

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: True Spirituality

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Pastor/Teacher

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True Spirituality and *Christianity Today* (Part 1)

I am returning to this sermon series to address a recent article that appeared in *Christianity Today* which promotes itself as “A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction.” At one time – many years ago – that claim would have been true, but it now rings very hollow. Over the last two decades CT has been in the forefront in promoting things (like Open Theism, the Emergent Church, an inclusive view of Salvation, i.e., people of other faiths will be saved based on the cosmic work of Christ, as well as numerous other items that cast doubt on classical Protestant orthodoxy, i.e., articles questioning the validity of penal substitutionary atonement and others suggesting that the doctrine of Hell is in need of complete overhaul) that can hardly be described as being in harmony with classical Evangelicalism. This most recent example of theological drifting is, in my mind, proof conclusive that CT has ceased to be “*Evangelical*” in any meaningful sense of the word. The article, entitled, “Journey To The Center: Joanna Quintrell brings the Christ alternative to alternative spiritual seekers” (12/30/09)¹ is a blatant endorsement of undiluted New Age Spirituality. The article centers around Joanna Quintrell who is identified as executive pastor of Redwood Covenant Church in Santa Rosa, Calif.² Quintrell claims she had a spiritual experience – God spoke directly to her: “I had a strong sense of the presence of God,” she says, “and a message from him: ‘Take out a piece of paper. I want to tell you something new,’” Quintrell found herself filling up a sheet of paper as though by dictation. “I had never had anything like that happen. I knew it wasn’t coming from me.”³ The words that filled the sheet of paper before her added up to something quite different from anything her church was doing. Nonetheless, Quintrell’s church embraced her new ministry vision, retooling her position to director of spiritual formation. She launched a program called the Journey Center, in accordance with what she *felt* were her divine instructions. The center offered classes in contemplative prayer, spiritual direction, and spiritual formation and other types of Eastern Meditative practices that are designed around New Age Spirituality. However, since some standard Christian words like Jesus, church, and Christianity were offensive to the people they were trying to reach, their work wasn’t going to be easy or comfortable. Volunteers have learned that Christ carries positive connotations, for many are into *Christ consciousness*. “They mean something different,” Quintrell says, “but Christ is a bridge word. So we usually pray in the name of Christ the healer.” As Quintrell has read more about alternative spiritualities, she has been amazed to find all the words that were in her original vision: journey, Christ-centered, healing, wholeness. “From the beginning,” she says, “God gave us a bridge.” A stronger bridge came in human form. While researching popular alternative spiritual directors, Quintrell contacted one woman named Rush Bull, who sent a brochure about her practice. She offered techniques in chakra balancing and past-life regression. Something happened the moment they met. “As we walked up to each other, it was as if we had stepped under a waterfall of love. We grabbed each other and hugged. Then we sat for the next two or three hours, sharing our stories.” Bull’s included radical feminism, goddess worship, Buddhist meditation, and Native American spiritual practices. As she explained to Quintrell, Jesus kept showing up unbidden. He had appeared in a group exercise in guided meditation. When Buss visualized a door, turned the handle, and stepped into the room where she was supposed to meet her higher self, Jesus was there. Over time, Bull, we are told, changed too. “Every month she was more open,” until one day, at a meeting at Quintrell’s church, she announced her decision: “Joanna, I have waited to be in your community to do this; I want to follow Jesus.” Bull now calls herself

a “contemplative Catholic.” What is most revealing about the Journey to the Center story is the complete absence of *any* reference to sin, justification by faith and Christ’s atoning work. This total absence of anything remotely *Evangelical* should be a red flag. Instead, we are given a picture of a Christ who is described merely as a *healer*, but not a Redeemer. The late Martin Lloyd-Jones declared this to be one of the ways to identify a false teacher. “Sometimes they deny Christ by not making Him absolutely central, vital and essential. If Christ is not in the centre, He is being denied. He is either in the centre or He is nowhere. Again, they may deny Him by denying His Person, by regarding Him as a man only, as a great teacher, a wonderful example, but denying His Deity – denying Him as God-Man, the ‘theanthropos’, in all the glory and fullness of His blessed Person. Or they deny Him most of all and most seriously by denying His atoning work, by denying the fact that if He had not gone to the cross every man would remain doomed and under the wrath of God, by denying that this is the only way to God, by failing to see themselves as hopeless, damned sinners who are only saved because He bore their sins in His own body on the cross – denying the centrality of the cross! ‘denying the Lord that bought them’. Whatever teaching a man may have to offer to you, if the Christ on Calvary’s Cross is not the central pivot at the heart of it, I say he is a false prophet and a false teacher. And no one can give hope, either to the individual or to the world today, who is not centred absolutely upon that atonement. He is a false prophet and teacher.”⁴

Furthermore, the repeated emphasis on *feelings* and how this woman *felt* the presence of God should alert us to Satanic deception. Wisely did Donald Bloesch write: “It is increasingly evident that we are living in an age of theological erosion. We have spirituality without doctrinal substance. When spirituality is divorced from theology it speedily deteriorates into sentimentality. Biblical, evangelical spirituality is now in eclipse. Most current books on spirituality reflect either Neoplatonic mysticism or the new innerworldly mysticism... Feminist spirituality also by and large represents a rebirth of Gnosticism in which the key to personal and spiritual renewal lies in developing a higher form of consciousness. A more recent manifestation of the growing spiritual revolution is the Emerging Church, reflecting again the drift toward an amorphous mysticism and relativism.”⁵

I. FALSE TEACHERS (II Peter 2:1-3)

Both Paul and Peter warned about the dangers of false doctrines and the very real threat of being deceived by false teachers. cf. See Acts 20:29-30; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 3:2; II Thess. 2:1-3; I Tim. 1:3-7; II Tim. 3:1-8; I John 2:18-19; Jude 3-4.

