

# The Way International

Interfaith Witness

# BELIEF BULLETIN

*Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements*

<b>Official Name:</b>	The Way International
<b>Founder:</b>	Victor Paul Wierwille (1916-1985)
<b>Current Leaders:</b>	President - Rosalie Rivenbark Vice President - Harve Platig
<b>Headquarters:</b>	The Way Farm, New Knoxville, Ohio
<b>Ministries Associated with The Way International:</b>	American Christian Press (ACP); The Way of Abundance and Power Classes; The Way Corps
<b>Key Publications:</b>	<i>The Way Magazine</i> ; Books by Victor Paul Wierwille (all published by ACP): <i>The Bible Tells Me So</i> (1971), <i>The New, Dynamic Church</i> (1971), <i>The Word's Way</i> (1971), <i>Receiving the Holy Spirit Today</i> (1972), <i>Are the Dead Alive Now?</i> (1973), <i>Jesus Is Not God</i> (1975), <i>God's Magnified Word</i> (1977); L. Craig Martindale: <i>The Rise and Expansion of the Church</i> (1995)

This Belief Bulletin presents information and a biblical analysis on the history, beliefs, and practices of The Way International (TWI). Principles of effective Christian witness to those involved are provided.

## Short History of The Way International

Victor Paul Wierwille was born in New Knoxville, Ohio, on December 31, 1916. He and his family were members of an Evangelical and Reformed Church (now United Church of Christ). He attended Mission House (Lakeland) College and graduated in 1941 from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Wierwille claimed that on October 3 of the next year, he heard God speak to him audibly. God told Wierwille that He would guide him to understand and interpret the Bible more accurately than anyone since the apostolic age. As a result, Wierwille said he dumped 3,000 of his theological textbooks into a trash heap and set on an independent study of Scripture.

In 1948 Wierwille received a Doctor of Theology degree from the unaccredited (and now defunct) Pike's Peak Seminary in Colorado. In 1951 he visited

evangelist J.E. Stiles and learned his technique for speaking in tongues.

In 1953 Wierwille began teaching his "Power for Abundant Living" (PFAL) classes, a series of lectures highlighting his unusual doctrinal views. In 1955 Wierwille incorporated his ministry as The Way, Inc., and a few years later, formally withdrew from the Evangelical and Reformed denomination. Over the next few years his theology increasingly deviated from orthodox Christianity, particularly his views of the Trinity and the nature of Christ.

Wierwille's influence grew as a result of the late 1960s "Jesus Movement." A number of former hippies were attracted to his authoritative teaching style and experiential emphasis on spiritual gifts. In the early 1970s the group adopted the name The Way International (TWI) and began holding annual "Rock of Ages" music festivals. In 1975 The Way College was opened in Emporia, Kan., with 350 students.

Wierwille officially retired as president of TWI in 1982. L. Craig Martindale, a former Baptist Student Union and Fellowship of Christian Athletes leader at the

University of Kansas where he played football succeeded him. Wierwille died of ocular cancer on May 20, 1985, at age 68.

Following his death, several former leaders of TWI leveled charges against Wierwille and TWI trustees including accusations of extreme authoritarianism, plagiarism, adultery, and false teaching. As a result the group lost many followers, sold its college in Kansas, and spawned several like-minded splinter groups led by former TWI staffers. These included Christian Educational Services and Pacific West Fellowship.

In 2000, amid charges of sexual improprieties, L. Craig Matindale resigned as TWI president and was succeeded by Rosalie Rivenbark.

## Beliefs and Practices

### Authority and the Bible

The Bible as God's inspired and infallible Word is regarded by TWI as "God-breathed" and perfect as originally given. The King James Version is usually quoted in TWI literature; however, some Hebrew and Greek texts used by Bible scholars have been distorted, and thus textual research is needed to clarify certain passages and doctrines.

An extreme dispensational interpretive method is followed which regards only portions of the New Testament (Paul's letters to the churches and the Book of Acts) as relevant to Christians. The Old Testament, the four Gospels, and Paul's letters to individuals are regarded as nonessential.

Victor Paul Wierwille's interpretations, as stated in his writings are authoritative for all TWI students.

