

Article: DR305

## FRAUDS, FICTIONS, FANTASIES, AND FABRICATIONS

This article first appeared in the Practical Apologetics column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 18, number 3 (1996). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

Imagine traveling back in time to the late 1970s. As you are sitting in church on Sunday morning your pastor announces that next week the church will be hosting a special conference with a former Satanist who has been miraculously transformed by the power of the gospel.

You can hardly believe your ears. This is precisely what you have been looking for. For months now you have been trying to convince a neighbor who dabbles in the occult that Satanism poses incredible dangers. But so far your efforts have been to no avail. So you rush home and immediately invite him to church. While your neighbor has labeled you a “naive fundamentalist,” he won’t be able to say that about a genuine ex-Satanist.

The next weekend quickly arrives and you are seated next to your neighbor in church. John Todd is introduced as a former Satanist, a courier for the satanic ruling council, the Illuminati. He is now a brother in Christ, free from the shackles of satanic power.

Todd opens his message with a bang. “Few people,” he says, “have any idea how powerful, persuasive, and pernicious Satanism really is. Movies such as *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary’s Baby* are just the tip of a very insidious iceberg. The real danger,” says Todd, “lies in a carefully crafted cartel encompassing policemen, politicians, and even pastors who are engaged in secret satanic subterfuge to advance their satanic agenda — an agenda that has moved Satanism into the very halls of power as well as into the sanctuaries of religion.”

Todd ought to know, because as the courier for the Illuminati, he personally made payoffs to dozens of prominent people, including prominent Christian leaders. As Todd puts it, *no* organization — including the church — is immune from infiltration.

Immediately images begin to flash in rapid succession across the canvas of your consciousness. You wonder if Todd might be referring to an evangelist you saw begging for money on television just last night. Or could it be a local Mormon bishop who chairs your community’s ecumenical council? Maybe it’s a famous religious author better known for “possibility thinking” than preaching the gospel.

Three words, however, snap you back to reality: “Pastor Chuck Smith.” In stunned disbelief you hear Todd continue, “Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary Chapel movement, is a secret Satanist. He has been strategically situated by Satan to seduce young people by imprisoning their minds with secular tunes sung to deceptively innocuous lyrics masking subliminal satanic messages.”

You instantly go into denial. You cannot — you will not — believe that one of the most significant Christian leaders of the twentieth century is in reality a pawn in the hands of Beelzebub. As though anticipating your thoughts, Todd reminds his audience that Satan seldom uses obvious candidates for his deadly deceptions because he knows they won’t be believed. “Rather,” says Todd, “he uses those noted for piety and with a reputation for honesty. Besides that,” he continues, “I know firsthand. I was there. As the courier for the Illuminati, I personally delivered a total of eight million dollars to Chuck Smith. The instructions I passed on to Chuck were to start Maranatha Music and use it to pervert the minds of unsuspecting converts.”

Still, you find this hard to swallow. How could anyone who names the name of Christ, such as Chuck Smith, so blatantly betray his Lord? Todd seems to have a ready answer for everything. “Judas,” he says, “betrayed the Lord for only thirty pieces of silver. Why would anyone think it is far-fetched for Chuck Smith to betray Christ for eight million dollars?”

Nervously, you sneak a peek at your neighbor. To your amazement, he doesn't appear to be the least bit skeptical. His eyes are riveted on Todd. It's as though Todd and he are the only people in the sanctuary. As Todd transitions into his altar call, your friend rushes forward and without hesitation gives his heart to the Lord. Whatever doubts you still harbor instantly vaporize. Todd *must* be right — just look at the fruit!

Jump forward with me from the late 1970s to the present. John Todd no longer preaches. He has lost his popularity and platform in a precipitous plunge from pulpit to prison — a convicted felon, an exposed deceiver.

And Pastor Chuck Smith? For more than a quarter century he has quietly gone about the task of “making disciples of all nations.” The fruit of his labors has been multiplied through the lives of hundreds of pastors who, like him, are equipping Christians to be effective tools in the hands of the Holy Spirit. The long-haired, barefooted Jesus movement hippies that Pastor Chuck first reached out to have matured into Christian leaders with receding hairlines, who, in turn, are now discipling yet another generation of Christian leaders.

