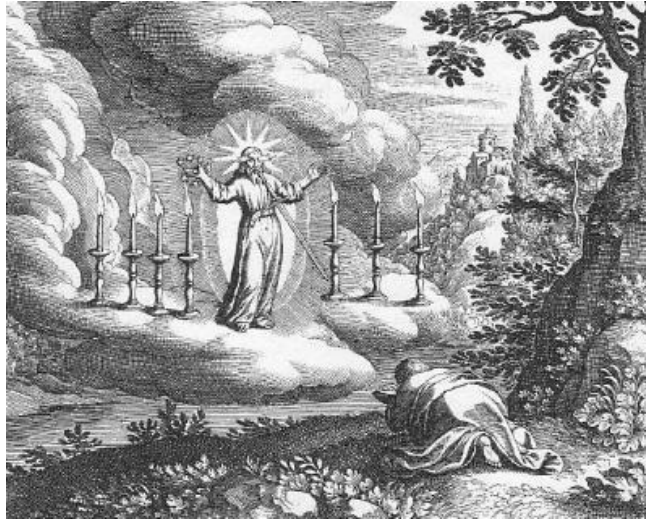


How to Experience God

A Handbook for Evangelical Mystics



John Boruff

Foreword by Mark Virkler

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**HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD:
A HANDBOOK FOR EVANGELICAL MYSTICS**

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*Dedicated to the glory of God
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:
in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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FOREWORD BY MARK VIRKLER

How to Experience God is a much needed book. It is a thoughtful reflection on the place of “experiences” in the Christian faith. Having come out of a religious belief that our relationship with God and Jesus is largely cognitive, John Boruff makes a case from Scripture and from church history for ongoing direct encounter between God and man. This book is written for the thinker, one who wants to fully understand these “mystical” experiences.

Even the use of the word “mystical” is difficult for many. Although Webster defines it as “the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight)”—it is a word that most Evangelicals and even most Charismatics shy away from as we are much more inclined to gain our understanding of God through our reason and the Bible, than we are through a direct encounter with Him. For some reason we believe our intellect is more trustworthy than our actual experiences. You know, experiences can lead you astray. However in my journal, God said to me, “You can trust My voice in your heart more than you can trust the reasoned theology of your mind.” Wow! Do I dare believe this? Does the Bible even support such an idea? Could you find one or several verses that agree with this? Actually, when I looked I found **many** verses which agreed with this. I bet you will too if you search the Bible with an open heart.

So can we search with open hearts? What a challenge. With everything being filtered through my mind, I

was not really open to heart responses at all. At one point in my life, I could not even define what my heart or spirit FELT like, and yet I was supposed to live and walk in the Spirit! How in the world could I do that if I could not even define the sensation? Evangelicalism has a 500 year old history of making Christianity mainly a rational and theological understanding about God, rather than an actual ongoing encounter with Him. In my early days as a conservative Evangelical, I wrote off dreams, visions, the voice of God, healings, tongues, and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Actually any direct encounter with Almighty God was considered suspect as it came through experiences, rather than through my intellect. And I had been taught to rely so much on my intellect. Well it is time for everyone to **take another look at the Scriptures** and church history and see what God Himself has to say about direct ongoing spiritual encounters.

I believe if you do this with an open mind and not through the lens of dispensationalism, you will be amazed at what you will find. I was! This book will help you take an open look at the Scriptures and church history. You will explore intellectually what the Bible teaches about worship, meditation, contemplation, and spiritual experiences in general. I pray your heart will be open to hear and receive what God wants to say to you through this book. A living encounter with the living God sure beats a theology about Him. I know. I have had both. I pray you try the ongoing living encounter and see how it feels to your heart and spirit and soul and body. I believe if you open up and give it a try, you will be well pleased at the

results in your life. And if you already live in ongoing encounters with the living God, then this book will help give you an increased understanding of the experiences you are having, and offer you ways of sharing your walk more clearly with others. Having an intellectual understanding of your experiences with God can only help, and understanding how to steer clear of the New Age movement while having these experiences is a wonderful blessing.

