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RELIGION

God's Inferno: Are You Among the Chosen Few
James Tucker
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Two Stars (out of Five)

The pretext for James Tucker's study of Christianity is a conversation between three angels. Ariana is a true believer, but until now she has never looked at her faith critically. She is upset with Cerberus, the Devil's disciple, because of his bad influence on today's Christians. But Calleo (Latin for "knowing") is the dominant voice in Tucker's book, *God's Inferno: Are You Among the Chosen Few?* The conversation between angels provides scant material for a work of fiction, but it gives the author a Socratic format for a critique of Christianity. He has no credentials as a Biblical scholar, but Tucker, an Iowa native who was once a chaplain's assistant, is a lifelong student of religion. As Calleo, Tucker is the voice of reason in *God's Inferno*. He asks questions, looks for facts, and interprets his findings. And while Calleo chides Ariana and Cerberus for their emotionalism, fixed attitudes, and failure to investigate, Tucker in effect chides his readers.

Tucker argues that "blind faith" like that of Ariana is the shortcoming rather than the hallmark of a good Christian. But he also questions the "mere assumptions" of professed atheists like Cerberus. He demands that Christians ask the hard questions about the Old and New Testaments and the history of Christianity. What is the nature of the Supreme God? Is the Bible really His inspired word? Is Jesus Christ His son? Why are Christians behaving so abominably? Tucker finds and reports on the many errors, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the Bible. He uncovers a god there who is often harsh and indifferent, and who allowed his son and his son's most faithful followers to suffer horrible indignities. Then Tucker dredges up two millennia of less-than-Christ-like behavior overseen by some of Christ's most powerful followers.

At times, Tucker's fault-finding seems trivial or unjustified. For example he cites Jesus' renaming of Peter as "Cephas" ("stone") in John 1:42. Tucker asks why none of the other three New Testament gospels mention this, and he wonders why Jesus never calls Peter by his new name after 1:42. Some will answer that perhaps John was the only apostle present when the naming of Peter took place, and that maybe Jesus was giving Peter a symbolic rather a formal

name. But most of Tucker's comments reflect the concerns of many contemporary readers of Scripture. We may well wonder with him, for example, how the story of the ark can be anything but a myth. And why is the historical record of the life of Christ so scanty?

Tucker's purpose is to prompt Christians to examine their faith and to follow a value system based on newly formed beliefs. He goes so far as to warn the searcher that the Bible will not support a belief in a "Supreme God." In doing so his examination of the faith maybe so destructive that a Christian who follows his example of a quest for "rational spiritual beliefs" may not discover a religion worth investing in.