistical difference between the believers in Christ and the world, much to the shame of all who name the name of Christ in sincerity. Christian ministries are under investigation for financial abuses, while some Christian ministers live in luxury and demand the perquisites to match their perceived status. Many strange and injurious teachings are propagated. Is this not degradation! This is not to deny that there are many sincere, seeking believers who, in their innocence and sincerity, are in this system. It is simply to recognize the general condition of the system of Christianity.

In 2003, Geisler withdrew from the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) because he claimed that ETS had lost its doctrinal integrity, had adopted revisionist interpretations of the Bible, and operated contrary to its own history.²⁰ Without commenting on whether Geisler's characterization of ETS was accurate or not, it is fair to say that in his mind the standing of ETS had degraded from what it once was. In his seven reasons for his resignation, although he spoke at length of the doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture, Geisler cited no Scripture—a vivid contrast to the many scriptural passages expounded by Witness Lee in the subject chapter of *Practice*.

¹⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. IV* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 11th Printing, October 1973), p. 353.

²⁰ Norman L. Geisler, "Why I Resigned from The Evangelical Theological Society," November 20, 2003, www.normangeisler.net/etsresign.htm.

Geisler and Rhodes Distort Witness Lee's Teaching

While Witness Lee did criticize many aspects of Christianity or Christendom, that criticism was never the focal point of his ministry. Neither is it the focus of the ministry among the local churches today. However, Geisler and Rhodes totally missed the main content and focus of Witness Lee's teaching in the third chapter of *Practice*. It was their responsibility to understand Witness Lee's statements in context, to represent those statements fairly, and then put forth their objections, if any. However, Geisler and Rhodes chose to give their readers the false impression that Witness Lee viciously and blindly attacked all Christians.

Witness Lee's message in the chapter in question is a crucial message that needs to be heard by today's seeking Christians. He addresses an issue of great import: how to practice the proper church life according to the God-ordained way presented in the New Testament. Witness Lee criticized the system of Christianity because major features of that system hinder or even prevent the believers from living and functioning as members of the Body of Christ according to the pattern revealed in the Bible.

As a whole *Practice* presents believers with a view of practicing a church-life in which every member is filled with the living Spirit, equipped with the truth, and active, that is, functioning in four main areas: 1) preaching the gospel to unbelievers, 2) caring for new believers by nourishing them through personal, vital contact, 3) mutual perfecting, teaching, and care for all the believers carried out in home meetings full of prayer, the Word, and the Spirit, and 4) coming together as the church so that all believers may prophesy, not mainly by predicting the future, but by speaking forth the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:26). To this end, in the chapter in question, Witness Lee wrote:

We must believe that every believer is a living one because every believer has the living God, Christ, the Spirit of life, in

him. We should afford every believer an opportunity to express his living situation as a living member of the Body of Christ. In today's Christianity the living members are killed, and their functions are annulled.²¹

These few sentences express both the reason for criticism—that formality, organization, and the unscriptural trappings of today's Christianity kill the spiritual life of the members of the Body of Christ and annul their function—and the goal of Witness Lee's speaking—to provide an atmosphere in which all the members can become living and functioning in God's economical move. Witness Lee closes this section with the following:

We should stand for the testimony of Jesus in this age. We need to compare what is revealed in the Bible with what is being practiced in today's Christianity. We must stay away from the practice of the deformed and degraded Christianity and come back to the divine revelation for the Lord's recovery...We must come back to the biblical way, the new way, the living way, that affords God the opportunity to operate among His chosen people.²²

This matter is not merely theoretical. When, in the late 1980s, Witness Lee began to minister concerning the way to carry out the Christian life and the meeting life as ordained by God in the Bible, his desire was to rescue the local churches from the perils of the negative things mentioned above and to open the way for all believers to enter into a daily living as members of the Body of Christ. Since its inception among the local churches, the worth of the God-ordained way has been demonstrated many times over. Those researching the local churches, both from CRI and from Fuller Theological Seminary, have witnessed these matters firsthand and have testified of their appreciation for what they have seen. It is truly regrettable that Geisler and

²¹ Witness Lee, *Practice*, op. cit., p. 32.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Rhodes have chosen to despise the testimony of their Christian brothers.

Conclusion

The opening of this article set forth the minimum requirements for a believer to critique those with whom he may disagree. It is evident that Geisler and Rhodes have failed to perform the requisite research, have failed to represent the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches accurately, and have failed to present adequate context so that the readers could fairly discern between truth and error.

In the small section of “Response” addressed in this article, Geisler and Rhodes misled their readers about Witness Lee’s references to “false teachers” who were in “apostasy” and chose to create a false impression that Witness Lee was attacking all Christian teachers. They falsely accused Witness Lee of slanderously attacking “all Christians” when he spoke only of love and respect for his fellow believers. Geisler and Rhodes ignored these and other similar statements that are in the same chapter of *Practice*. They also concealed from their readers the fact that Witness Lee’s criticism of Christianity was directed at the system of Christianity, not at the believers or the faith. They neglected in its entirety the fact that Witness Lee’s criticisms were solidly based in several portions of Scripture. Geisler and Rhodes failed to provide their readers with the requisite context concerning Witness Lee’s use of the terms *degraded* and *deformed* to describe the system of Christianity. Instead, they plucked these and other words out of context and rearranged them in a misleading manner. Finally, Geisler and Rhodes ignored the thrust of Witness Lee’s ministry in the referenced chapter.

Geisler and Rhodes are both signers of the so-called open letter to the leadership of Living Stream Ministry and the local churches. In that letter, they and their fellow-signers called upon the local churches to disavow similar statements made by Witness Lee, statements they presented wrenched from context

and separated from meaning as Geisler and Rhodes have done in “Response.” After reading the many points above, one can understand why there has been no rush to disavow statements by Witness Lee. On the contrary, good faith efforts have been made to answer the false accusations in a straightforward way and to invite proper, meaningful dialogue.

MISREPRESENTING WITNESS LEE AND DEFENDING THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In “Response”¹, Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes excerpt isolated words and phrases from a single chapter of *Practice*¹ by Witness Lee, which they then characterize as “slanderous” and as “religious libel.” Geisler and Rhodes both misrepresent Witness Lee and the local churches and apparently defend the Roman Catholic Church (henceforth RCC) against Witness Lee’s critique. They write:

Chapter Three from a book by Witness Lee titled, *The God-Ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* in which he engages in a slanderous attack on...“today’s Catholic Church.” ...[Lee says that] The Roman Church is infested with “Satan’s evil spirits” and “full of all kinds of evils. Evil persons, evil practices, and evil things are lodging there.” It is an “adulterous woman who added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things).” It is “the Mother of the Prostitutes” and an “apostate church.” Again, it is “full of idolatry,” “against God’s economy,” and “saturated with demonic and satanic things.” If ever there were grounds for religious libel, this would be it.

Geisler and Rhodes’ accusations in this part of “Response” closely parrot those addressing the same chapter of the same book on the Harvest House Publishers corporate website. Many of those accusations have been addressed in previously published articles,² but Geisler and Rhodes do not refer to those

¹ See pages 7 and 8 for the full titles of “Response” and *Practice*.

² See:

- “Harvest House Publishers, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon Campaign to Paint the Local Churches as Anti-Christian: Against Christians and Against the Faith” (www.contendingforthefaith.org/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/responses/Christianity/index.html),
- “Harvest House Books Echo Our Criticism of Today’s Christianity” (www.contendingforthefaith.org/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/responses/Christianity/HHbksEcho.html),

articles in “Response.” This fault in their apologetic method may reflect their stated position that they have no need of further research concerning the local churches.³

Other articles in this volume directly address Geisler and Rhodes’ accusations against Witness Lee’s criticism of Christianity as a whole and what they themselves have written

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- “Harvest House’s Hypocrisy Concerning Our Criticism of Christianity” (www.contendingforthefait.org/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/responses/Christianity/HarvestHouseHypocrisy.html),
 - “Harvest House Web Site Used to Scandalize Christian Readers with Out of Context Quotes of Our Writings about ‘Christianity’” (www.contendingforthefait.org/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/responses/Christianity/ECNRMisrepresentations.html), and
 - “Misrepresentation in ECNR: False Allegations That We ‘Reject’ Christians and the Christian Faith” (www.contendingforthefait.org/libel-litigations/harvest-house-et-al/responses/Christianity/HarvestHouseDistortions.html).

³ In “Response” Geisler and Rhodes contend, “One argument used by CRI is that their conclusions in favor of the LC should be believed because they have done better and more research on the topic...*more* does not necessarily mean *better*. So, we can concentrate on what really matters... However, it is clear that truth does not always reside with the persons who have read more or studied longer. Rather, it rests with those who can reason best from the evidence. Further, there is really no new evidence available since CRI did its first research...” In this way Geisler and Rhodes justify ignoring recent articles that are directly relevant to the subject at hand. Geisler and Rhodes’ claim of superior reasoning ability is in itself unreasonable. By their own admission, Geisler and Rhodes did not consider all available evidence. Their claim that no new evidence is available is absurd; since the mid-1970s LSM has published hundreds of titles that are relevant to the subjects at hand. Furthermore, the arguments made by Geisler and Rhodes give little indication that they studied even what was then in print, including the responses made to similar criticisms. They simply repeat the same tired arguments which were long ago refuted and ignore all evidence and reasoning contrary to their predetermined conclusions. In other words, Geisler and Rhodes’ claim of superior reasoning ability and concomitant slighting of a fellow apologist have no factual basis.

critically about the RCC.⁴ This article will examine how Geisler and Rhodes:

- Ignore Witness Lee’s positive statements about Catholic believers in *Practice*;
- Admit the association of evil spirits with the RCC yet attack Witness Lee for making a similar association;
- Object to Witness Lee’s statement, based on the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32, that there are evil persons, evil practices, and evil things in the RCC;
- Object to and misrepresent the portrayal of the RCC as the woman in Matthew 13:33 who added leaven to the fine flour;
- Misrepresent Witness Lee’s scripturally-based identification of the RCC as Babylon in Revelation 17 and Jezebel in Revelation 2:20;
- Defend the RCC from the charge of being an apostate church; and
- Use harsh and regrettable language in their condemnation of Witness Lee’s biblical terminology.

