

Cursory Review of Elijah House doctrine and practice
with references to
Transformation of the Inner Man and *Healing of the Wounded Spirit*
By John Sandford and
Elijah House Training for the Ministry of Prayer Counseling
by Elijah House staff

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July 2004

“America is literally strewn with the wreckage of my mistakes.”
John Sandford, *The Elijah Task*

Introduction

John Sandford and his Elijah House movement have greatly impacted what was formerly known as the "charismatic church" in America. To understand the third-wave church today you must understand Sandford, who himself states that he "pioneered the modern prophetic movement almost thirty years ago."¹ Sanford is fully integrated with the third-wave church (manifest sons of God) movement, and serves on the so-called "Apostolic Council of Prophetic Elders"² with the likes of Mikes Bickle, Paul Cain and Jim Goll. His books can be found in colleges as diverse as Regent University and Eastern Mennonite University. His teachings are cited from many pulpits, and his methods embraced by Christian counselors across the land.

Some have objected to "Elijah House" simply on the basis that it not much different than secular psychology. They make a good point when they state that the "inner child" is nowhere to be found in the bible. Yet whether or not we counsel people out of their problems is not the real issue. The real issue is the doctrinal foundation of that counsel.

This paper will attempt to take a look at some of the core beliefs and practices of the "Elijah House" movement as propagated by John and Paula Sandford. Some have reportedly criticized John Sandford and his teachings and have been told not to "touch God's anointed"³. It is not the intent of this paper to discredit Sandford, or his critics, but rather to "examine these things to see if they are true" (Acts 17:11).

I personally have received blessing from the Elijah House material, having received conviction from a paragraph that contained great truth. While there is some good in Elijah House, there also is much bad.

The most in-depth study of John Sandford, which most of the other internet reviews gathered their information from, is one done by Greg DesVoignes of "Christian Research Ministries"⁴. Some of the objections made in that study cite quotations out of context, and are permeated with a non-charismatic slant. That viewpoint does not, however, change the issue.

¹ http://www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word.html?ID=2314

² <http://www.letusreason.org/Latrain21.htm>

³³ Greg DesVoignes, commentary on Transformation Of the Inner Man And Inner Healing Philosophies posted at <http://www.crmspokane.org/transformation1.htm>.

⁴ DesVoignes, [Transformation1](#).

References are made in this paper to the book about Agnes Sanford entitled “Abusing Memory, the healing Theology of Agnes Sanford”, by Jane Gumprecht⁵. This book also comes from a dispensational viewpoint, but offers much insight into the occultic origins of her teachings. Agnes Sanford's beliefs are far from orthodox, and John Sandford embraces her fully.

Nonetheless, DesVoignes and Gumprecht seem to have a handle on the parallels between Sandford's teachings and those of Psychologist Carl Jung. This is a bigger issue than just "Elijah House". Within Evangelical Christendom there are people who embrace psychology, and people who don't. It is my personal belief that the Word of God is effective, able to do what God sends it to do. Others must have a different perspective. Certainly we have no record of Jesus spending any time looking back into the childhoods of those who were tormented.

We must allow that Christian counseling has proven beneficial to some, and may have its utility. **The point that must be made is this: just because it is labeled "Christian" is not proof that it is. Just because other bodies have embraced it does not mean we cannot question it. And just because it works does not mean it is desirable.** All error will contain much truth, and therefore we must look very carefully at these things.

There is a great deal of material, books and tapes, which have been produced by Sandford's Elijah House ministry. A comprehensive study of the whole would necessarily take several years. This paper chooses to focus in on "The Transformation of the Inner Man" which is recognized as Sandford's seminal work. Also reviewed was Sandford's “Healing the Wounded Spirit”, a text that was published three years after “Transformation”. Reference will also be made to the three part workbook currently used in Elijah House training⁶.

⁵ Jane Gumprecht, M.D., Abusing Memory - The Healing Theology of Agnes Sanford. (Moscow, ID:Canon Press, 1997).

⁶ Elijah House, Workbooks. Did not get bibliography information; workbooks were borrowed.

Chapter 1

A roll in the grass

It is easy to confuse the teaching of Sandford with those of Agnes Sanford, an earlier proponent of "inner healing". With Sanford, the connection to eastern practices, such as visualization, guided imagery, conjuring of spirits and such things, is clear.

