

## A Short Apologetic on Watchman Nee - by Patrick J. Knapp

A full negative critique of Nee cannot be made in this short venue. That said, one might consider the following:

1) Nee denies any role of the intellect in the sanctification process, this is abundantly expressed in his book "Spiritual Authority":

"We should not be occupied with right or wrong, good or evil; rather should we know who is the authority above us." p.23 "It is very true that we need to have the eyes of our reason put out in order to follow the Lord. What governs our lives? Is it reason or is it authority? When one is enlightened by the Lord he will be blinded by the light, and his reason will be cast aside." p.93 ...authority alone is factual to me; reason and right and wrong no longer control my life. He who knows God knows himself and therefore is delivered from reason." p.97

Consider the additional anti-intellectual mysticism found in his well known book, "The Normal Christian Life":

"The normal Christian life must begin with a very definite 'knowing,' which is not just knowing something about the truth nor understanding some important doctrine. *It is not an intellectual knowledge at all*, but an opening to the eyes of the heart to see what we have in Christ." p.47 "No sight ever came by feeling or analyzing. Sight only comes by the light of God coming in; and when once it has come, there is no longer need to ask if a thing is right or wrong." p.243 (my emphasis added)

In the sanctification process he clearly devalues: reason, the need for defining right or wrong, intellectual knowledge and the need to analyze. He promotes a very subjective or intuitive perspective of spirituality, rather than valuing the sanctify use of the mind. This runs contrary to the value placed on the mind or intellect in Scripture: II Chron 30:12, Ps.26:2, Isa 26:3; Jer.31:33; Matt.22:37; Mk.12:30; Lk.10:27; Lk.24:45; Acts 4:32; Rom.12:2; Eph.4:23; I Cor.1:10; II Cor.13:11; Heb.10:16; I Pet.1:13...the list goes on and on.

2) Dogmatism in denying Nee's trichotomy has warrant:

If Hebrews 4:12 and I Thess. 5:23, are addressing a model of our ontological (human) makeup, rather than a figure of speech drawn from the surrounding Greek culture, then we would find clear distinctions throughout Scripture. But, we do not find this. There are absolutely huge overlapping meanings found in the terms soul and spirit in both old and new testaments. They are used essentially as synonyms, not about dividing up man into pieces – but a figure of speech for man's completeness. The same thing is found in such passages as Mark 12:30-33 where we are commended to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength. These are

not four parts of an individual, but serve as conveying a functional all-inclusiveness that would be clearly understood by the readers.

The problems associated with the trichotomous view of human beings are dealt with in one of the finest Systematic Theology text currently in print: "Integrative Theology" by Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest. Essentially, their conclusions are that this passage speaks to the totality of one's being (not a hypothetical three distinct parts). This is also echoed by authors Ranald Macaulay & Jerram Barrs in "Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience" (p.203). Macaulay and Barrs, in this book, also elaborate on much that is found within Watchman Nee's theology apart from the trichotomy issues. Nee's trichotomy is not derived from Scripture, but more likely from his presuppositions found in the mysticism of the Chinese culture.

3) Practical concerns should abound in Nee's teaching that have nothing to do with his character:

While the popularity of Watchmen Nee, since the 70's, has significantly declined his teachings are still frequently found in various unhealthy churches. Nee's teachings are consistently found in abundance in bible-based cults such as: The Walk, The Way International, David Koresh's Waco, The Boston Church of Christ, Witness Lee's Local church and the Alamo Foundation. Christ's teachings are not consistently found in such groups, but only asserted to be present.

4) Nee affirms much that is found in authentic Christian thought and behavior:

Nee was martyred for his Christian faith, he was a Christian evangelist and he contributed much to the underground Chinese church. We live in an age that seldom encourages thoughtful theological reflection and debate. Rarely do our church leaders, let alone the average church attendee, understand Keswick (Nee's theological roots) and Reformed distinctions. Greater criticism is understandably leveled at non-Christian groups, as many are more easily recognized as promoting non-Christian thought and as a threatening organization.

5) To suggest that Nee's success in his missionary endeavors should be sufficient to counter his errors negates the importance of sound doctrine:

Charles Wesley was a flagrant example of faulty Arminian thinking and practice, yet God chose to use Him to bring many to Christ. If one is an Arminian one might find fault with Charles Whitfield (being a Calvinist), yet Whitfield was very significantly used of God. "Success" in missions is no guarantee of purity of doctrine even in important matters. But, what is evident is God's providential care for His elect in that He uses all things to ultimately glorify Himself and bless His people.

Unlike Nee frequently does, I am not making black and white comparisons related to the life of the believer. The issue is not "flawlessness" for any believer, we all have flaws and will most likely, upon entering Glory, find we were in error in a good number of things. Nee was used by God, but this should not give him a pass in areas where his theology was starkly in error,

damaging the intellectual sanctification of many and systemically empowering many to authoritarian abuses.

6) Finally, I am not speaking from a merely hypothetical, nor academic position. For 13 years (70-84') I was heavily under the influence of Watchman Nee theology. For the last 25 years I've counseled and mentored people severely damaged by the practical implications of much of his theology. Ideas have consequences. We are all clearly exhorted to take great care in both our doctrine and practice (I Tim.4:16). It is not enough to merely affirm behavioral results, as these can be incomplete and misleading. God calls us to use all of our mental faculties in His service to think His thoughts after Him, to worship him in spirit and truth and to fulfill the great commission. The great commission was not only about getting people saved, nor church growth, but about more specifically making obedient disciples (Matt.28:19). I believe many of Nee's core teachings; because they are false, do much damage to the making of Christ honoring disciples. These are but a few reasons, why I contend that the writings of Watchman Nee have done a great deal of damage to the Christian community.