Witness Lee’s Attitude toward Catholic Believers

Before addressing the particular complaints of Geisler and Rhodes, it is helpful to examine what they chose to omit concerning Witness Lee’s statements about Catholics in *Practice*. As with the criticisms of Christianity,⁵ where it was the system that Witness Lee criticized, not the believers, so it is with the RCC. Witness Lee is critical of the RCC as an institution, a system, but has positive things to say about believers who may be a part of the RCC. For example, in *Practice* Witness Lee says:

⁴ See “Misrepresenting Witness Lee’s Critique of Christianity” and “Applying a Double Standard with Regard to Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume.

⁵ See “Misrepresenting Witness Lee’s Critique of Christianity” in this volume.

We love all our Christian brothers and respect them, yet we cannot agree with the religious system they are in. There are many genuine believers even in the Catholic Church, and some of them are seeking and devout. Yet the Catholic Church itself is full of idolatry.⁶

It is not Catholic believers who are the subjects of the criticisms noted by Geisler and Rhodes. Rather, it is the RCC as a system that embodies unscriptural teachings and practices worthy of objection. Geisler and Rhodes should have made this distinction clear to their readers, but they did not. Instead, in “Response” they said, “It is simply insufficient to counter this by producing an admission from the LC that there are true believers in other churches.” This statement not only misses the point; it obscures the teaching of Witness Lee on the matter. To say that some believers in the RCC are “seeking and devout” is more than “admitting” that there are some “true believers in other churches.” Additionally, Witness Lee proclaimed his love and respect for such believers.⁷ In saying that there are seeking and devout believers in the RCC, Witness Lee made a clear distinction between the believers—some of whom are seeking and devout, all of whom are to be loved and respected—and the system of the RCC. Further, Witness Lee’s statement was not an

⁶ Witness Lee, *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), p. 28.

⁷ Although critical of the RCC as a system, Witness Lee positively appraised individual Catholic writers many times. He often referenced Augustine and, less frequently, Aquinas. François Fénelon and Jeanne Marie Guyon (with some significant reservations) are further examples of this. Witness Lee affirmed what was sound and helpful in their writings but cautioned against other portions that promoted asceticism, the worship of Mary, burning candles to idols, etc. The booklet *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Herman Lawrence Nicholas, a monk known as Brother Lawrence, is well-known among the local churches. There are other examples as well.

“admission” as portrayed by Geisler and Rhodes;⁸ it was a voluntary statement of fact offered as a clear delineation of what specifically was being criticized and what, or more precisely, who was not. It is simply indefensible that Geisler and Rhodes obscured this important distinction.

Although Geisler and Rhodes ignored this point, others, including Catholics, have recognized this distinction in Witness Lee’s teaching. Father John Saliba, a Jesuit Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Detroit Mercy, noted not only this distinction but also its importance. Saliba testified:

...first of all, Witness Lee doesn’t harp against the Catholic Church all the time. It is not like some evangelists do on television. So it occurs occasionally, and, I remember one quote...where he says, Love everybody, Protestant and Catholic included; so I said, At least, Witness Lee may interpret Revelation against my church, but he doesn’t hate me.⁹

⁸ Far from being an admission, Witness Lee and the local churches have always affirmed that the genuine believers in all of Christianity, including Catholicism, are fellow members of the Body of Christ:

From the very beginning we realized that despite the divisions, organizations, and traditions, there were a great number of genuine Christians scattered in these divisions. We saw that the Lord’s Body comprises all these genuine believers. Even in the Catholic Church we saw a number of genuine believers, and we also considered them as members of the church and as our dear brothers and sisters. On the one hand, we began to meet by ourselves and we fully realized that the dear, genuine believers who were scattered in the Catholic Church and the Protestant denominations were our brothers. We recognized them and we loved them. We realized that the Lord’s Body as the church of God did not only comprise us but also all the genuine believers, of which we were a small part. - Witness Lee, *Elders’ Training, Book 4: Other Crucial Matters Concerning the Practice of the Lord’s Recovery* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1985, 1998), pp. 123-124

⁹ John A. Saliba, “The Testimony of John Albert Saliba, Ph.D.,” *The Experts Speak Concerning Witness Lee and the Local Churches* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, November 1995), p. 107. Although Saliba’s statement has been part of the public record since 1985, Geisler and Rhodes offer no

Saliba's objectivity is missing from "Response." As Saliba noted, Witness Lee did not major in criticism of the RCC. Saliba also commented that Witness Lee's position vis-à-vis the RCC was a typical Protestant position, describing it as "a common explanation"¹⁰ of Revelation 17. While he sometimes criticized the RCC and the system of Christianity, the focus of Witness Lee's ministry was elsewhere, primarily on the riches of Christ and the experience of Christ as life for the producing of the church as the Body of Christ. As demonstrated below, when Witness Lee was critical of the RCC, his criticism was solidly based on the Bible and made with the focus of his ministry in view. These facts were ignored by Geisler and Rhodes.

The Scriptural Basis for Saying Evil Spirits Lodge in the Great Tree of Christendom

Geisler and Rhodes characterize Witness Lee as saying in *Practice* that "the Roman Church is infested with 'Satan's evil spirits,'" although "infested" was their supplied editorial comment. In fact, in the third chapter of *Practice*, the subject of Geisler and Rhodes' attack, the words "Satan's evil spirits" do not refer to the RCC directly. Rather, they refer to the "birds" lodging in the big tree of Christendom (Matthew 13:31-32). *Christendom* is a very broad term encompassing the totality of the organized religious system, including that which is only nominally Christian. Witness Lee said:

Another parable in Matthew 13 describes today's Christendom as a great tree with great branches that become a lodging place for birds (vv. 31-32). This is the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard is an annual herb, which shows that the church should be like an herb to produce food. Instead it became a tree, a lodge for birds, having its nature and function changed. These birds refer to Satan's evil spirits

indication that they are aware of it. This is yet another reason to reject their assertion that they need to perform no further research relative to the local churches.

¹⁰ Ibid.

with the evil persons and things motivated by them (13:4, 9). They lodge in the branches of the great tree, that is, in the enterprises of Christendom.¹¹

Witness Lee then used the RCC as an example of the evils that are inherent in Christendom as a whole. Rather than claim that the RCC is “infested with Satan’s evil spirits,” he taught that in the many branches of the big tree of Christendom there are places for the “birds,” Satan’s evil spirits, to lodge and exert their influence. In some cases, this evil influence has led some to “deny the resurrection of Christ and all the miracles in the Bible,”¹² among other things elucidated in the same context. Surely Geisler and Rhodes cannot object to the fact that the widespread denial of these precious truths (as well as many others) in the enterprises of Christendom is due to the influence of Satan’s evil spirits. When Witness Lee’s statements are read in context, it is evident that his teaching has been seriously mischaracterized by Geisler and Rhodes.

Although Geisler and Rhodes may hold a differing interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew 13, they should be aware that Witness Lee’s interpretation is not unique to him.¹³ For example, in speaking of this parable, G. H. Pember stated:

For, in changing to a tree, the mustard must strike its roots more deeply into the earth than, as an annual, it was intended to do, and so becomes a perennial, and puts forth great branches. And hence the fowls of the air, which in the first

¹¹ Witness Lee, *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), p. 26.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Witness Lee’s interpretation of this parable is substantially the same as that of many Bible teachers, including John Nelson Darby, Robert Govett, W. E. Vine, A.W. Pink, G. Campbell Morgan, G. H. Lang, J. J. Ross, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Herbert Lockyer, John F. Walvoord, and Ray Stedman.

Parable, caught up and devoured the Good Seed, are able to come and lodge under its shelter.¹⁴

As regards the interpretation of the Parable, the grain represented the seed and principles sown by Christ in the world, out of which the Nominal Church grew: the description of its unnatural growth signified that those principles would be abandoned as the Age rolled on—a prediction which was very manifestly fulfilled.¹⁵

Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary (Rhodes' alma mater and where Geisler once served as a faculty member) also interprets the parable negatively as concerning Christendom:

In the third parable Christ presents truth through the figure of the mustard seed and the tree. Again the testimony of history and the teaching of the parable agree. The very small beginning in the early days of the church has developed out of all due proportion in mere members and includes all professing Christendom. The great tree now shelters even the birds of the air. It is significant that the birds of the first parable are represented as catching away the good seed.¹⁶

In expounding the parable of the sower concerning the snatching away of the seed by the birds, the Lord said, "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the

¹⁴ G. H. Pember, *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries Concerning the Church, Vol. 4* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing, 1984), p. 341. In this portion, Pember refers the identity of the "birds" to the first parable in Matthew 13. In his exposition of that parable, Pember identifies the "birds" as "those fallen angels and spirits" and "those ever-watchful agents of Satan, the countless spirits of the air" (pp. 291-292). Pember's description of the "birds" is similar to Witness Lee's expression "Satan's evil spirits."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁶ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 4: Christology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 352. See also Herbert Lockyer, *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), pp. 186-189.

evil one comes and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart” (Matthew 13:19). It is not at all a fanciful interpretation to say that the birds in the branches of the big tree of Christendom are the agents of the evil one, Satan.