John Sandford considers Agnes Sanford as his "first mentor and friend in the ministry of inner healing"⁷. Sandford makes numerous references to his close friend Sanford in many of his books, even to the point of dedicating those books to her memory. Since she was the pioneer of the "inner healing" movement, one must therefore wonder how much of the teachings of Sanford are at the root of Elijah House doctrine and practice.

According to the "Faith Issues" apologetics website, "Agnes Sanford follows the teaching of Matthew Fox's "Cosmic Christ" by saying that Jesus entered the universal subconscious mind and led the way for all followers of such enlightenment." "In simpler terms, they (Sanford and Carey) are saying that Christ was a mystic who helps us all become mystics. The gospel of Ken Carey, a New Age theologian, and Carl Jung, a psychic psychologist; then become, according to them, more accurate than the gospel of scripture."

Both Sandford and Sanford are proponents of pantheism. While most of us find getting out into nature a rejuvenating experience, they place it at a higher level, as if it is a psychic energy force in itself.

Sandford, in "Healing", recounts a time when his mentor Sanford was extremely depressed. She had been prayed for, but that did not seem to have an effect. Since nothing else worked, he suggested that she go outside and roll in the grass. He suggested that nature was able to absorb all the bad energy. This is a Hindu concept known as "prana". That Sandford would embrace this is nothing short of outrageous.

In a tape entitled "Into Rest in the Good Earth"⁸, Sandford elaborates on this New Age at-one with nature concept. He states that our emotions effect us and nature: "...man's mental storms effect nature... our emotions send trees quivering". John Sandford, in "*Healing*" goes on to say how western man does not know or practice many things that his Osage Indian ancestors knew. For that we should be thankful.

⁷ John Sandford, "Healing the Wounded Spirit," (Tulsa, OK: Victory House, Inc., 1985), p. v.

⁸ DesVoignes, Transformation1.

Chapter 2

The Biblical Foundation of Elijah House

Sandford rightly starts off laying a biblical foundation for his work. The first section of *Transformation* is scripture-intensive - to the point of mental overload. Nonetheless, the establishment of a biblical foundation is critical.

Sandford goes to great lengths to differentiate between sinful practices in the old nature and the sins of resentment and judgment which lie behind present behaviors. In other words, external manifestations of sin often (always) are accompanied by internal hurts of "the inner child". He states: "On the other hand, many pastors, who rightly called their people to daily death of self on the cross, had little awareness of the formation of these practices in early childhood, nor how to reach the inner child to accomplish that death and rebirth. These ministers seemed to me like gardeners continually lopping off weeds which just as persistently regrew from the roots. None seemed to comprehend the whole job, to lay ax to the roots"⁹.

Root Theology

This is the goal of "Elijah House" in a nutshell. The biblical principal of "rooting out" (Jeremiah 1:10) is indeed an important one. Root is a key word in Elijah House teaching. Laying ax to the roots, root of bitterness, rooting out, and so forth. The most cited "root" scripture by Sandford is Matthew 3:10, where John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees "And now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees"¹⁰. A careful study of this reveals that John is not talking about cleaning up an individual, but of peoples being removed because they have not brought forth good fruit. He called them a "generation of vipers", and stated that God would find a replacement people if he had to make them out of stones. Here Sandford falls short by misappropriating scripture.

Talking about this laying axe to the root, Sandford says it is the task of a counselor to "lay the ax to the root and so convert the unbelieving hearts of believers..."¹¹ . Interestingly, the passage of Matthew 3:10 tells us to lay the axe to the root in order to cast the entire tree into the fire to be burnt, never as a rejuvenation process.

According to Sandford, the need is universal.

Sandford treads on dangerous ground, when he states "None seemed yet to know that ministry to the inner man is not merely a tool to heal a few troubled ones; it is a vital

⁹ Sandford, *Healing*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Sandford, *Healing*, p. 9.

¹¹ Sandford, *Healing*, p. 26.

key to the transformation of every heart of every normal Christian"¹². This statement makes one wonder how many seemingly victorious Christians there must be who really have unresolved issues simply because they have not embraced this teaching.

