

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: True Spirituality
Number: 17
Text: II Peter 1:12-21
Date: January 31, 2010 (a.m.)

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True Spirituality and *Christianity Today* (Part 2)

Much of the Evangelical church at large – and particularly the Charismatic wing – is saturated with a highly subjective, privatized and intuitive form of mysticism.¹ The major emphasis is on having direct personal revelation from God. This is the centerpiece of the article that *Christianity Today* recently highlighted ('Journey To The Center'). Joanna Quintrell claims 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."² Despite the fact that what she claimed happened (automatic writing is directly linked to the Occult), she never stops to consider that the source for this revelation might be demonic. In fact, if this woman had taken time to actually read what the Bible has to say about such things, she might have had second thoughts about the source of this *NEW* revelation. For example, we read early in the Old Testament this warning: "When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Lest no one be found among you who burns his son or daughter in the fire, any one who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God. The nations you will dispossess listen to those who practice sorrow or divination. But as for you, the LORD your God has not permitted you so to do." (Deut. 18:9-14).

James Sire helpfully comments, "This instruction was given just before Israel entered the Promised Land. Canaan is full of false religion, full of occult practices. So watch out. Have nothing to do with this. Yahweh is God—the one God. Israel needs no other. There is no other. To think so—or to cover all bets by seeking the services of diviners, soothsayers, sorcerers, wizards, charmers, mediums or whatever—is blasphemy. God is God, and Israel is his people. The New Testament likewise forbids divination and recounts many instances of demon possession. (cf. Mt. 7:21-28; Lk 10:20; Acts 8:9-24; 13:8-11; 19:11-20; Gal. 5:19-21; Jas. 3:13-18; Rev. 21:8) One of the most instructive is the account of Jesus' casting the demons from the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1-20). From this account it is clear that many demons had possessed the man; they were not a projection of his psychosis, since when they left him they entered a herd of swine; demons are personal beings who can use language and communicate with people; and they have the very worst in mind for humanity."³

Quintrell blissfully assumes that her revelation *must* be from God because it confirms what she already embraces. 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." How convenient. Warfield's observation (cited in Part I) that anytime we substitute our religious experience – or in Quintrell's case, a claim that God gave her a *New* revelation – for the revealed Objective Word of God in Scripture – we end up with the Bible being subservant to our experience and lapse into darkness. Despite her claims to be reaching New Agers with

her message, Quintrell has been duped. “The devil’s alternative credo,” writes MacArthur, “often has a few carefully chosen elements of truth in the mix—but always diluted and thoroughly blended with falsehoods, contradictions, misrepresentations, distortions, and every other imaginable perversion of reality. Add it all up and the bottom line is a big lie.”⁴ Tim Stafford, the author of the Christianity Today article celebrates Quintrell’s efforts declaring “Joanna Quintrell is an old friend of mine who has started something called *The Journey Center*. It’s a ‘Christ-centered’ place where people of ‘eclectic spirituality’ can come and participate in hikes, classes, centering prayer, art exhibits, and many other options... a warm, unthreatening place that is clearly labeled as Christian but without the baggage that so often turns New Age people away.”⁵ The late Francis Schaeffer called this *semantic mysticism*. “People in our culture in general are already in process of being accustomed to accept non-defined, contentless religious words and symbols, without any rational or historical control. Such words and symbols are ready to be filled with the content of the moment. The words ‘Jesus’ or ‘Christ’ are the most ready for the manipulator. The phrase ‘Jesus Christ’ has become a contentless banner which can be carried in any direction for sociological purposes. In other words, because the phrase ‘Jesus Christ’ has been separated from true history and the content of Scripture, it can be used to trigger religiously motivated sociological actions directly contrary to the teaching of Christ... It is against such manipulated semantic mysticism that we do very well to prepare ourselves, our children and our spiritual children.”⁶ The Apostle Peter shows us how to do this.

I. THE APOSTLE’S RESOLUTIONS

Notice how Peter stresses his responsibility. He has a two-fold resolve:

A. To Be Always Reminding

What is it that he wishes them to remember? – “these things” (v. 12), a reference back to vv. 1-11 which he calls “the truth you now have.” Peter wanted the knowledge his readers possessed to result in action—to know truth in order to do the truth. Peter was, even to his dying day, always mindful of Jesus’ charge to him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17).