Contrary to Geisler and Rhodes’ contrived reiteration of his statements, Witness Lee is in line with the entire context of Matthew 13 as well as with other recognized Christian teachers in his application of this parable.¹⁷ In “Response” Geisler and Rhodes offer no hint that Witness Lee’s statement, “Satan’s evil spirits,” was taken from his teaching of the Bible and is based on the Lord Himself identifying the birds as the emissaries of Satan in verse 4 and 19 of Matthew 13.

Geisler and Rhodes’ accusation is altogether inconsistent with Rhodes’ writings. Rhodes has associated the RCC with the occult practice of spiritism, which he describes as the contacting of non-human spiritual entities and which he contends can lead to demon possession.¹⁸ Rhodes therefore links the RCC with evil spirits. Yet, he and coauthor Geisler feign indignation at Witness Lee’s interpretation of the birds in Matthew 13:32 as referring to Satan’s evil spirits.

Evil Persons, Evil Practices, and Evil Things

Geisler and Rhodes also object to Witness Lee’s statement that the RCC is “full of all kinds of evils. Evil persons, evil practices,

¹⁷ See note 13.

¹⁸ Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Catholic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), p. 106; Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), p. 241; and Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick: Handbook on Cults & New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), pp. 143, 182-186; cf. p. 278, Item 87. “Unbelievers Can Be Demon Possessed.” For a fuller explanation of Rhodes’ teaching, see “Applying a Double Standard with Regard to Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume.

and evil things are lodging there.”¹⁹ Their objection is curious since they both have linked the RCC with evil things and evil practices, as shown by a complementary article in this volume.²⁰ Geisler has objected to the veneration of Mary as “practical heresy,” “indistinguishable from worship”²¹ and a practice that “invites the charge of Mariolatry. And Mariolatry is idolatry.”²² Geisler has also stated that the many practices and teachings taken from paganism are among the main constituents of the RCC.²³ Rhodes has associated the RCC teaching of purgatory with apparitions which he classifies as an occult practice, spiritism.²⁴ Surely idolatry, pagan practices, apparitions, spiritism, and demon possession qualify as evil practices and evil things. One is left to speculate why Geisler and Rhodes object to Witness Lee’s teachings about the RCC.

History also testifies that Witness Lee was right in his criticism. Although there are many genuine, seeking believers in the RCC, it is true that there are many evil persons, evil practices, evil things, and much darkness in that vast organization. It is unreasonable to think that Geisler and Rhodes have forgotten

¹⁹ Witness Lee, *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), p. 26.

²⁰ See “Applying a Double Standard with Regard to Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume.

²¹ Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 181.

²² Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), p. 322. In the next paragraph, Geisler states, “...in practice there is no real difference between the veneration given to Mary and that given to Christ.”

²³ Geisler and Betancourt, op. cit., p. 181.

²⁴ Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Catholic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), p. 106. These same sentences appear in Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), p. 241.

the Reformation and events surrounding it such as the Spanish Inquisition and the Huguenot massacre—evil things carried out by evil persons. In speaking of the massacre of the French Protestants known as the Huguenots, church historian Andrew Miller wrote:

And then, from the Pope downwards, the Catholic community lifting up their hands to Heaven and thanking God for the glorious triumph! At Rome the news was received with transports of joy. The bearer of the glad tidings was rewarded with a present of a thousand pieces of gold. The Pope caused the guns of the castle of St. Angelo to be fired, declared a jubilee, and struck a medal in honour of the event.²⁵

Neither can Geisler and Rhodes credibly claim that the evils of the current international scandals in the RCC were not perpetrated by “evil persons.” The widespread evidence that the hierarchy of the RCC knowingly covered up crimes to protect the “good name” of the church testifies of the depth of the darkness there. These scandals alone are enough for reasonable persons to recognize that the RCC has evil persons, evil practices, and evil things residing in it. Both the historic matters and current events offered here serve as a small sampling of the evils that have characterized the RCC throughout history.

However, Witness Lee’s statement that there are evils in the RCC was not primarily based on opinion, history, or observation. His statements were based on the teachings of the Bible. Following his assertion of the evils in the RCC in *Practice*, Witness Lee referred to the parable of the woman hiding leaven in the fine flour (Matthew 13:33) as the source of his teaching. He linked the woman in the parable to the Old Testament Jezebel (Rev. 2:20; 1 Kings 21:25) and said that both Jezebel and the woman in the parable who added evil, heretical things (leaven) to the things of Christ (fine flour) represent the RCC.

²⁵ Andrew Miller, *Miller’s Church History: From the First to the Twentieth Century* (London & Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, 1963), p. 959.

The Woman Mixing Leaven with the Fine Flour

Witness Lee based much of his criticism of the RCC on the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13, but Geisler and Rhodes do not disclose this to their readers. They simply assert that Witness Lee says that the RCC is “an adulterous woman who added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things).” Separated from its context, this statement is made to appear as a wild and baseless statement. However, in context it reads:

Another parable describing the situation of Christendom is the parable of the woman who took the leaven and put it into the fine flour (13:33-35). This woman, prophesied by the Lord in Matthew 13:33, is mentioned in Revelation 2:20. She was typified by Jezebel in the Old Testament and fulfilled by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church became such an adulterous woman who added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things) into the fine flour (signifying Christ as the meal offering for the satisfaction of God and man). The Catholic Church took in all kinds of pagan practices.²⁶

It is evident that Witness Lee was teaching the Bible and in that teaching he referenced a few passages of Scripture that cover a great span of the Bible. Consider, in the context of Witness Lee’s teaching concerning the leaven in the parable in Matthew 13, Paul’s words to the Corinthian believers:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed. So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

Although there are differing schools of interpretation concerning the parable of the leaven, there have been a great many respected teachers of the Bible who have interpreted it in a

²⁶ Witness Lee, *The God-ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1987), pp. 26-27.

similar manner as Witness Lee.²⁷ Therefore, Geisler and Rhodes should not act shocked; neither should they give their readers the impression that this interpretation is unique to Witness Lee. Concerning the parable of the leaven, C. I. Scofield taught:

The symbols have, in Scripture, a meaning fixed by inspired usage. Leaven is the principle of corruption working subtly; is invariably used in a bad sense ... and is defined by our Lord as evil doctrine (Mt. 16.11, 12; Mk. 8.15). Meal, on the contrary, was used in one of the sweet-savour offerings (Lev. 2.1-3), and was food for the priests (Lev. 6.15-17). A woman, in the bad ethical sense, always symbolizes something out of place, religiously (see Zech. 5.6, note). In Thyatira it was a woman teaching (cf. Rev. 2. 20 with Rev. 17. 1-6). Interpreting the parable by these familiar symbols, it constitutes a warning that the true doctrine, given for the nourishment of the children of the kingdom (Mt. 4. 4; 1 Tim. 4. 6; 1 Pet 2. 2), would be mingled with corrupt and corrupting false doctrine, and that officially, by the apostate church itself (1 Tim. 4. 1-3; 2 Tim. 2. 17, 18; 4. 3, 4; 2 Pet. 2. 1-3).²⁸

Elsewhere, Scofield made it clear that this apostate church is indeed the RCC.²⁹ He also links the adulterous Jezebel of Revelation 2:20 to the RCC.³⁰ Scofield's teaching on this matter

²⁷ Witness Lee's teaching on the parable of the leaven echoes that of many other respected expositors, including John Nelson Darby, Robert Govett, C. I. Scofield, W. E. Vine, G. H. Lang, A.W. Pink, G. Campbell Morgan, J. J. Ross, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Herbert Lockyer, Lehman Strauss, and John F. Walvoord. Many of these also make the association between the woman in the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33 and Jezebel in Revelation 2:20.

²⁸ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1016, note 3.

²⁹ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1346, note 1. "...ecclesiastical Babylon, which is apostate Christendom, headed up under the Papacy... Ecclesiastical Babylon is 'the great whore' (Rev. 17.1)..."

³⁰ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1331, note 3. "As Jezebel brought idolatry into Israel, so Romanism weds Christian doctrine to pagan ceremonies."

is similar to that of Witness Lee, yet Geisler and Rhodes agitate against Witness Lee and accuse him of being harsh and slanderous. However, there is no record that Geisler and Rhodes have accused Scofield—or the many others who hold similar interpretations³¹—of libel and slander.

It is ironic that elsewhere Geisler appears to support this application. Geisler contends that the RCC is a combination of four components: basic Christian truth, hierarchy borrowed from the Roman Empire, rituals from Old Testament Judaism, and a large dose of paganism.³² The basic Christian truth in Geisler’s list corresponds with the fine flour in the parable, while the other three items—hierarchy, ritual, and pagan things—correspond to the leaven. Geisler’s characterization of the RCC as an amalgamation of biblical truth, hierarchy, ritual, and paganism is similar enough to Witness Lee’s teaching that the RCC is the woman who mixes leaven (evil, heretical, and pagan things) with fine flour (Christ as the meal offering) to raise questions about Geisler and Rhodes’ virulent attack on Witness Lee in this matter.³³ By assailing Witness Lee’s biblical criticism of the RCC, Geisler and Rhodes have placed themselves in the precarious position of tacitly defending the RCC against the very things they have accused it of elsewhere.

³¹ See note 27.

³² Norman L. Geisler & Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 184:

Current Roman Catholicism in general is a combination of four factors: (1) a basic Christian doctrinal core, (2) a Roman hierarchical structure (borrowed from the dying Roman Empire), (3) a Jewish ritualistic form (borrowed from the Old Testament), and (4) significant pagan content and practices.

³³ See “Applying a Double Standard with Regard to Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume for a more complete explanation.