Mark Virkler

Co-Author of *How to Hear God's Voice*

January 2010

MY STATEMENT OF FAITH

God. I believe that there is one God, in Three Persons: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent—present everywhere in the created universe—and lives within Christian believers. This is a reality of omnipresence, not pantheism. I reject the pantheistic notion that the universe itself and nature itself is divine. I affirm that the created world and the omnipresent Holy Spirit overlap one another, but still remain distinct from one another. The omnipresence of God is the teaching of the Bible and is completely foreign to the Hindu pantheism of India.

Jesus Christ. I believe in the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ—that He is the only Son of the Father—God in human flesh, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His return in power and glory.

Scripture. I believe the Bible to be the inspired, perfectly acceptable, trustworthy Word of God. I deny that any private revelations are of equal or higher authority than the Bible, but rather I affirm that the Bible is exalted above any spiritual experience, revelation, or prophecy—and it is the theological standard by which all spiritual experiences should be tested. If any private revelation ever contradicts the Bible, then it should be considered a counterfeit revelation; however, I do believe in private revela-

tions about topics that the Bible is silent about—provided that they are in agreement with the general flow of Biblical morality and Evangelical/Charismatic theology.

Man. I believe that mankind is naturally sinful, because of Adam and Eve's fall from God's grace in the Garden of Eden. Naturally the human spirit, soul, and body are corrupt and tend towards unrighteous thoughts and feelings. Only through faith in Christ is it possible to gain control over one's evil desires. Though it is true that God created man in His own image, it does not mean that man is the "god" of his own universe, nor does it mean that man has unlimited human potential. Miracles, signs, and wonders that certain men can perform are not so much from their innate willpower as they are from either divine or demonic assistance. I reject the so-called "Manifest Sons of God" or "Joel's Army" teaching that end-time Christians will become militant Christ-gods with immortal bodies prior to the return of Christ.

Salvation. I believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. This spiritual transformation is produced by faith alone in Christ's atoning death and resurrection, and by receiving God's forgiveness for sin; it is evidenced by an increase of righteous behavior coming out of a heart influenced by the feelings of divine love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Jesus Christ is the only Way, Truth, and Life: no one comes to the Father except through Him.

There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other Name under Heaven that has been given among men by which we can be saved from the everlasting destruction of Hell.

Heaven and Hell. I believe that Heaven, or the upper world, is the paradise abode of God, angels, and those that have been saved throughout the ages and have passed on. I believe that Hell, or the lower world, is literally located in the center of the Earth, and is the torturous abode of fallen angels, demons, and all who have not put their faith in the God of the Bible. Both Heaven and Hell exist in the spiritual realm.

The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit indwells or lives inside of every truly regenerated Christian, and gives them the desire to live a godly lifestyle in thought, will, and deeds; and to some extent it also plays a role in working miracles.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit can and will externally baptize, fall upon, immerse, or envelope the bodies of those Christians who seek God's miraculous power. While this experience can further empower the moral desires of the indwelling Holy Spirit, it is primarily a miraculous power. The baptism in the Holy Spirit bestows all kinds of supernatural gifts: speaking in tongues; revelations through dreams, visions, voices, and impressions; God's healing power; and God's miracle working power.

The Resurrection of the Dead. I believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of destruction.

The Church. I believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. No church building, religious denomination, institution, or organization is the reason for this unity. It is our faith in Christ—the only Way, Truth, and Life—that binds us together in love. I reject the “Dominion Theology” teaching that the church will take over all world governments before Christ’s return. I also reject the “emerging church,” which is marked by postmodern heresies.