B. To Cause Them to Remember

Again, note the expression “these things” (V. 15). The Apostle’s priorities were with the great truths (doctrines) of the Christian Faith—not with passing fancies of the culture.

II. THE APOSTLE’S CONVICTIONS

The foundation of Peter’s resolutions rested upon his firm conviction that the Gospel is true.

A. The Apostolic Testimony

Peter was one of the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ earthly coming. The Apostolic testimony was this: Christ the Messiah (the promised Deliverer) is come. He is Jesus of Nazareth. He has the authority to forgive sins. He was crucified, dead, and buried; and He is risen from the dead and has been exalted on high.

B. The Foundation of the Apostolic Testimony

Peter, along with the other Apostles, was an eyewitness to Jesus’ majesty. What did this involve?

1. *They Witnessed Miracles by Jesus*

Notice that Peter does not appeal to miracles done by his own hand.

2. *They Witnessed Fulfilled Prophecy*

Notice Peter’s disclaimer, “we did not follow cleverly invented stories” (1-16). The term *stories* in Greek is “myths.” According to Peter, false teachers are teaching the church members “destructive heresies” (2:1) and “stories they have made up” (2:3). They will scoff at Christ’s promise to return, Peter adds (3:3-4). These teachers deny the historical basis of the gospel message and instead present their own myths. What is a myth? A myth is a story which man has formulated to express his own desires without any reference to reality. Because of its man-centered focus, a myth is devoid of redemptive power (see I Tim. 1:4; 4:7; II Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14). By contrast, Scripture originates with God. The Bible is divinely inspired, rooted in history, and unquestionably true. And lastly, the gospel message redeems man from sin and glorifies God. Peter calls the myths of the false

prophets “cleverly invented stories.” He says that the apostles refused to follow manmade fables and rejected their alleged authority. In his epistle, Peter does not explain the content of these stories but rather reminds the readers of the context of the gospel.⁷

III. THE APOSTLE’S EXHORTATION

Peter urged them to pay close attention to the written Word—“as to a light shining in a dark place” (v. 19).

A. Pay Attention

The ESV reads “to pay attention” while the KJV reads “to take heed.” Peter used the word PROSECHONTES which literally means, “holding your mind upon.” The word actually means to focus the attention of the mind. This involves reading, of course, but the thought is much stronger. “Diligent study” is implied because close attention and considerable effort of thought are the import of Peter’s words.

B. The Light of Scripture

Note the reason why Christians are to take heed to the written word. It is “a light shining in a dark place.” The imagery Peter uses is picturesque. Scripture is likened to a lamp (cf. Psalm 119:104, 130). It is light shining in a “dark Place.”⁸ The Puritan giant John Owen wrote, “It is the Kingdom of Satan, filled with darkness and confusion. Superstition, idolatry, lying vanities, wherein men know not at all what they do nor whither they go, fill the whole world, even as it is at this day. And the minds of men are naturally in darkness; there is a blindness upon them that they cannot see nor discern spiritual things, no, not when they are externally proposed unto them.”⁹