The Catholic Church as Mystery Babylon and Jezebel in Revelation

Geisler and Rhodes further contend against Witness Lee's depiction of the RCC as "the Mother of the Prostitutes" and an "apostate church." However, they again, as is their pattern, neglect to note that in saying these things Witness Lee is teaching the Bible. "The Mother of the Prostitutes" (or, harlots) is a direct quote from Revelation 17:5—"And on her forehead there was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and the Abominations of the Earth." Therefore, since Witness Lee uses the words of the Bible, Geisler and Rhodes cannot possibly object to the language itself. Rather, it must be assumed that they object to the association of the RCC with the Babylon of Revelation 17. However, a great many respected Christian teachers share Witness Lee's position that the Babylon of Revelation 17 is the RCC.³⁴ Even many of those who teach that the Babylon of Revelation 17 is a future conglomeration of world religions also teach that the RCC will either be intimately involved with or lead this consortium. Lewis Sperry Chafer commented:

Revelation, chapter 17, describes the final ascendancy to governmental power on the part of the Church of Rome, and her judgments that must fall upon her.³⁵

More explicitly, he states:

³⁴ Others who have taught that Mystery Babylon the Great in Revelation 17 refers to Roman Catholicism include William Tyndale, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, John Gill, Albert Barnes, John Peter Lange, John Nelson Darby, Andrew Miller, G. H. Pember, Robert Govett, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, Charles H. Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, H. A. Ironside, C. I. Scofield, Arno C. Gaebelein, J. J. Ross, William R. Newell, Lewis Sperry Chafer, Louis Talbot, Lehman Strauss, Merrill F. Unger, John F. Walvoord, Walter Lewis Wilson, W. A. Criswell, and Donald Grey Barnhouse.

³⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Volume IV* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 354.

Two ‘Babylons’ are to be distinguished in the Revelation: ecclesiastical Babylon, which is apostate Christendom, headed up under the Papacy; and political Babylon, which is the Beast’s confederated empire, the last form of Gentile world-dominion. Ecclesiastical Babylon is ‘the great whore’ (Rev. 17.1)...³⁶

Chafer, like many others, described the RCC as “apostate” and referred to ecclesiastical Babylon, headed up by the RCC, as “the great whore,” quoting from Revelation 17:1. Geisler and Rhodes should be well aware of the many other respected Christian teachers who have taught the same thing. Chafer, between the two portions cited above, quotes at length from Ford C. Ottman (*Unfolding of the Ages*, pp. 378-84) and C. I. Scofield to support his points. Witness Lee, using similar terminology, is not out of line with such teachers nor with the Bible.

In *Practice*, Witness Lee referenced G. H. Pember’s work *The Great Prophecies*, Alexander Hislop’s book *The Two Babylons*, and the Plymouth Brethren writers as others who hold similar views. Geisler and Rhodes hide all of these sources from their readers. While there are differing interpretations of the prophecy in Revelation 17, it is dissembling for Geisler and Rhodes to portray Witness Lee as isolated from the long line of Christian teachers with similar interpretations of Scripture in order to attack him as if he were an aberration.

Witness Lee bases his observation that the RCC is an “adulterous woman” on the apostle John’s letter to the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29), where there is such a woman named Jezebel who “calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices” (v. 20). In the Bible, God’s people are called to be a chaste bride (2 Cor. 11:2); for God’s people to engage in idol worship is called fornication and adultery (Jer. 2: 11, 19-20; Num. 25:1-3). Without question the Old Testament Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31;

³⁶ Ibid., p. 358.

19:1-2; 21:23; 25-26; 2 Kings 9:7) caused Israel to incur judgment from God for these things. Revelation 2 refers to a New Testament Jezebel who is an adulterous woman. This woman's identity, a matter Geisler and Rhodes avoid addressing, is central to interpreting the second and third chapters of Revelation and related Bible verses. Witness Lee plainly identifies this woman with the woman in Matthew 13:33 and the great harlot of Revelation 17:

The woman here is the same as the one prophesied by the Lord in Matt. 13:33. There the woman added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things) into the fine flour (signifying Christ as the meal offering for the satisfaction of God and man). This woman is the great harlot of Rev. 17, who mixes abominations with the divine things. Jezebel, the pagan wife of Ahab, is a type of this apostate church.³⁷

Concerning the church in Thyatira addressed in Revelation, Witness Lee considers it a prefigure to the RCC:

The Greek word means *sacrifice of perfume*, or *unceasing sacrifice*. As a sign, the church in Thyatira prefigures the Roman Catholic Church, which was fully formed as the apostate church by the establishing of the universal papal system in the latter part of the sixth century. This apostate church is full of sacrifices, as demonstrated in her continual Masses.³⁸

Once again, Witness Lee is not alone in holding the view that the epistles to the seven churches in Revelation, although written to actual local churches in Asia Minor, depict the course of the church through its various stages from the early church (Ephesus) until the Lord's return.³⁹ Concerning Thyatira prefiguring the RCC, Andrew Miller stated:

³⁷ Witness Lee, Revelation 2:20, footnote 1, *Holy Bible: Recovery Version* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2003).

³⁸ Witness Lee, Revelation 2:18, footnote 1, *ibid.*

³⁹ Victorinus, the Catholic scholar Joachim, John Gill, Matthew Poole, John Nelson Darby, William Kelly, Andrew Miller, G. H. Pember, G. Campbell Morgan, F. W. Grant, A. B. Simpson, Joseph A. Seiss, C. I. Scofield, Arno

In Thyatira, we have the Popery of the middle ages. Jezebel-like, practising all kinds of wickedness, and persecuting the saints of God under the disguise of religious zeal...Period—from the establishment of Popery to the Lord's coming. It goes on to the end, but is characterized by the dark ages.⁴⁰

This same view of the prophetic nature of the seven churches in general and the identity of Thyatira (Jezebel) in particular was espoused in one form or another by Lewis Sperry Chafer,⁴¹ C. I. Scofield,⁴² G. H. Pember,⁴³ and Watchman Nee,⁴⁴ among many others.⁴⁵ Indeed, Watchman Nee said:

Here we want to note who Jezebel is. Jezebel is a woman. The woman in Revelation 17 refers to the Roman Catholic Church. In Matthew 13:13 the woman who took the leaven and hid it in three measures of meal is also the Roman Catholic Church. Naturally, therefore, the woman in Revelation 2:20 also represents the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁶

Rather than address any substantive matters of biblical interpretation, Geisler and Rhodes simply extracted fragments

C. Gaebelein, William R. Newell, H.A. Ironside, Louis Talbot, Ford C. Ottman, John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Lehman Strauss, Donald Grey Barnhouse, J. Vernon McGee, and W. A. Criswell, among others.

⁴⁰ Andrew Miller, *Miller's Church History: From the First to the Twentieth Century* (London & Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, 1963), p. 5.

⁴¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Volume IV* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 353.

⁴² C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 1331, note 3.

⁴³ G. H. Pember, *The Great Prophecies of the Centuries Concerning the Church, Volume 4* (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing, 1984), pp. 494-649.

⁴⁴ Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 47: The Orthodoxy of the Church & Authority and Submission* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1994), pp. 3-102.

⁴⁵ See "Biblical Critiques of Christianity – Selected Bibliography and Biographical Notes on Sources Cited" in this volume.

⁴⁶ *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 47*, op. cit., p. 45.

from Witness Lee's teaching to inflame their readership without regard to truth.

Apostate Church

Geisler and Rhodes complain that Witness Lee is harsh and libelous when he refers to the RCC as an apostate church. However, referenced above are several noted Christian scholars who have also recognized and referred to the RCC as an apostate church. Even some allies of Geisler and Rhodes hold this view.⁴⁷

The three items Geisler cites as foreign elements in the RCC—hierarchy, ritual, and pagan practices—are in themselves enough to label the RCC as apostate. Geisler also criticizes many of the main teachings of the RCC as not only being unscriptural but also against the main principles of the gospel. He further contends that in practice the veneration of Mary is idolatry. If one adds all of Geisler's complaints against the RCC together, it certainly looks like apostasy. Yet, he and Rhodes attack Witness Lee for stating the obvious, that the RCC is apostate.

As noted above, C. I. Scofield used the word *apostate* in describing the RCC. Ford Ottman, quoted by Lewis Sperry Chafer in his *Systematic Theology*,⁴⁸ said of the RCC at the end times:

Such a condition shall assuredly be manifest in the apostate church just prior to the return of our Lord with the true Church. The indications are of such a character as to mark out more particularly the ecclesiastical system now known as the papal church. Romanism shall be in existence at the time, but more fearfully apostate than she has ever been. The definite marks here given are such as have in a general way

⁴⁷See "Applying a Double Standard with Regard to Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church" in this volume.

⁴⁸Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. IV* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1973), p. 354.

characterized Romanism throughout the entire time of her history.⁴⁹

Lest anyone think that it is only Christian teachers of the past who have called the RCC apostate, consider the following statement made by John MacArthur:

And perception is violated, particularly because the Catholic Church claims to be “true Christianity.” And when we reverse 450 years of history and just throw our arms around the Roman system—which I think we have to say, John, in all honesty is not a group of wayward brothers but is an apostate form of Christianity. It is a false religion. It is another religion.⁵⁰

In the same panel discussion, R. C. Sproul echoed MacArthur’s sentiments, saying:

Somebody is preaching a different gospel. And when Rome condemned the Protestant declaration of justification by faith alone, I believe Rome, when placing the anathema on *sola fide*, placed the anathema of God upon themselves. And I agree with his [MacArthur’s] assessment, that the institution is apostate.⁵¹ [emphasis in original]

Both MacArthur and Sproul are well-known among evangelicals. For Geisler and Rhodes to single out Witness Lee’s criticism of the RCC and to ignore the chorus of evangelical voices who have likewise called the RCC apostate is yet another example of biased apologetics.