And your neighbor? Sadly, his faith was short-lived. The last time you ran into him, he shoved a newspaper account of Todd's conviction under your nose. “Why should I follow your Christ?” he bellowed. “You Christians are all alike. If truth were really on your side, you wouldn't have to concoct stories to scare people into believing!”

Instead of discovering that Christianity is historic and evidential, your neighbor's faith was as fleeting as the fabrication on which it hung. For the moment, the “fruit” from Todd's ministry looked genuine, but in the end it was merely a poor imitation.

Despite the fact that Christians are followers of the one who proclaimed Himself “the truth,” the John Todd travesty is not an anomaly. All too frequently those who take the sacred name of Christ upon their lips spread stories that have no basis in fact. A classic example is the report circulated worldwide by the Trinity Broadcasting Network that scientists had discovered hell in Siberia. According to the story, scientists drilled a hole nine miles into the earth's crust, shoved a microphone into the hole, and heard the voices of thousands — maybe millions — of tormented souls, screaming in agony. The Crouches claimed their tale was documented by major newspaper accounts as well as a letter from a Scandinavian Christian.

The documented newspaper account was nothing more than a fabrication — a sensational story printed by a charismatic Christian tabloid with no factual basis. And the letter? It turned out to be a hoax concocted by a man named Age Rendalin to demonstrate just how easily Christians can be duped. When Rendalin first heard on the Trinity Broadcasting Network that hell had been discovered in Siberia, he decided to have a little fun at the expense of credulous Christians. He wrote the Crouches to tell them that while at first he laughed at their story, upon returning to Norway, he found the newspapers chock full of documentation on the “hell-hole.” Rendalin went on to say that tremendous fear took hold of him, and amid dreams and nightmares of hell, he surrendered his life to Christ. Along with his letter, Rendalin provided the Crouches with his “translation” of an article from a large and reputable Scandinavian newspaper, which provided further details on the discovery.

In the translation, Rendalin provided details that should have stretched even the Crouches' credulity beyond the breaking point. For example, the newspaper article allegedly reported the appearance of “a fountainhead of luminous gas shooting up from the drill site. Out of the midst of the luminous gas, a brilliant being with bat wings appeared with the words, ‘I have conquered.’”

When contacted by Rich Buhler, a responsible Christian radio talk show host who is more interested in communicating truth than circulating tales, Rendalin said, “None of it is true. I fabricated every word of

it." In a letter dated May 18, 1990, Rendalin went on to say, "Religion is no excuse for being careless with the truth. A simple phone call would have been enough to expose the bogus information I supplied....I must confess I share in full the general public's disgust with these media preachers, who long since tired of preaching the Christian gospel, and in its place substituted a *National Enquirer* style gospel of cheap sensationalism...."

While Rendalin's rebuke might well be dismissed by some as mere rhetoric from a reprobate, it is time for Christians to wake up and take notice. Phil Donahue recently warned Christians who were spreading the false story that the president of Procter and Gamble had appeared on his show to confess his company's ties to Satanism that they were "bearing false witness." When executives of CBS's *60 Minutes* learned that Christians were boycotting Procter and Gamble on similar allegations, they responded that anyone repeating this false rumor will "someday have to answer to a power a lot higher than *60 Minutes*."

It is indeed tragic that the secular world has had to chide those who claim to be followers of Christ, the very personification of truth. While Crouch and Todd may argue that their fabrications are justified because they have borne fruit, we would do well to recognize that the end does not justify the means. More to the point, careful examination of the "fruit" they extol often reveals little more than disease, division, and disillusionment.

Like Todd and Crouch, John Arnott — leader of what has become well known in Christian circles as the "Toronto Blessing" — frequently fabricates stories and then attempts to justify his behavior on the basis of the "fruit." His tale about Sarah Lilliman is a classic case in point. Of all the "healings" claimed for this current "laughing revival," Arnott calls Sarah's healing "the best one so far." Arnott not only tells his unsuspecting audience that the healing was "documented" but he makes it a point to chide those who may not have had the kind of faith it took to facilitate the miracle.

Sarah, says Arnott, was "like a vegetable... totally incapacitated, paralyzed, and blind." Her friend, "out under the power [at the Toronto Airport Vineyard] has a vision: Jesus said, 'Go pray for Sarah, your friend, I'm going to heal her.'" To enthusiastic applause, Arnott continues, "that girl, totally incapacitated, paralyzed and blind, after two and a half hours of soaking prayer, got up seeing."