**Biblical Response:** The Bible is indeed God's infallible and inerrant Word as given in the original autographs. The textual integrity of the Bible is well established; however, no one translation and no one interpreter are regarded as infallible. Many of Wierwille's interpretations of certain passages are incorrect, and his extreme dispensationalist approach must be rejected. Both the Old and New Testaments are relevant to Christians when studied in context, utilizing sound principles of interpretation (see Luke 24:27, 44-45; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).

### God Is One

The traditional Christian understanding of God as Trinity is rejected by TWI. He is regarded as a unitary being who is the creator of the universe. The Trinity is deemed unbiblical and reflects the influence of pagan Roman emperors and the creeds of church councils.

**Biblical Response:** There is only one true God (see Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10-11). However, the doctrine of the Trinity is taught in Scripture. The church creeds affirmed the biblical teachings and did not create them. God is one in three and is revealed as Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. He is one God in three Persons (see Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:3-14).

### Jesus Christ Is Not God

Jesus Christ did not preexist according to TWI. He existed only as "The Word" in the foreknowledge of God. Thus He was created at His miraculous conception. He was born a perfect man whose soul was specially created by God and given "holy spirit." Thus He can be regarded as the "Son of God" but not "God the Son." He lived a sinless life and was crucified on a stake, not a cross, and on Wednesday, not Friday. He was executed between four criminals, "two thieves" on one side (see Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27) and "two malefactors" on the other (see Luke 23:32).

Jesus was resurrected physically on Saturday (not Sunday).

**Biblical Response:** Jesus is the eternal, preexistent Word of God. He is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. He was, is, and always shall be God. In His earthly life He had two natures: human and divine. He lived a perfect, sinless life and was crucified on a Roman cross between two thieves (malefactors) as a substitutionary atonement for mankind's sin. He rose physically on the third day (Sunday) and is ascended to heaven (see John 1:1-18; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; 17:5; Col. 1:15-17; 2:9).

### Holy Spirit and "holy spirit"

The term "holy spirit" is used in two distinct ways in Scripture according to TWI. Holy Spirit (capital letters in TWI literature) is merely a synonym for God. It is a name of God describing His nature as Spirit (see John 4:24). Contrary, "holy spirit" (not capitalized in TWI literature) refers to the gift of God given to believers by the Holy Spirit. It is the power of God given in the inside of the believer but manifested on the outside by speaking in tongues (SIT).

**Biblical Response:** The New Testament indicates that the Holy Spirit is both a person and fully God. He is capable of speaking, teaching, grieving, and being lied to (but not being fooled). There is no distinction made between "Holy Spirit" and "holy spirit" as maintained by TWI (see Matt. 12:31-32; 28:19; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:12; John 14-16; Acts 5:3-10; 13:2-4; Rom. 8:4, 26-27; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 2:18-19; 4:30; 5:18-21).

### Mankind's Problem: Lost "Spirit"

According to TWI, mankind consists of a three-fold nature: body, soul, and spirit. God created Adam with a body and soul (mind), to which He added spirit. This is the essence of the image of God. Adam lost "spirit" when he sought knowledge through the soul.

Jesus thus paid a legal transaction to redeem mankind from Satan by taking the sins of the world upon Himself at His crucifixion. This made "holy spirit" available to mankind by believing in Jesus Christ (see Acts 2:38).

**Biblical Response:** All have sinned and are lost without Christ (see Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Jesus' death on the cross was a substitutionary atonement to pay fully the debt of sin (see Rom. 4:25; 1 Pet. 3:18). Only by putting one's faith in Christ alone and receiving Him as Savior and Lord can a person be saved (see Eph. 2:8-9).

### No Need for Water Baptism

TWI teaches that water baptism is not needed in the church era. That was for Israel only and ended with John the Baptist and at Pentecost. The reference to baptism and the Trinity in Matthew 28:18-19 was probably not in the original text. Other references in the New Testament to baptism are likewise rejected.

**Biblical Response:** Water baptism is a symbol of the believer's identification with death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the act of Christian initiation in the body of Christ (see Acts 8:12, 36-39; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:12). The textual integrity of Matthew 28:18, 19 is fully affirmed.