CONCLUSION: Donald Bloesch correctly notes that the kind of Spirituality that characterizes much of today’s Evangelicalism “teaches not the fear of God nor the inaccessibility of God, but the availability of God. God is a power we can tap into rather than a holy Lord we must submit to.”¹⁰ In this kind of spirituality, the highest values of the surrounding culture are naturally given divine approval. Quintrell declares that the Journey Center’s primary purpose is one of bringing healing and wholeness. “We believe that Christ lives and that He continues to walk among us, eager to touch us with the healing power of His love. And that healing is available for every area of our personal lives, our relationships, for those who suffer in our community and in the world, and for this beautiful earth itself. We believe that we were created to love with all of who we are... heart, soul, mind and strength. We are all being invited by the Spirit to move towards wholeness.”¹¹ Notice the emphasis. Psychological healing and wholeness constitutes the essence of this type of spirituality. David Wells perceptively diagnosed the difference. “Wherein, then, lies the difference between a classical and a post-modern spirituality? The latter begins, not so much with sin as morally framed, but with sin as psychologically experienced, not so much with sin in relation to God, but with sin in relation to ourselves. It begins with our anxiety, pain, and disillusionment, with the world in its disorder, the family or marriage in its brokenness, or the workplace in its brutality and insecurity. God, in consequence, is valued to the extent that he is able to bathe these wounds, assuage these insecurities, calm these fears, restore some sense of internal order, and bring some sense of wholeness.”¹² Peter declares the written Word to be shining light. It is made more certain.¹³ In what sense is it more certain? Peter is saying that the Holy Scriptures are more certain than experience—even the experience of an apostle! (cf. Paul’s remarks in Galatians 1:1-6). You can be led astray, regardless of how sincere you are, by experience. “Take heed,” said William Bridge, “and attend to the Scriptures, for they are our great and most sure light, whereunto ye do well if ye take heed as unto a light shining in a dark place. Oh, then take heed thereunto.”¹⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ Actually, this kind of thing is spread across the national landscape. See “Why some Americans mix Christianity, Eastern Religions: Worshipers are borrowing from Eastern Religions and New Age beliefs.”

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- <http://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/content/view/print/275844>. The distressing thing is that a magazine like Christianity Today would openly sanction such a thing.
- ² Joanna Quintrell has a website that goes by the title, “The Journey Center” Christ-Centered Spirituality, Healing and Wholeness.” She declares, “We are not a church or an institution, but a group of people who have encountered the Living Christ and are being transformed by that experience.” Furthermore, the same kind of direct revelation that she claimed to receive is available to all, “We believe that true spirituality involves opening ourselves to a deeper awareness of the Presence and Love that already surrounds us, listening for the voice of God and learning to respond to the movement of the Spirit in our lives. Whatever your spiritual path, we invite you to enter into that Presence with us.” <http://www.JourneyCenter.org/about.php>
- ³ J. W. Sire, The Universe Next Door (IVP, 2004) p. 807.
- ⁴ John MacArthur, The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception (Thomas Nelson, 2007) p. 40.
- ⁵ <http://timstafford.wordpress.com/2010/01/04/the-mission-field-of-eclectic-spirituality/>
- ⁶ F. Schaeffer, The God Who is There (IVP, 1968) p. 84. Quintrell is a modern day Gnostic, and like Gnostics of old, she is very eclectic. “Every major form of Gnosticism was actually pagan to the core, but because Gnostics had a peculiar tendency to synthesize Christian doctrine and symbolism with their worldly philosophies, they fooled many Christians. They borrowed biblical terminology and elements of Christian teaching. But they redefined all the terms and revamped all the teaching. Then they masqueraded as Christians and advertised their religion as a more enlightened version of Christianity. Gnostic leaders often aligned with established churches to gain credibility. They aggressively recruited followers from within the church itself. Because the Gnostics employed familiar Christian terminology and professed faith in Christ, many in the church were uncertain about whether to embrace them as brethren or reject them as heretics.” MacArthur, op. cit. p. 90.
- ⁷ S. J. Kistemaker, Peter and Jude: New Testament Commentary (Baker, 1987) p. 264.
- ⁸ The idea conveyed by the word “dark place,” AUCHMĒRŌITOPŌI, is very vivid. It refers to a parched, squalid, dirty, dark and murky place. This pictures the human mind that is ignorant of God. “Darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2).
- ⁹ The Works of John Owen (V rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 97.
- ¹⁰ D. G. Bloesch, Spirituality Old & New (IVP, 2007) p. 45.
- ¹¹ <http://www.journeycenter.org/encounter.php>
- ¹² D. F. Wells, Losing Our Virtue: Why The Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision (Eerdmans, 1998) p. 42.
- ¹³ The literal meaning is “durable or permanent” in the sense that it is steady, steadfast, from the word BEBAIOTERON, cf. Gordon Clark, II Peter: A Short Commentary (P & R, 1972), p. 28.
- ¹⁴ The Works of William Bridge (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), p. 449.