Because Sandford has made Elijah House *more* than a counseling technique, he has elevated it to the status of a "way of life" for all believers; we must hold it to a higher standard. Either is doctrinally sound, or it is not.

¹² Sandford, Healing, p. 6.

Chapter 3

Positionally Saved

Both "Transformations" and the workbook emphasize the point that we are "Positionally Saved". "We died, and were made perfect, positionally, in every part of us, when we first received Jesus as Lord and Savior." He goes on to say "But our entire selves are not always aware of or ready for death and rebirth!" While I do accept that our sanctification is progressive, I cannot make light of the once for all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. I believe that many evangelical theologians would take issue with Sanford's concept in its entirety.

The premise of being positionally saved is popular in the third-wave church today but is the antithesis of Whitefield's concept of being "soundly converted". It is a poor replacement.

For Sanford, realizing our salvation is a process. For me, it was an event. I was saved when Jesus Christ through His Holy Spirit drew (dragged) me out of my pew and took me to the altar. I have never been the same since. I continue to grow in sanctification, as the Holy Spirit reveals things in me. The agent for sanctification in my life has been the fear of the Lord. The Elijah House model would call for me to realize my salvation through a process of dredging up the past (all the way back to conception) and dealing with all those issues. We are worlds apart.

In the manual¹³ we continue with a similar theological problem. It outlines the "fall" of the Western church from sanctification and transformation to an "elevated experience of conversion" during the great awakenings.

While the manual says that "this theology of salvation versus damnation was not wrong, but rather incomplete", a counter charge could be launched against Sanford: One could state that the theology of transformation on the inner man (through extensive counseling and mucking around in the past) disregards the efficacy of the blood of Jesus.

Sanford apparently is blind to the greater-body of teaching that came out of these moves of God. Finney, for example, taught us that we cannot "will ourselves" to be holy, but that it is a work of God.

200 years from now, if the Lord tarries, people will still be talking about Jonathan Edwards. My great-great uncle was saved (soundly converted) under the hell-fire preaching of George Whitefield; people still sing the songs that were birthed out of John Fawcett's ministry today. Sanford makes a great mistake by blaming the condition of the church today on the "great awakening".

¹³ Elijah House, Manual, Section 2, po.14, 15.

Much of what Sandford proposes is a Christianized version of psychology, a practice that he wishes to foster upon all believers in order to complete their sanctification. In effect Sandford says we are only "positionally saved", that we must go through this "sanctification" process to become whole. According to DesVoignes, "The concept is similar to karma. In fact Carl Jung said that inner child work and Karma are inseparable. Inner child and Re birthing is the shortcut to better karma and less life cycles. So now, you can go back, regress, change your vows, your judgments which result in an instant change of behavior now. Your Karma has been changed. Straight from the occult."¹⁴

¹⁴ DesVoignes, Transformation.

Chapter 4

Confession, Repentance and Forgiveness

Sandford makes some very good points in the area of confession and forgiveness. For instance, he states that we should, after hearing a confession, pronounce forgiveness in the first person (I pronounce that you are forgiven...). He makes a case for the individual's free will, and the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. There should be no quarrel with him in these issues.

Some of his ideas in this area are tainted by those of Agnes Sanford, who was dramatically affected by a "*life confession*" that she made to a Catholic priest. It was this event that some credit as the "foundation stone for her formulation of Inner Healing and Healing of Memories where the inner child is forgiven or comforted"¹⁵.

The criticism of such confessionals is that they seem to exclude God from the process. We must make sure that confession is made not only to man, but actively to God. Intimacy with God is the ultimate objective.

Both Sanford and Sandford have been strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, and in fact, the Elijah House program has been embraced by many Catholics. Where wrongful Catholic doctrine has been interjected into Elijah House practice, it must be rejected. The concepts of confession to a "priest figure" come dangerously close to such practices.

I had the opportunity once to hear Heather Jackson, identified with the Toronto movement, share about her prison ministry. In one instance, she pronounced forgiveness to a group of criminals on behalf of the victims, some whom I believe may have been murdered. . While it may be theologically possible to pronounce forgiveness on the behalf of the Lord (by the authority given to the church), under whose authority do we speak for the dead?