Sadly, however, Arnott here plays fast and loose with the truth. An examination of the real facts shows just how wildly he has embellished his story. Sarah was *not* totally incapacitated, paralyzed, and blind; her doctors diagnosed significant psychosomatic emotional problems underlying some of the physical problems she did have; and Jesus did not heal her as He supposedly promised her friend He would. When Arnott's associate, who allegedly documented the case, was interviewed, he confessed he had not done any investigation.

Two months later, during a visit to the Toronto Airport Vineyard, Sarah's friend claimed that God once again had a word for her. This time the Almighty allegedly told Sarah (through her friend) that if she "would go to the front of the church and testify, He would heal her eyes" (*Catch the Fire*, p. 148). An Arnott associate went on to promise Sarah that God was not only going to heal her eyes, but would heal her emotions as well.

Today, however, despite the broad circulation of this story by Arnott and his associates as evidence of God's power in the Toronto Blessing, *Sarah is still as before, legally blind*. Unfortunately, she and her family continue to struggle with her physical and psychosomatic disorders.

The John Todd fraud, the Procter and Gamble fiction, the hell-hole fantasy, and the John Arnott fabrication all share two things in common — false facts and false fruit.

John Arnott and his fellow laughing revivalists pepper their appearances with fabrications, seemingly unaware of the disastrous consequences they bring. Disillusioned followers who at first crowd through the front doors of their churches often fall out the back doors into the kingdom of the cults. They no longer know what to believe and they secretly fear that the untrustworthiness of those who claim to be God's representatives may indicate the untrustworthiness of God Himself.

TBN's fictitious Siberian hell-hole story has been frequently cited as evidence that Christians are easily led as well as willing to promote as fact virtually anything that furthers their cause. Thus, the fruit more often than not has been controversy rather than conversion. Even a random sampling of secular talk shows in America bears eloquent testimony to the fact that millions today write off Christianity as little more than a hoax. Their assumption is that because Christians willingly embrace current mythology, they are just as prone to embrace mythology that is 2,000 years old.

The Procter and Gamble legend is likewise based on fiction rather than fact. It seems incredible that thousands of Christians would devote their energies to boycotting a major corporation on completely unsubstantiated rumors. Yet that is precisely what has happened. Few have thought to ask for video documentation of the Donahue show on which the president of Procter and Gamble allegedly confessed his company's ties to the church of Satan. The deadly fruit of this fictitious story is not only that Procter and Gamble's reputation has been unfairly damaged, but also that Christ's name has once again been dragged through the mud.

I began this article by asking you to imagine traveling back in time to the late 1970s. The story that followed, however, was not imaginary. John Todd did in fact stand in pulpits across America and proclaim that Chuck Smith was a secret Satanist who received eight million dollars in bribes from the Illuminati. And while Todd has been exposed as a deceiver, many like him are currently peddling their pernicious poison.

Over the past year alone the Christian Research Institute has had to defend itself against stories circulated in the Christian media ranging from the outrageous charge that my wife and the widow of CRI founder Walter Martin have engaged in "racketeering across state lines" to the ridiculous charge that I have defrauded the government by falsely claiming to be ordained.

Another slanderous story being circulated in Christian circles today is that I, like Chuck Smith, have received secret bribes. In my case the alleged bribes have come not from the Illuminati but from an associate of the Trinity Broadcasting Network named Phil Aguilar. Despite the fact that there is not a shred of evidence to substantiate this allegation, the Christian media has circulated the story nationwide.

Ironically (if not uncommonly), after the story had been leaked to the secular media, it was finally investigated and found to be completely groundless. Thus, while the story found circulation in the Christian press, the secular press set a higher standard by not perpetuating the myth.

When Christian standards have more in common with the *National Enquirer* than the New Testament it is time for us to examine ourselves. If selling and sensationalism become more tantalizing than truth, the very foundation of our faith is compromised. As followers of the one who proclaimed Himself to be not only "the way and the life" but "*the truth*," we must set the standard for the world, not vice versa. We would do well to heed Blaise Pascal's words (in *Pensees*) as they ring down through the ages with prophetic poignancy: "Truth is so obscure in these times and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it."

-- Hank Hanegraaff