



STATEMENT DP079

THE AGONY OF DECEIT BY MICHAEL HORTON

(Moody Press, 1990)

As I was taking over the leadership responsibilities of the Christian Research Institute, Dr. Walter Martin -- CRI's founder -- warned me about the "no-win situations" I would face. He went on to point out that this particular ministry is definitely not a place for popularity contests.

When Elliot Miller, editor of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, asked me to review *The Agony of Deceit* -- subtitled *What Some TV Preachers are Really Teaching* -- I was fully aware that I would be in a classic no-win situation.

On the one hand, there are advocates of the book who will fault me for not giving it an unqualified endorsement. Already, I have received calls and letters denouncing me for not publicizing a book to which Dr. Martin contributed a chapter.

On the other hand, there are opponents of the book who -- because it relied heavily on CRI research documentation, and was dedicated to our founder -- have already condemned me along with Dr. Martin to the fate of "everlastingly burning in Hell."

Therefore, recognizing that I will be vilified regardless, I forge ahead in this review to "tell it like it is."

Let me begin with what will surely displease those involved in the so-called faith movement: most of the material in the book regarding the theology of the faith teachers is both accurate and appropriate -- particularly Walter Martin's chapter entitled "Ye Shall Be As Gods." In this chapter, Martin clearly demonstrates and documents the heresies maintained by the faith teachers, who mix cultic and occultic doctrine with biblical truth, thus perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet, despite my strong affirmation of much of the content of this book, I believe it contains significant flaws that simply cannot be overlooked. First, Michael Horton -- the editor of this volume -- violates a primary rule that the Christian Research Institute has sought to uphold throughout its 30-year history: we do not openly criticize a brother or sister in Christ without first going to him or her in the spirit of Matthew 18. As a case in point (p. 137), he states that Pat Robertson denies the doctrine of Original Sin, yet -- by his own admission -- he has never attempted to discuss this matter with Robertson. Dr. Martin, who considered Pat to be a brother in Christ, as well as I myself, have found Robertson and others at CBN to be teachable and open to dialogue on issues of concern.

Moreover, regardless of what might be said about Pat Robertson, to paint him into the same corner as that occupied by faith teachers like Kenneth Hagin, Ken Copeland, and Robert Tilton, is inaccurate and patently unfair. This is painting with a broad brush, or perhaps even a broom.

Second, while the book clearly and accurately denounces certain Christian programming which airs the faith movement's "little gods" doctrine, it also makes a stirring appeal to Christians and denominational leaders to watch, promote, and support networks like VISN ("Vision") cable. VISN also brings the "we can become gods" teaching into our homes in the form of Mormon programming (not to mention many other warped theologies carried by VISN). Although I acknowledge the right of VISN cable to air whatever kind of programming they like, I find it strangely inconsistent to encourage Christians to support it while in the same breath criticizing the programming schedule of ministries like TBN.

Third, I found it unfortunate that the book "mixes metaphors" at times by getting into issues that unnecessarily cloud its central message. Instead of simply dealing with the deviations of the faith teachers with respect to the essential doctrines of the historic Christian faith, *Agony* also gets into issues on which honest and committed Christians can differ in good conscience.

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For example, in chapter nine former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop makes a case against the perpetuity of spiritual gifts. This is an issue on which orthodox scholars (and Walter Martin was one of them) hold a differing view. The maximum should have prevailed: "In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, in all things charity."

In summary, while I thoroughly enjoyed contributions in *The Agony of Deceit* made by R. C. Sproul, Rod Rosenblatt, Walter Martin, and others, because of the nature of some of its inconsistencies, the Christian Research Institute does not carry this book in its *Resource Catalog*, nor can CRI wholeheartedly endorse it.

In my estimation, the best single volume presently available on this issue remains *A Different Gospel*, by D. R. McConnell (Hendrickson Publishers, 1988). -- Hendrik H. Hanegraaff