Repentance for Others

In Section 1, Page 67 of the workbook, the boundary of sound doctrine is crossed; things seem to go a little too far with our involvement:

"As an individual with my own hurts, I go into the Garden (Gethsemane) as often as I need to. There I identify with the pain in the other, with my part in that pain, my part in tempting someone to wound me. I experience the other's pain, and God's pain, and am devastated - because their pain becomes my own. Feeling such anguish, I can forgive, or deeply repent, either for myself or on behalf of the other."¹⁶

¹⁵ Gumprecht, 88.

¹⁶ Elijah House, Workbook, p.1-67.

This is utter nonsense. There is no widely-accepted biblical basis for repenting on behalf of others in such a manner.

The root of this is pure Sanford. She wrote, “I have found only one way of praying for another with real power while accomplishing an act of repentance. This is the ancient method of reparation wherein one makes available the sacrificial love of Christ for another by assuming his sins and doing penance for them”.¹⁷

If this is not clear, then listen to this:

“We tried to bring them to her mind (repressed memories), and had failed. There were buried so deep that she was completely unaware of their existence. So I thought, ‘I will repent of them in her name’ I will say to Jesus Christ, ‘Let the grown woman free, for I will take the responsibility for her sins of fear and hate. Since she cannot see them herself to repent of them herself, I will repent of them in her name and so open the door for the forgiveness of Jesus Christ’ ”¹⁸.

It is clear that John Sandford embraces the concept that one can repent for another’s sins. This is pure heresy – “another gospel”.

¹⁷ Agnes Sanford, The Healing Touch of God (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 1983) p. 2.

¹⁸ Agnes Sanford, Healing p. 120.

Chapter 5

Inner Vows

Sandford goes to great lengths to explain how we make inner vows and how they can effect us. An example of a young girl who is made to hate boys who vows to never have a boy child. Later in life she is infertile, because of that long forgotten vow.

Only when she is brought back to a point of remembrance, and then renouncement, is she able to conceive.

While I do agree that our words are powerful, as a believer I have yet to master the power of my words to the point where I can cast mountains into the sea. Yet, in this example, a young girl (presumably a non-believer) is able to cast a spell on herself that lasts for 20 or 30 years. Incredible.

One has to wonder how vows that we have made before salvation can have that kind of power over us after receiving salvation. If that is so, then we ought to include a blanket renouncement of vows in our altar-call ministry training.

Sandford even states that good inner vows can be harmful¹⁹. It would be interesting to hear him explain how it would be harmful to vow to live by the "golden rule".

¹⁹ Sandford, Healing p. 203.

Chapter 6

Early Life - Hidden Sins

Whereas the orthodox perspective on hidden sins addresses those things done in private, Sandford equates hidden sins with things that happened to us in childhood (or even in the womb) that we may not even be conscious of. This viewpoint cannot be supported in scripture. .

To illustrate this, Sandford states: "Perhaps a mother attempted to nurse, and her milk was lacking nutrients. Though her child was fed, he was not satisfied. That continually repeated disappointment can register in the foundation stones of his being and create an expectancy to ask but not receive richly and abundantly."²⁰

Fortunately, Sandford indicates that we "may invite the Lord Jesus to meet us at that deep level of our being...He will comfort and satisfy the little child within".

The theme of the "little child within" is dominant throughout Sandford's teaching, and absent within the Word of God. It is straight from the teachings of Jung, an agnostic who had strong ties to the occult. Sandford takes the concept of "inner child" from his mentor, Agnes Sanford, who embraced Jung's statement that the "child had a psychic life before it had consciousness"²¹. Said Sanford: "And if even before birth the soul was shadowed by this human life and darkened by the fears and sorrows of the human parents, then I pray that even those memories or impressions may be healed, so that this one may be restored to Your original pattern, the soul as free and clean as though nothing had ever dimmed its shining."²²

Interestingly enough, the writers of the EH manuals had the good common sense to leave all *direct* references to the inner child out of the material. But the manuals constantly point back to Sandford's book "*Transformation*". The concept of the "inner child", espoused in "*Transformation*" is central to Elijah House teaching, and without it the system falls apart. And this pivotal issue is completely without biblical merit.