⁴⁹ Ford C. Ottman, *Unfolding of the Ages in the Revelation of John* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1905), p. 378. The entire text of this book is available online at books.google.com/books?id=YKHf8xadOpIC on Google Books.

⁵⁰ John MacArthur, “Do Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants Now Agree?,” *Defending the Faith, Volume IV* (Chattanooga, TN: Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1995), p. 14. This article is a transcript of a panel discussion among MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, D. James Kennedy, and John Ankerberg. None of the four participants objected to this characterization of the RCC as apostate.

⁵¹ R. C. Sproul, *ibid.*, p. 16.

Conclusion

Witness Lee has a solid scriptural basis for his statements concerning the RCC as well as the support of the strong testimony of many Christian teachers since the Reformation. Yet Geisler and Rhodes suppress these facts and characterize his biblical teaching as “harsh,” “slandorous,” and “libelous.”

Although Witness Lee did use strong and frank language in his criticism of the RCC, as does the Bible, this did not occupy a large part of his ministry, nor was it central to his message. Rather, his ministry focused on the crucial truths concerning the all-inclusive Christ as everything in God’s economy to become everything to his chosen and redeemed people to produce the church as the Body of Christ in this age and, as the ultimate consummation, the New Jerusalem in eternity, the mutual dwelling of God and man.

However, from time to time, as the need arose and as particular passages of the Bible required, Witness Lee did speak strong, frank, and healthy words concerning the condition of the RCC and its place in the revelation of the Bible. To do less would have been unfaithful. The Lord Himself often spoke frank and cutting words (for example, in Matt. 12:25-37; 16:1-12; 23:1-36). His servants cannot be asked to ignore such passages in the Bible or refrain from faithfully echoing the Lord’s assessments. Witness Lee spoke these words primarily to those within the local churches to warn them of the dangers inherent in not pursuing Christ and of practicing the church life without the reality of the living Christ. At no time were Witness Lee’s words unwarranted or inappropriate, let alone libelous or slanderous as Geisler and Rhodes state.

While Geisler and Rhodes have the liberty to disagree with Witness Lee’s interpretation of the various scriptural passages in question, they failed to address the relevant matters of truth in their critique. Instead, they employed a dishonest apologetic

method, excising small snippets from *Practice* and arranging those “quotations” in such an inflammatory manner to incite their readers against Witness Lee and the local churches. They brandished about terms such as “slanderous” and “libelous” without supporting their charges. They obscured the fact that Witness Lee was expounding biblical prophecies and that his expositions had considerable historical precedent among respected teachers of the Bible. Some of these prophecies were uttered directly by the Lord Himself. All of them are part of the inspired Word of God. By separating Witness Lee’s commentary from the biblical passages he was commenting on, Geisler and Rhodes have deprived their readers of the opportunity to weigh the issues for themselves in light of Scripture. In effect, they have not allowed the Lord to speak to their readers through His Word and have deprived them of the chance to consider the Lord’s evaluation of the condition of His church.

APPLYING A DOUBLE STANDARD WITH REGARD TO CRITICISM OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In “Response”¹, Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes apply a double standard in making inflammatory accusations against Witness Lee based on the third chapter of his book *Practice*.¹ They condemn Witness Lee for making certain statements about the Roman Catholic Church (henceforth RCC) that are similar to statements they have made about the RCC in their own writings. Not only so, some of their allies have also made similar, and in some cases stronger, statements. Many of these accusations have been addressed previously on Contending for the Faith (www.contendingforthefaith.org), yet Geisler and Rhodes have ignored those replies.² Geisler and Rhodes state:

Chapter Three from a book by Witness Lee titled, *The God-Ordained Way to Practice the New Testament Economy* in which he engages in a slanderous attack on...“today’s Catholic Church.” ...[Lee says that] The Roman Church is infested with “Satan’s evil spirits” and “full of all kinds of evils. Evil persons, evil practices, and evil things are lodging there.” It is an “adulterous woman who added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things).” It is “the Mother of the Prostitutes” and an “apostate church.” Again, it is “full of idolatry,” “against God’s economy,” and “saturated with

¹ See pages 7 and 8 for the full titles of “Response” and *Practice*.

² The very same chapter, chosen from among thousands of chapters in hundreds of books by Witness Lee, was the subject of very similar attacks on the Harvest House Publishers corporate website. Geisler aided in the defense of a book published by Harvest House and authored by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, so he should have been aware of both Harvest House’s criticisms and of the articles published on contendingforthefaith.org that responded to similar accusation by Harvest House and addressed similar issues. (See footnote 2 on page 25 for a listing of these articles and their web addresses.) Geisler and Rhodes ignored these responses and simply strung together fragments of Witness Lee’s writing to create the desired impression in much the same way Harvest House did.

demonic and satanic things.” If ever there were grounds for religious libel, this would be it.³

The subject matter to which Geisler and Rhodes so strongly object consists primarily of a few words and short phrases stripped from the context of *Practice*.⁴ They combined these selected phrases with their running editorial comments to present an extremely sensationalized, unbalanced, and inaccurate view of Witness Lee’s teaching. Furthermore, it is evident that their criticism is an exercise in hypocrisy in light of:

- The strong criticism of the RCC by both the Reformers and their successors;
- Ascription of similar evils to the RCC by Ron Rhodes;
- Criticism of Roman Catholicism by Norman Geisler; and
- Strong statements about the RCC by allies of Geisler and Rhodes.

Not only have Geisler and Rhodes treated Witness Lee’s words unfairly by cobbling together a series of out-of-context fragments, but on the basic issue of criticism of the RCC, they have applied a blatant double standard.

The Historic Protestant Position on Roman Catholicism

Witness Lee’s criticism of the RCC is often much less harsh than the criticism of Protestant teachers from the Reformation

³ The mere fact that Witness Lee made strong and critical statements about the RCC does not support Geisler and Rhodes’ contention of slander and libel. As is often stated, “Truth is an absolute defense against the charge of libel.” In other words, if statements are true, they are not slanderous or libelous. Since Geisler and Rhodes couched their criticism of Witness Lee with accusations of slander and libel, it was incumbent upon them to challenge the truth of his statements. This they did not do. Rather, “Response” consists of bare accusation and sensationalism.

⁴ For a detailed explanation of the mishandling of excerpted quotes, see: “Misrepresenting Witness Lee and Defending the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume.

until the present time.⁵ One of the earliest writings of Martin Luther after he took a stand against the RCC was the treatise “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.” The title alone equates the RCC with Babylon, an idea that Geisler and Rhodes apparently reject as harsh, regrettable, and slanderous. In this treatise, Luther says:

But after hearing and reading the super-subtle subtleties of these coxcombs, with which they so adroitly prop up their idol (for my mind is not altogether unteachable in these matters), I now know for certain that the papacy is the kingdom of Babylon and the power of Nimrod...⁶

Luther purposely used “coxcombs” as a derogatory term to portray his opponents as those who pretended to rank and authority. The “idol” Luther referred to was the Pope himself. Here, and in many other places, Luther’s criticism of the RCC was much stronger than Witness Lee’s. Luther said that if the Antichrist himself were pope, he could add nothing to Rome’s wickedness, stated that the RCC was “a licentious den of thieves...the most shameful of all brothels” and surmised that the RCC deserved to have Satan as its pope.⁷ Luther was not alone in speaking so strongly. Luther was joined by John Calvin, John Knox, and John Wesley.⁸ Yet Geisler and Rhodes have not

⁵ This matter will be touched briefly in this article. For a more complete presentation, please refer to “Biblical Critiques of Christianity – Selected Bibliography and Biographical Notes on Sources Cited.”

⁶ Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 124.

⁷ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 268-269.

⁸ See, for example: Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” and “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 124 among many other references; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 314-315; John Calvin, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, edited by J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 90-91; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Volume 1*,

attacked these teachers as slanderous and libelous. In fact, Rhodes uses Luther and his criticism of the RCC as a positive example to rouse today's believers to stand up for the truth of the gospel:

As Christians, we are called to contend for the faith by “telling it like it is.” Look at it this way: Would we have had a Reformation if Martin Luther hadn't told it like it was to the Roman Catholic church? No, we wouldn't. Luther saw a deviation from “the faith” and he accordingly contended for the faith. We must follow Luther's example.⁹

If Geisler and Rhodes truly object to the statements they listed and portrayed as slanderous, they have no choice but to similarly condemn Luther, other Reformers, and the many Christian teachers who came after them who were also highly critical of the RCC.¹⁰ Rather than condemnation, Rhodes offers praise for

trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1981), John 8:43-45; John Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559* (Dallas, TX: Kevin Reed, Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995) available at: www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/firblast.htm; John Wesley, “Revelation 17,” *John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible*, available at wes.biblecommenter.com/revelation/17.htm.

⁹ Ron Rhodes, *The Culting of America* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), p. 221.

¹⁰ See, for example: Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. III* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 813, 817, 822, 832; John Owen, “Sermon XV. The chamber of imagery in the church of Rome laid open,” *The Sermons of John Owen*, www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/sermons.ii.xv.ii.html; Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1964), p. 459; C. H. Mackintosh, *The Mackintosh Treasury* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1976), p. 814; F. B. Meyer, *Great Verses through the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 467-468; H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Revelation* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920, 1973), pp. 55-56, 57, 299, 305-306; Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: God's Last Word*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971, 1982), pp. 324-35; John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, Volume V: Colossians—The Revelation* (Kingston-on-Thames: Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1965), p. 412; W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on*

Luther's stand against the RCC, however "harsh and regrettable" his language may have been.

What Witness Lee wrote in *Practice* is much more in line with the traditional Protestant position concerning the RCC than are the protests of Geisler and Rhodes. In fact, Witness Lee's words pale in comparison to those of many other respected Christian teachers.