A. Their Reality and Appearance

The presence of false teachers *in the church* should not be all that surprising. After all, Peter says that was the case with the people of God in the OT – and will be down through the ages. Calvin wrote, “all the errors that have arisen in the Christian Church from the beginning have sprung from this source; sometimes covetousness and sometimes self-seeking have extinguished genuine fear of God. Thus a bad conscience is the mother of all heresies, and today we see a vast number of men, who had never embraced the faith with honesty and sincerity, stamped like brute beasts into the madness of the Epicureans, so that their hypocrisy is exposed. And not only so, but contempt for God is spreading everywhere and the licentious and depraved lives of almost all classes of men show that there is but the smallest portion of integrity left in the world, so that there is good reason to fear that the light which has been kindled may soon be put out, and God may leave a pure understanding of the Gospel to very few.”⁶

B. Their Motivation and Behavior

The false teachers are driven by their own agenda. In Greek, the word “exploit” in the ESV, is *pleonexia*. “Pleon” means “more,” and “exia” comes from the verb which means “to have.” It’s a covetous desire for money, lust for another person, or an unholy ambition for honor, prestige or power. These are the motives behind the false teachers and their teachings. They use deceptive words, *plastois logois* (from which we get our word plastic) means to mold or shape and denotes fabrication for the purpose of deception.

C. Their Influence and Traits

“The false teachers, Peter warns his readers, ‘will exploit you with stories they have made up.’ They enter the Christian community with fabricated stories that unsuspecting believers accept as gospel. Paul also is acquainted with such unscrupulous peddlers who are interested in not the soul but the possessions of the people. He writes, ‘Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit’ (II Cor. 2:17).”⁷

CONCLUSION: Simply because Joanna Quintrell uses *Christian* terms to describe her New Age Mysticism does not make it *Christian*. Warfield makes this observation. “The distinction between mysticism of this type and evangelical Christianity, from the point of view which is now occupying our attention, is nevertheless clear. Evangelical Christianity interprets all religious experience by the normative revelation of God recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures, and guides, directs, and corrects it from these Scriptures, and thus molds it into harmony with what God in His revealed Word lays down as the normal Christian life. The mystic, on the other hand, tends to substitute his religious experience for the objective revelation of God recorded in the written Word as the source from which he derives his knowledge of God, or at least to subordinate the expressly revealed Word as the less direct and convincing source of knowledge of God to his own religious experience. The result is that the external revelation is relatively depressed in value, if not totally set aside. In the history of Christian thought mysticism appears accordingly as that tendency among professing Christians which looks within, that is, to the religious feelings, in its search for God. It supposes itself to contemplate within the soul the movements of the divine Spirit, and finds in them either the sole sources of trustworthy knowledge of God, or the most immediate and convincing sources of that knowledge, or, at least, a coordinate source of it alongside of the written Word. The characteristic of Christian mysticism, from the point of view of religious knowledge, is therefore its appeal to the ‘inner light,’ or ‘the internal word,’ either to the exclusion of the external or written Word, or as superior to it and normative for its interpretation, or at least as coordinate authority with it, this ‘inner light’ or ‘internal word’ being conceived not as the rational understanding but as the immediate deliverance of the religious sentiment. As a mere matter of fact, now, we lack all criteria, apart from the written Word, to distinguish between those motions of the heart which are created within us by the Spirit of God and those which arise out of the natural functioning of the religious consciousness. This substitution of our religious experience—or ‘Christian consciousness,’ as it is sometimes called—for the objective Word as the proper source of our religious knowledge ends therefore either in betraying us into purely rationalistic mysticism, or is rescued from that by the postulation of a relation of the soul to God which strongly tends toward pantheizing mysticism.”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ Available at http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=86212

² This Church is a member of a denomination known as the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). This denomination is distinctively pietistic and proudly advertises itself as such. Like most forms of pietism, this group has a strong inclination toward mysticism and all of its pitfalls – especially when it comes to the whole question of what constitutes true versus false Spirituality. The ECC, like many denominations, is decidedly egalitarian and is presently in a state of perplexity over the issue of homosexuality. For further information on the ECC see: <http://www.pietisten.org/misc/redefining.html>.

³ Quintrell describes what happened to her in terms of *divine dictation* or what is known in the Occult as *automatic writing* – a form of *divination*. It is expressly condemned in the Bible (cf. Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-14; Jer. 27:9; Isa. 47:13; Ezk. 13:3-6; Acts 16:16-18). For details, see L. Spence, Encyclopedia of Occultism (University Books, 1960).

⁴ M. Lloyd-Jones, Expository Sermons on 2 Peter (Banner of Truth, 1983) p. 131.

⁵ D. G. Bloesch, Spirituality Old & New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life (IVP, 2007) p. 31.

⁶ Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries 10 (Eerdmans, 1973) p. 202.

⁷ S. J. Kistemaker, Peter and Jude: New Testament Commentary (Baker, 1987) p. 284.

⁸ The Words of Benjamin B. Warfield IX (rpt. Baker, 1981) p. 654.