Sandford says "Sometime we have found the loss of breast feeding to be the reason some people cannot stop smoking (as opposed to nicotine addiction -ed.); the oral sensation, the comfort and peace of smoking reach too deeply into unsatisfied areas." Too deeply for God to reach?

²⁰ Sandford, Transformation p. 144.

²¹ Jeremiah Abrams, ed. Reclaiming the Inner Child (Los Angeles, CA: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1990) p. 293.

²² Gunprecht, p.116.

Toddlerhood

Sandford make a strong connection between potty training and our current sexuality. Wrongful scolding can become an unconscious part of our foundational attitude toward our body.²³ Apparently the key to performance in the marriage bed is through a rebuking of our mother's poor insight in our formative years. Mom should have known better.

Potty training is also linked to "performance orientation", not to be confused with "pressing on toward the high calling". It is not inconceivable that a propensity towards a "performance orientation" might have been placed in us at an early age. If this is causing sins in a person's life, why not look at what is going on, confess it, put oneself in a discipleship situation, and most of all place it at the cross? Do we really have to drag Mom and the diapers into it? Pity the poor person without this insight - again, God's hand is shortened and he cannot save.

Sexual Perversions

Sandford's viewpoints on these items are fairly acceptable. Certainly we can understand how being raped as a child might cause problems later in life. However, since none of us have had a perfect childhood, it might lead one to conclude that all are doomed.

Pornography, he says, offers a "no-no" "to a child needing to rebel". We should wonder if the "old man" isn't enjoying it too, and perhaps that is who we need to deal with.

In the Womb

With all of the harmful things that could happen to us in childhood, you would think at least the womb would be a safe place. Not so.

Sandford says: "Sometimes the spirit of the fetus is aware of great parental desire of a baby of the opposite sex", explaining a root cause for homosexuality. This is what he calls "prenatal trauma". While it can be said that John the Baptist jumped in the womb, we have no evidence of much capacity for awareness of issues such as sexual orientation at such a tender age. And if the thoughts of our pre-natal parents are so strong, shouldn't just the thought of the cross of Jesus be stronger?

The Workbook (Section 3) elaborates on Prenatal Wounds. It is extremely mystical. The "father's feelings about wife and unborn child can also affect pregnancy". "Womb experiences shape a child's attitudes /expectations about himself". "Research indicates babies are keenly aware of mother's feelings". And so on.

²³ Sandford, Transformation p. 157.

Oddly enough, the scriptures are silent on these issues. Jesus himself never dealt with people who were traumatized by such things. And quite frankly, some of us don't remember such things.

"Sex during pregnancy can negatively affect an unborn child when it is done sinfully, lustfully, insensitively or unwisely. This brings forth an irrational fear of the male organ, with accompanying fears of phallus-shaped objects, i.e. knives."²⁴

First of all, knives are not exactly "phallus-shaped". How about fears of the Washington Monument? The Orientals believe that ginseng is an aphrodisiac because it is shaped like a human torso. There is a name for this type of belief. It is not Christianity.

This is yet another example of unsubstantiated theories of pre-natal influence. Much of the Elijah House practice is built upon dealing with pre-natal and early-childhood influences. Christianity offers a better way - salvation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17).

²⁴ Elijah House, Workbook p. 3-26.

Chapter 7

Homosexuality

Here Sandford pushes things a bit far. He says the Holy Spirit revealed this to him and he does not pretend to understand, but that it "seems to work". By his own admission he is not on a firm doctrinal foundation from the start.

He states that God's word does not state "Male or Female created he each one", but "Male and Female he created them". He goes on to tell us that we are created both male and female, that we have both "poles within us", while allowing that his exegesis of Genesis 1:17 is suspect. According to Sandford, the Lord told him "In the case of one who has indeed become homosexual, what has happened is that either prenatal or by sinful experience the poles have become reversed".

Allegedly the Lord said, "John, when you have done all else for a homosexual, by vision see the poles reversed as I have shown you, and then stand and see as I reach in to disentangle these poles and set them in order." Some would object to him seeing "by vision", but that is acceptable. We ought to speak those things that are not as if they were. It is his concept of "poles" which is problematic.