Ron Rhodes Criticizes Catholicism for Occult Involvement

Although "Response" vehemently attacks Witness Lee's words concerning the RCC, its authors have written similar criticisms. In *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Catholic*, Ron Rhodes equated the RCC teaching of purgatory and its practical effect on Catholics with the occult, with apparitions, and with spiritism. Speaking of this matter Rhodes says:

Researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon have noted an occult connection to the doctrine of purgatory. They observe that throughout the history of the Roman Catholic Church there have been widespread reports of apparitions alleged to be those of dead persons...¹¹

After quoting Ankerberg and Weldon, Rhodes concludes:

This is nothing less than spiritism. And all forms of spiritism are condemned by God as heinous sin.¹²

Revelation: Volume 4—Revelation 11 through 17 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, 1980), pp. 182, 186; Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Devotional Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House, 1964, 1975), pp. 769, 770, 771; and John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 245-246. See "Biblical Critiques of Christianity – Selected Bibliography and Biographical Notes on Sources Cited" in this volume.

¹¹ Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Catholic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), p. 106. These same sentences appear in Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2000), p. 241.

¹² Ibid.

In *Find It Quick: Handbook on Cults & New Religions*, Rhodes explains the evils he attributes to spiritism. He again defines spiritism as “heinous sin” and further as the equivalent of channeling, an occult practice, which he describes as an attempt to communicate with “allegedly departed human beings” or “other non-human spiritual entities.” He then concludes that one of the dangers of spiritism is demon possession.¹³ Rhodes states that one of the main features of occult practices is that:

...they place people in contact with supernatural powers, paranormal entities, or demonic forces...Occultism takes many forms but often includes such practices as trance states, séances, clairvoyance, spiritism (also called channeling)...¹⁴

Rhodes acknowledges that Catholic apparitions are a form of spirit contact. He further points out that spiritism can result in demon possession. To Rhodes, therefore, the “spiritual entities” contacted through apparitions (spiritism) are, in fact, evil spirits or demons. Rhodes associates all these things with the RCC: apparitions, spiritism, the occult, evil spirits, demons, and demon possession. Yet, Rhodes and Geisler object when Witness Lee speaks of the RCC being associated with “Satan’s evil spirits” and being “saturated with demonic and satanic things.” Apparently this is an acceptable criticism of the RCC when it is made by Rhodes but not when it is made by Witness Lee, even though Witness Lee’s criticism is based entirely on the Bible,¹⁵ while Rhodes’ critique relies primarily on other sources.

¹³ Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick: Handbook on Cults & New Religions* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), pp. 182-186. cf. p. 278, Item 87, “Unbelievers Can Be Demon Possessed.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁵ See: “Misrepresenting Witness Lee and Defending the Roman Catholic Church” in this volume. This article demonstrates that many respected Christian teachers held interpretations concerning certain key parables and prophecies similar to those expounded by Witness Lee.

Geisler Criticizes Catholicism for Heresy, Idolatry, and Mixture

In an article posted on the John Ankerberg website and excerpted from Geisler's book *When Cultists Ask*, Geisler comments on the RCC veneration of Mary. He says:

In addition, bowing down in veneration before any creature, even angels (cf. Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:8-9), is forbidden in Scripture. The Bible makes it clear that we are not to make any "images" of any creature or even to "bow down" to them in an act of religious devotion (Exod. 20:4-5). To call Mary "Queen of Heaven," knowing that this phrase was borrowed directly from an old pagan idolatrous cult condemned in the Bible (cf. Jer. 7:18), only invites the charge of mariolatry. And mariolatry is idolatry. In addition, despite theological distinctions to the contrary, in practice many Catholics do not distinguish between the veneration given to Mary and that given to Christ.¹⁶

In this portion, Geisler associates idolatry and idols with the RCC. He accuses the RCC of adopting an "old pagan idolatrous cult" practice that has been "forbidden in Scripture." He indicates that in practice the veneration of Mary in the RCC is the worship of something or someone other than God and amounts to "idolatry." Yet, Geisler and Rhodes condemn Witness Lee's use of similar terms.

In answering the question of whether or not the RCC is a false church, Geisler wrote, somewhat equivocally:

But is the Roman Catholic Church a false church? If Rome is judged by the standard of the fourteen (or sixteen) salvation essentials embodied in the creeds of the first five centuries, the answer is no. In this case, Rome is a true church with significant error. If judged by the standards of the Protestant

¹⁶ Norman Geisler, excerpted from *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997). "Mary—Fully Human, or Nearly Divine?" www.ankerberg.com/Articles/PDFArchives/theological-dictionary/TD4W1299.pdf.

Reformation, however, the answer is yes. In this case, Rome is a false church with significant truth.¹⁷

One is left to wonder both how Geisler would answer this question for himself and what would be his answer if the standard was the Bible rather than the creeds. Unable or unwilling to answer this question unequivocally, Geisler¹⁸ further states, “Therefore, Rome has ‘practical heresy’ if not both practical and doctrinal heresy.”¹⁹ Finally, Geisler concludes:

Current Roman Catholicism in general is a combination of four factors: (1) a basic Christian doctrinal core, (2) a Roman hierarchical structure (borrowed from the dying Roman Empire), (3) a Jewish ritualistic form (borrowed from the Old Testament), and (4) significant pagan content and practices. Depending on the time and place, one or more of these factors may dominate. Thus, depending on the critic’s focus, one may get widely divergent conclusions about Roman Catholicism ranging from Christian to cult. To borrow the title of Jaroslav Pelikan’s excellent tome, this is “the riddle of Roman Catholicism.”²⁰

Geisler’s four factors that constitute the RCC bring to mind Witness Lee’s teaching that the RCC is typified by the woman who mixes leaven with the fine flour in Matthew 13:33. The fine flour in the parable represents the person and work of Christ, which roughly corresponds to Geisler’s first point, the basic truths of the faith. The leaven that the woman mixed with the fine flour would be represented by Geisler’s other three points: hierarchy, ritual, and pagan things. Geisler described the RCC as a combination of these four elements, which implies a mixture. The meal offering, indicated by the fine flour in the parable,

¹⁷ Norman Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 180.

¹⁸ Geisler’s equivocation concerning the RCC may be due to sympathies formed during his study at Loyola of Chicago, a Jesuit institution.

¹⁹ Geisler and Betancourt, *op. cit.*, pp 181.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

should consist of fine flour without any mixture of corrupting elements (Lev. 2:4-5, 11). In his description of the RCC, Geisler admits that it is a mixture of the things of God and three corrupting elements. In effect, he is saying that while the church should be pure and consist of Christ and the things of God, the RCC has mixed in corruption, or leaven, in the form of hierarchy, ritual, and paganism. Thus, according to Geisler, the RCC is an impure mixture incorporating even pagan things. Yet, in "Response" Geisler and Rhodes strongly attack Witness Lee for saying that the RCC is the "woman who added leaven (signifying evil, heretical, and pagan things)," even though Geisler's own teaching supports Witness Lee's point.

In other writings Geisler attacks the RCC concerning its errant teachings and practices: Mary as co-redemptrix and co-mediatrix, the immaculate conception of Mary, the assumption of Mary, the mass, the Eucharist, the Apocrypha, justification by works, the Magisterium, and papal infallibility among others.²¹ He also is critical of evangelicals such as Charles Colson, J. I. Packer, and others who issued a joint statement of cooperation with Catholics.²² Considering the seriousness of the claims he

²¹ For examples see:

- Norman Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt, *Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008).
- Norman Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).
- Norman Geisler, "Mary -- Fully Human or Nearly Divine?" Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1999 (www.ankerberg.com/Articles/PDFArchives/theological-dictionary/TD4W1299.pdf).
- Norman Geisler, "The Apocrypha: Parts 1—4," Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 2002.

²² Norman Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), critiques cooperative efforts between Catholics and Protestants and "addresses the issue of whether cooperation or conflict should charac-

makes against the RCC, the real remaining “riddle” is that Geisler, along with Rhodes, so vociferously protests Witness Lee’s teachings about the RCC. It seems Geisler and Rhodes maintain that criticisms that are appropriate for them to levy against the RCC are not appropriate for Witness Lee to make. This is a flagrant double standard.

Geisler and Rhodes’ Allies Vehemently Attack Catholicism

Both Geisler and Rhodes are allied with Harvest House Publishers and John Ankerberg. Geisler authored an amicus brief on their behalf during the litigation concerning *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions (ECNR)*, and Rhodes signed another amicus in the case. Geisler was listed as one of John Ankerberg’s consulting experts in the case, and Ankerberg depended on Geisler for his opinion concerning proposed changes to *ECNR*. Geisler has been a frequent guest on the John Ankerberg Show and has authored numerous articles posted on the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute (ATRI) website. As pointed out previously, the attack by Geisler and Rhodes on the third chapter of *Practice* is similar enough to the attack on the same chapter on the Harvest House website to suggest collusion between the two parties. Geisler and Rhodes have published numerous books with Harvest House.

Both Geisler and Rhodes were also signers of the so-called open letter calling for a disavowal of statements made by Witness Lee, which, according to one of the signers of that document,

terize these unions” (p. 15). It contends that “... there is no hope for ecclesiastic union with Catholicism.” It contains criticism of the endorsers of the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (“ECT”) statement drafted by Charles Colson and Kent Hill (then President of Eastern Nazarene College), among others. Its evangelical participants and endorsers included Os Guinness, Richard Land, Richard Mouw, Mark Noll, Jesse Miranda, Pat Robertson, and Thomas Oden. Geisler’s book is also critical of Michael Horton and J. I. Packer for diluting statements originally made in a response to “ECT.”

was written in large part to support Harvest House and its authors in the ECNR litigation. Like "Response," much of the content of the open letter is very similar to that of corporate statements posted by Harvest House on its website.