### The New Birth and a Renewed Mind

TWI says that the new birth comes by verbal confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. A person "renews" their mind for abundant life, however, only by taking TWI's "Way of Abundance and Power" class (formerly "Power for Abundant Living"). The sign of the renewed mind is the nine manifestations of the gift of holy spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

The initial and primary expression of holy spirit manifestation is speaking in tongues. Only by verbally speaking in tongues can one see outward, visible proof of an inward power of holy spirit. Students are taught a specific technique for speaking in tongues during The Way of Abundance and Power classes and are expected to demonstrate an ability to do so before graduating.

**Biblical Response:** TWI's two-stage concept of redemption is without biblical support. One is fully born again by trusting in Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord and receiving salvation by grace through faith alone (see Eph. 2:8-9). At that moment, our sins are forgiven, we are saved from our sins, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us to empower us for living the Christian life. There is no indication that speaking in tongues or any other outward sign is necessary to confirm the Spirit's presence. The Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes His various gifts as He wills to all members to minister to the whole body of Christ (the church) (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:11).

### The Dead Are Now Asleep

TWI maintains that there is no conscious existence after death. When believers die they do not go immediately to be with God or Jesus. Rather, they await the future resurrection when their bodies, souls, and spirits will be reunited to live again.

**Biblical Response:** At death, believers in Christ maintain a conscious relationship with Him while awaiting the resurrection (see Matt. 22:32; Luke 16:22-23; 23:43; John 11:26; 2 Cor. 5:8; 12:2-4; Phil. 1:23-24; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10).

### Organization: The Way Tree

TWI is organized along the lines of a metaphor of a tree. Individual members are referred to as "Leaves." A small cell-group fellowship of Leaves is a "Twig" and is led by an experienced elder. The local Twigs association is a "Branch," and a state association of Branches is a "Limb." All the Limbs in a specific country comprise a national "Trunk," and the world headquarters is the "Roots."

All policies and doctrinal positions are transmitted from the Roots through the various levels of authority to local Twigs and Leaves. All leaders are appointed by various levels of authority and approved by the Roots leadership.

**Biblical Response:** TWI's centralized and authoritarian system of organization contrasts to the locally led and based churches of the New Testament. No one leader or leaders since apostolic times can claim exclusive authority over local congregations of believers. The biblical model for church structure is the body of Christ, not a tree and branches.

### Principles for Witnessing to Those in The Way International

1. Have a clear understanding of your own faith and the Bible.
2. Study the beliefs and practices of The Way International in order to communicate intelligently with those involved in it.
3. Determine the level of involvement of the person in TWI. Have they been through The Way of Abundance and Power class? Are they involved in a Twig fellowship? Are they in some position of TWI leadership?
4. Define all terms carefully. TWI members often use Christian terms but have different meanings. For example, when they talk about Jesus as "the Son of God", they do not mean "God the Son."
5. Seek to build personal relationships and sincere friendships with those in TWI. Remember, patience is a key ingredient.
6. Avoid arguments, and let love be your true motive for witness.
7. Share your personal testimony of God's grace and assurance in your life. Tell what Jesus means to you personally.
8. Use the Bible in your discussion and check all passages for correct context.
9. Focus your discussion on the essential biblical issues such as the nature and work of Jesus Christ,

and on the basics of the gospel message.  
10. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to lead in your witness encounter.

---

Tal Davis, Associate, Interfaith Evangelism

© 2001, North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Alpharetta, Georgia

All rights reserved. The North American Mission Board grants permission for reproduction of this publication for educational purposes. Alteration of this publication is strictly prohibited. May not be sold for profit.

All other inquiries should be addressed to: Editorial and Design Manager, North American Mission Board, 4200 North Point Pkwy., Alpharetta, Ga. 30022-4176; or fax (770) 410-6006; or e-mail [permissions@namb.net](mailto:permissions@namb.net).

For more information contact Interfaith Evangelism via e-mail at [interfaith@namb.net](mailto:interfaith@namb.net).

<http://www.namb.net/interfaith>

---



NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD, SBC

**NAMB**

4200 North Point Pkwy.  
Alpharetta, GA 30022-4176

*A Southern Baptist Convention agency supported by the  
Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®*

P010296/03-02