This is essentially the occult belief of what Carl Jung calls the Anima and the Animus- a belief that each person contains a male and female part. Jung, while writing under the "dictation of the unconscious" (consulting with spirits) asked himself, "Is this really science that I am doing?" A woman's voice answered him and they conversed for a while. From this he deduced that he had within himself an autonomous feminine subpersonality he named his 'anima.'²⁵

John Bevere, in his sermon on "Intimidation"²⁶ tells of rebuking a cross-dressing homosexual. The homosexual tells John he was created with the body of a male but the mind of a female. John heard the spirit say "Lie" and told this man "God created them male and female, not half and half".

One of these men, Bevere or Sandford, has appropriated a wrong interpretation of this scripture. Sandford has already admitted that "perhaps his exegesis is suspect", and on that suspect exegesis he bases his entire theology of homosexuality.

²⁵ Gumprecht, pp. 124,125

²⁶ John Bevere, Overcoming Intimidation (Pensacola,FL: Brownsville Revival School of Ministry, 1999) VHS Videotape

Chapter 8

Defilement

Sandford makes a strong case for how our spirit can directly affect other Christians. He recounts a counseling session with a woman, when he (Sandford) was uncontrollably overcome by lust for her, undressing her in his mind. Sandford was taken back by this and asked her if she was having impure thoughts about him, she replied that she was.²⁷

The biblical approach to such a problem would be to take captive such imaginations. Sandford apparently was unable to take the responsibility for this problem of lust; rather he shifted the blame to the woman. He came by this concept honestly – his mentor Agnes Sanford wrote:

“For now we know that we have within us another mind than the conscious, and this unconscious mind is not disconnected from life but is connected with the mind of the race: the collective unconscious. Therefore we can ‘pick up’ thoughts and impressions from another or from life outside ourselves, or from memories of the race.”²⁸

Note that Sandford is not talking about defilement as in the context of laying hands suddenly (without due consideration) on anyone. No, this is a simple *proximity defilement* that places us in a constant battle mode.

This concept, when studied fully, is extremely disturbing. It fosters a distrust of others, and plants the seeds of fear. One is not safe around anyone, or the things they might project on us.

²⁷ Reference uncertain, probably in workbook.

²⁸ Agnes Sanford, Healing Gifts of the Spirit (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincot, 1966) p. 136.

Conclusion

Elijah House doctrine and practice, on its own, would cause little more concern than the use of Jungian psychology in secular practice. That takes place everyday, and there is little that we can do about it. Its identification with Christianity, and its curious mixture of psychology and spiritualism, is a matter of great concern. Its acceptance in the modern church, as an orthodox, even desirable practice, is a sure recipe for trouble.

If we do not buy the premise of the "inner child" than Sandford's entire teaching falls flat on its face. At best, it becomes a meaningless exercise, at worst, an affront to the blood of Jesus.

By placing the blame for our sins on our childhood or our parents, we eliminate a certain amount of personal responsibility. The teaching has a wrong idea about hidden sin. Many believe that this is not the message of holiness that the church needs to hear today.

If confined to the counseling room it might be more palatable, Sandford however elevates his teachings to normal practice and doctrine for the Christian when he states "ministry to the inner man is not merely a tool to heal a few troubled ones; it is a vital key to the transformation of every heart of every normal Christian". The basis of his teaching must therefore be examined closely.

To borrow a technique from Elijah House, we must look at the roots. The roots of "inner healing" are the teachings of Agnes Sanford and they are totally corrupt. Her teachings include many occultic practices and are unquestionably straight from the "New Age" movement.

We cannot separate the teachings of Sandford with Sanford, because they are so entwined. Agnes Sanford once suggested to John Sandford that he "close some of his spiritual centers or his psychic doors", to which he replied: "Why don't you try to open some of yours?"²⁹ Like Mormonism, a high percentage of Elijah House teachings are biblically based. Because of the nature of error that is coupled with the truth, the entire body of teaching must be rejected altogether. There is not one other reasonable alternative.

This paper has addressed only the tip of the iceberg. For brevities sake many lesser issues, such as Sandford's post-tribulational theology and how it has shaped his beliefs, were not addressed. It is my hope that a review of the issues outlined here can become a springboard for discussion about the advisability of embracing this foundationally-flawed program.

²⁹ Agnes Sanford, Sealed Orders (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972) p.284.