It is, therefore, both appropriate and instructive to examine what Geisler and Rhodes' allies have written about the RCC, not necessarily to criticize any of the named authors or to either challenge or endorse their statements. Rather, this is done to illustrate further the double standard employed by Geisler and Rhodes in their attack on Witness Lee and his teaching.

John Ankerberg and John Weldon

Ankerberg and his former long-time researcher John Weldon published many statements stridently criticizing the RCC and accusing it of occult involvement. Without equivocation, they take the position that the RCC is not merely an errant Christian religion; it is simply not a Christian religion:

Now consider Roman Catholicism. The fact that it accepts many Christian doctrines is irrelevant. That it teaches salvation by works proves that it is not a Christian religion.²³

So how do we finally assess Roman Catholicism? We can only evaluate it by the Bible and Rome's own claims. In such light then should Roman Catholicism really be classified as the one true Church? Should it even be classified as Christian? No. Roman Catholicism is not the true Church and it is not even a Christian religion.²⁴

Following a testimony of Weldon's own experience as a Catholic, Ankerberg and Weldon conclude:

²³ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Protestants & Catholics: Do They Now Agree?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), p. 219.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

...[S]uch stories are anything but uncommon. But if so, the Catholic Church must be seen as a genuine hindrance to the cause of Christ.²⁵

In *The Coming Darkness*, Ankerberg and Weldon accuse the RCC of the darkest, most demonic activities. For example:

There are also reported cases in Catholic monasteries. Dr. Vallee observes that “the most remarkable cases of sexual contact with nonhumans are...in the archives of the Catholic Church” and he proceeds to list examples. Given the claims that (according to Investigative Reports TV series “Sins of the Fathers”) widespread homosexuality and, to a much lesser degree, pedophilia exist in some Catholic seminaries and among priests today (25 to 50 percent of priests were estimated to be homosexually inclined), one can only wonder if this phenomena has already returned. There are also cases of sex with alleged UFO occupants (e.g., the Villa Boas, Shane Kurz, and Cordelia Donavan incidents), which essentially parallel the incubi-succubae.²⁶

It is painful to include such topics in this article, and it should be noted that Witness Lee’s biblical criticisms of the RCC using scriptural expressions cannot be compared with this level of ignobility and sensationalism.

Authors on the ATRI Website

The ATRI website has a major category of articles dedicated to addressing errors and issues related to the RCC. The current index page²⁷ on Roman Catholicism on johnankerberg.org lists articles by John Ankerberg and John Weldon,²⁸ Mike Gendron,

²⁵ Ibid. p. 195

²⁶ John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), pp. 196-197.

²⁷ As of June, 2010. See www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/archives-rc.htm.

²⁸ Some of the article titles attributed to Ankerberg and Weldon in the Roman Catholicism Index of the ATRI site are: “Catholic and Occult View of Mary,” “What about Marian Apparitions?,” “What is the Unique Role of Mary in Roman Catholicism and Is It Biblical?,” “Is the Pope

James McCarthy, Greg Durel, and others. One article by Gendron, an ex-Catholic, entitled “Roman Catholicism—Apostolic or Apostate?” concludes in this way:

Is the Roman Catholic Church guilty of apostasy? The evidence is overwhelming. The truth must be told in love with courage and conviction. The eternal destiny of millions of precious souls hangs in the balance. The Catholic Church has fallen away from the faith of the apostles and gone the way of apostates.²⁹

Gendron, on the ATRI site, states clearly that he considers the RCC to be apostate. Geisler and Rhodes claim that when Witness Lee describes the RCC as an “apostate church,” he is guilty of slander and religious libel. Gendron also has articles on the ATRI site addressing various aspects of the RCC entitled “Beware of Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” “Is a Catholic Christian an Oxymoron?” “Roman Catholics, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses,” and “Eucharist Adoration: Worship or Idolatry?” among others.

After describing at length the strong rebukes the Lord Jesus had for the Jewish religious system of His time (described on the ATRI Roman Catholicism Index page as “scathing criticism”) and comparing that system to the RCC, McCarthy says:

Jesus rejected the man-made authority structure of the first century Jews. He refused to submit to Tradition, the teaching authority of the scribes and the Pharisees, or the ruling authority of the Sanhedrin they represented. What Jesus rejected, the Roman Catholic Church has now restored. It has elevated Tradition to the same level of authority as God’s

Infalible in Matters of Doctrine and Morals?,” and “A Catholic is a Catholic is a Catholic.”

²⁹ Gendron, Mike, “Roman Catholicism—Apostolic or Apostate?” (Chattanooga, TN: ATRI, Not Dated), p. 3. www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/_PDFArchives/roman-catholicism/RC2W1199.pdf.

inspired Scriptures. Its pope and bishops have laid claim to universal jurisdiction and sole teaching authority.³⁰

It is clear from this article that McCarthy postulates that the Lord's strong rebuke, characterized by ATRI as "scathing criticism," of the Pharisees and Sadducees could also be applied to today's RCC.

Greg Durel, who also writes articles for Reaching Catholics for Christ, has articles on the ATRI site addressing the shortcomings of the RCC. In the introductory paragraph of the article "Signs of a Cult," Durel first states that there are seven principle signs for identifying a cult. In the article he says, "But for our discussion the word cult is simply a word that describes organized heresy." Concerning the RCC, Durel concludes:

The mysticism is clearly not biblical and certainly not necessary for anyone to be saved. Their insistence on such heresies places them at the top of the list of religious cults. That statement may seem a bit harsh, but it is nonetheless true. Catholicism does not differ from any of the cults where our first sign [*exclusivity*] is concerned. A closer look at the other signs of a cult further confirm the fact that Catholicism, while large in number, humanitarian in practice, is still unbiblical and perhaps the mother of all "Christian" cults.³¹

Durel contends that its heresies place the RCC "at the top of the list of religious cults" and suggests that the RCC may be "the mother of all 'Christian' cults." Although he says this may seem harsh to some, his defense of his harsh statement is that it is true. Certainly truth should be the determining factor in judging statements about the RCC. Durel's language resembles that of

³⁰James McCarthy, "Roman Catholic Authority" (Chattanooga, TN: ATRI, Not Dated), p. 2. www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/_PDFArchives/roman-catholicism/RC1W0899.pdf. Adapted from McCarthy, James, *The Gospel According to Rome* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).

³¹Greg Durel, "The Signs of a Cult" (Chattanooga, TN: ATRI, Not Dated), p. 2, www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/_PDFArchives/roman-catholicism/RC4W0899.pdf.

Geisler when he commented (as noted above) that according to some evaluations the RCC may be seen as a cult.

Norman Geisler is a long-time associate of John Ankerberg and has appeared numerous times on *The John Ankerberg Show*. He has never condemned Ankerberg and Weldon for criticizing Roman Catholicism, although he has publicly castigated Witness Lee for doing so. Geisler clearly has one standard for his language and that of his allies but quite another standard for Witness Lee.

Harvest House Publishers

Many of the quotations used above to demonstrate the charges against the RCC made by Rhodes, Ankerberg, and Weldon were taken from books published by Harvest House.³² The quote from James McCarthy taken from the ATRI site is adapted from a book also published by Harvest House. It seems that Geisler and Rhodes' publisher has no qualms publishing criticisms of the RCC.

For example, Harvest House published Dave Hunt's *A Woman Rides the Beast*. On the front cover of the book is a portion of Revelation 17:7 ("I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast...") and a proclamation that the book is about "the Roman Catholic Church and the last days." The back cover blurb reads, in part:

Who is this woman? Tradition says she is connected with the church of Rome. But isn't such a view outdated? After all, today's Vatican is eager to join hands with Protestants worldwide. "The Catholic Church has changed," is what we hear. Or has it? In *A Woman Rides the Beast*, prophecy expert Dave Hunt sifts through biblical truth and global events to

³² Ironically, as Harvest House's contract copy editor for Ankerberg and Weldon's *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions* attested, statements critical of the RCC were removed from that book in order to broaden its marketability.

present a well-defined portrait of the woman and her powerful place in the Antichrist's future empire. Eight remarkable clues in Revelation 17 and 18 prove the woman's identity beyond any reasonable doubt.³³

Both the front and back covers would have been developed by Harvest House Publishers with the author's approval.

Hunt believes the RCC is the Babylon of Revelation and that she is the harlot, the whore of Babylon. Starting on page 68 there is a section titled "Who Is the Whore?" followed by a section beginning on page 77 titled "The Mother of Harlots and Abominations." Hunt states, "Against only one other *city* in history could a charge of fornication be leveled. That city is Rome, and more specifically *Vatican City*" (emphasis in original).³⁴ In speaking of the popes of history, Hunt describes many of them as "master criminals, poisoners, adulterers, and mass murderers" who were nevertheless considered "infallible when they spoke *ex cathedra*" about faith and morality. Their lives were full of "lust, madness, mayhem, and murder."³⁵ This list of blatant evils pales in comparison to Hunt's association of the RCC with Hitler, Mussolini, the Holocaust, and Nazi atrocities.

In another Harvest House book by Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion*, one finds such statements as "...millions... refused allegiance to the Church of Rome because of its pagan/occult practices and apostasy" in a chapter titled "Occultism and the Roman Catholic Church."³⁶ Hunt further associates the RCC with voodoo:

³³ Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), back cover.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁶ Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), p. 407.

Images, holy water, and Catholic rituals cannot be found in the Bible, but have all been adapted from paganism. Their counterpart is found today in voodoo and related cults.³⁷

In the same chapter Hunt associates the RCC with Santeria, "...'gods' who front for demons passed off as Catholic saints,"³⁸ "superstition and occultism,"³⁹ and shamanism.⁴⁰ This is a small sampling of statements from this chapter that characterize the RCC as something exceedingly evil.

Hunt's statements in *A Woman Rides the Beast* and *Occult Invasion*, both published by Harvest House, are far more inflammatory than any of the statements made by Witness Lee that apparently stirred Geisler and Rhodes into charging him with slander and religious libel. Once again, Geisler and Rhodes employ a different standard to judge Witness Lee than they apply to themselves or their allies.

Geisler and Rhodes Apply a Hypocritical Double Standard

In examining the statements that Geisler, Rhodes, and some of their allies have written about the RCC and comparing them to sentence fragments excerpted from *Practice*, it becomes evident that there is a double standard at work in Geisler and Rhodes' assessment. Witness Lee's criticisms of the RCC are, in many cases, milder than the criticisms of Luther, Calvin, and others. Yet, Geisler and Rhodes choose to attack Witness Lee and to champion others who have said similar things.

Rhodes, in his writings, linked the RCC with apparitions, spiritism, occult practices, evil spirits, demons, and demon possession. He characterizes all these as "heinous sin," which

³⁷ Ibid., p. 411.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 412.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 415.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

indeed they are. Yet, he and co-author Geisler apparently bristle at Witness Lee's biblical critique.

Geisler linked the RCC to many evils. He wrote that in the RCC Mariolatry and idolatry are, at the very least, practical heresy, could be theological heresy, and amount to worship of someone other than God. Geisler has rightly pointed out that the term "Queen of Heaven," used by the RCC in relation to Mary, was taken from ancient pagan practices and is condemned by the Bible. Geisler stated that, depending on what standard one uses, the RCC may be either a true or a false church and that at certain times, under certain circumstances, those who examine the RCC could conclude that it is anywhere from a Christian church to a cult. He admits that three of the four main components of the RCC are ritual, hierarchy, and pagan teachings and practices. Yet Geisler, with his co-author Rhodes, affects outrage at similar statements by Witness Lee. Geisler's four points about the constituents of the RCC actually support Witness Lee's teaching about the woman who mixes leaven with the fine flour in Matthew 13:33. Yet Geisler and Rhodes attack Witness Lee for applying the language of this parable to the RCC, ignoring the many respected expositors through history who did the same.

Additionally, allies of Geisler and Rhodes— John Ankerberg, Harvest House Publishers, and other authors on the ATRI website—write and publish very harsh criticisms of the RCC. In many cases, they say things that could be characterized as strong, harsh, and extremely offensive. Ankerberg flatly denies that the RCC is a Christian church or even a Christian religion and sees it as full of heresy and a hindrance to the gospel and the cause of Christ. He also associates the RCC with gross, demonic immoralities. Other authors on his website say, "the Catholic Church has ... gone the way of the apostates," "what Jesus rejected, the Roman Catholic Church has now restored," "their insistence on such heresies places them at the top of the

list of religious cults,” the RCC may be “the mother of all “Christian” cults,” and other such statements.

Harvest House has published many of the statements about the RCC made by Geisler, Rhodes, and Ankerberg, as well as others who post on ATRI's site. They have additionally published *A Woman Rides the Beast* by Dave Hunt, a scathing, no-holds-barred attack on the RCC, and *Occult Invasion*, also by Hunt, a book that associates the RCC with many satanic evils.

Apparently, all of these criticisms are acceptable to Geisler and Rhodes. It is only when Witness Lee criticizes the RCC that they cry, “Slander! Religious libel!” These examples demonstrate the double standard applied to the teachings of Witness Lee and the local churches by Geisler and Rhodes.

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Criswell, W. A. (1909-2002) – Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas for over 50 years starting in 1944; founder of Criswell College, First Baptist Academy, and KCBI Radio.

Darby, John Nelson (1800-1882) – Influential teacher among the Plymouth Brethren; considered the “father” of modern dispensationalism; wrote a five volume *Synopsis of the Bible*

outlining the major themes in each book; translated or collaborated in translation of the Bible into English, German, French, and Dutch.

Fausset, A. R. (1821-1910) – Irish rector and chaplain; belonged to the Evangelical school of the Church of England; edited the English translation of Bengel's five-volume *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, wrote the second and fourth volumes of *The Critical and Explanatory Pocket Bible*, and collaborated with Robert Jamieson and David Brown on a multi-volume *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*.

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Jamieson, Robert (1802-1880) – Scottish minister and co-author of a multi-volume *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* with A. R. Fausset and David Brown.

Kelly, William (1821-1906) – Prolific writer among the Plymouth Brethren; edited the *Collected Writings* of John Nelson Darby, with whom he was a long-time co-worker.

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Lange, John Peter (1802-1884) – German Protestant theologian; professor of dogmatics at Bonn; professor of theology at Zurich; contributed commentaries on ten books of the Bible, including Matthew and Revelation, to *Theologisch-homiletisches Bibelwerk*, which was subsequently translated and enlarged under the general editorship of Philip Schaff.

Larkin, Clarence (1850-1924) – American Baptist pastor, Bible teacher, and author; his most famous book is *Dispensational Truth (or God's Plan and Purpose in the Ages)*.

Lockyer, Herbert (1886-1984) – Pastor, Bible teacher, and author; leader in the Keswick movement; authored a well-known 21-volume *All Bible* study series, including *All the Parables in the Bible*.

Miller, Andrew (1810-1883) – Voluntary pastor of a Baptist Church in William Street, London; wrote the introduction to C. H. Mackintosh's *Notes on the Penteteuch*, the publishing of which he also financed; wrote *Miller's Church History*.

Morgan, G. Campbell (1863-1945) – Congregational minister; renowned preacher and Bible expositor; director of Northfield Bible Conference; pastor of Westminster Chapel in London; contributor to *The Fundamentals*.

- Newell, William R. (1868-1956) – Pastored of Bethesda Congregational Church in Chicago; became the first assistant superintendent of Moody Bible Institute under R.A. Torrey in 1895; well-known for commentaries on Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation.
- Pember, G. H. (1837-1910) – English Bible and classics scholar associated with the Plymouth Brethren; known for books on prophecy and for *Earth's Earliest Ages*, which articulates the “gap” theory of Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.
- Pink, A. W. (1886-1952) – English evangelist and author; studied briefly at Moody Bible Institute; pastored congregations in Australia and in various parts of the United States; his writings were posthumously republished by Banner of Truth Trust, Baker Book House, Moody Press, and Truth for Today, among others.
- Poole, Matthew (1624-1679) – English Nonconformist theologian and apologist; rector of St. Michael le Querne, London from 1649-1662; fled England under threat of assassination because of a tract he wrote entitled “Nullity of the Romish Faith”; wrote *Synopsis criticorum biblicorum* (5 vols fol., 1669-1676) and *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (originally published as *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*); his writings were valued by Charles Spurgeon and Jonathan Edwards, among others.
- Ross, J. J. – Pastor of Second Baptist Church in Chicago and Lecturer in Homiletics and the English Bible in the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Chicago.
- Scofield, C. I. (1843-1921) – Minister at First Congregational Church in Dallas, TX; secretary of American Home Missionary Society of Texas and Louisiana; co-founder of Lake Charles College, Lake Charles, Louisiana; founder of Central American Mission based on fellowship with life-long friend Hudson Taylor; pastored Trinitarian Congregational Church of

East Northfield, Massachusetts; oversaw Moody's Northfield Bible Training School; wrote the notes for the Scofield Reference Bible, a highly influential publication espousing dispensationalist views; became a Southern Presbyterian; supervised the New York Night School of the Bible; founded Philadelphia School of the Bible (now Philadelphia Biblical University) in Philadelphia, PA.

Seiss, Joseph A. (1823-1904) – Evangelical Lutheran minister and prolific author of biblical expositions; pastored congregations in Baltimore and Philadelphia; president of the board of directors, Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Spurgeon, Charles H. (1834-1892) – Baptist preacher; built Metropolitan Tabernacle; founded Pastors' College; established Stockwell orphanage; well-known for collections of his sermons and his opposition to higher criticism of the Bible.

Stedman, Ray (1917-1992) – Graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary; traveled with H.A. Ironside; served in leadership positions at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, CA for 40 years.

Strauss, Lehman (1911-1997) – Bible teacher and author; taught on the weekly national radio broadcast, "Bible Study Time" (Biola College's radio ministry, "The Biola Hour"); taught Old Testament History at Philadelphia Bible Institute; pastored Calvary Baptist Church, Bristol, PA, and Highland Park Baptist Church in Highland Park, MI, before devoting himself to speaking in Bible conferences.

Talbot, Louis (1889-1976) – Pastored The Church of the Open Door; President of Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola College); Founded Talbot Theological Seminary (now Talbot School of Theology); founded *The Biola Hour* national radio broadcast.

Unger, Merrill F. (1909-1980) – After serving as pastor of several churches, he became a professor of Old Testament at Dallas

Theological Seminary; author of over forty books, including many reference works.

Vine, W. E. (1873-1949) – Classical scholar, expositor and theologian; author of the *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; editor of *Echoes of Service*, a monthly magazine of reports from missionaries around the world.

Walvoord, John F. (1910-2002) – Theologian, pastor and author; professor of systematic theology and president of Dallas Theological Seminary; editor of *Bibliotheca Sacra*; his writings focused on theology and eschatology.

Wesley, John (1703-1791) – Evangelist, preacher and author; founder of Methodism; with his brother Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, he set out to evangelize Great Britain, traveling on horseback and using open-air preaching to reach the masses.

Wilson, Walter Lewis (1881-1969) – American medical doctor and preacher. Started Central Bible Hall (later Central Bible Church) in Kansas City; founded Kansas City Bible Institute (now the Calvary Bible College); pioneered radio ministry.