INTRODUCTION

How to Open Up to God

How can I begin to explain what this book is about? I could really oversimplify and just tell you that it's about things like worship, meditation, contemplation, and spiritual experiences. But it's so much more than that. Although my chapters will be about these topics, they point to a much larger reality: God and the spiritual realm. The title of the book is the thesis of the book. **This is supposed to be a how-to book, a practical manual, a guide to opening up your spirit to experiences of God.** If you desire, you may call it a variety of things: a book on spiritual disciplines, mystical theology, a guide to Christian spirituality, a prophetic manual, or a book on the deeper life. But my desire is not merely to write another work of mystical theology in a Protestant framework. The goal of this book is to let the reader understand what he has to do in order to come near to God so that God will come near to him (James 4:8). At first when I had the desire and the idea to write on experiencing God, I only focused on revelatory experiences like spiritual voices and visions. Then I had the idea that I needed to write on all of the methods of meditation that have come down to us through 2,000 years of Christian spirituality. Feeling that this would be impossible, what resulted was stagnancy and a halting to my writing that I felt was from the devil.

I had convinced myself that no one would care to read the things that Jesus taught me by experience, unless

I had first done extensive bibliographical research into the great works of mystical theology in order to substantiate my experiences. And it may be that I will have the opportunity to produce later editions of this book with all sorts of footnotes and references to great mystical theologians like St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Augustin Poulain, Albert Farges, Benedict XIV, and Adolphe Tanquerey. But I feel a sense of urgency to write what I have experienced and the need to publish it. I feel like Jesus is telling my spirit something like this: “Those things which I have whispered in your ear in the inner room, I want you to proclaim from the rooftop” (Luke 12:3). So, that’s what I’m going to do through this book. I’m going to proclaim from the rooftop that **God is accessible today!** He is a God that is nearby and not far away (Jer. 23:23). **He is a God that can be felt, heard, and seen by His people through spiritual experiences today!** The beauty of it is that you don’t have to read tons of mystical theology books in order to get a grip on what it means to come to God. Just a little teaching is enough to point you in the right direction and confirm that your experiences are real when they happen.

New Age Spirituality vs. Evangelical Mysticism

Before this teaching can begin, there is something that I have to warn the reader of this book: **beware of the demonic counterfeits of Christian mysticism.** I prefer to refer to myself as an “Evangelical mystic” instead of simply a “Christian mystic,” because New Agers often

hide behind the latter title. However, an Evangelical is a theologically conservative Christian that adheres to exclusive salvation through Jesus alone (John 14:6). There are various denominations that have taken this same stance of Evangelical mysticism that I have, embracing either what they call “soaking prayer” or “contemplative prayer”: Assemblies of God, Evangelical Friends, Four-square Church, Vineyard USA, Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (Catch The Fire Toronto), Catch The Fire Ministries, International House of Prayer, and other independent Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Neoevangelical groups that hold to a similar theology. A point of cautious discernment for Evangelical mystics today involves fighting with New Age spirituality and other forms of occultism.

In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the Holy Spirit was manifesting great power in Charismatic movements. But also during this time, satan was sending out legions of occult demons to deceive and lure hippies and others into Eastern meditation techniques (e.g., Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen). Whatever God does, satan responds with a counterfeit! **God sent the Charismatic movement, but satan responded with the New Age movement.** And to this day, Charismatics need to protect themselves from the influence of New Age teachings—which are the “doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1, KJV). In *Confronting the New Age* (1988), Christian apologist Douglas Groothuis explains how Christians can practically discern New Age influences anywhere: popular culture, books, movies, music, events, churches, public

schools, and business seminars. Basically it comes down to knowing the teachings of New Age spirituality. We can't fight false doctrines that we don't know about. And because true Christian mystics share some superficial similarities with New Age mystics, it becomes absolutely necessary for New Age teachings to be exposed for the false doctrines that they are. So, I will present a short chart here that will show both some of the similarities and differences between New Age spirituality and Evangelical mysticism:

	New Agers	Evangelical Mystics
<i>God</i>	The Universe: Including Man	The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
<i>Scripture</i>	Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, and Occult Texts	The Holy Bible
<i>Man</i>	God	A Creature Made in God's Image
<i>Sin</i>	Not Realizing Everything is Divine	Human Nature; Breaking God's Law
<i>Salvation</i>	Realizing You're God in Meditation	Faith in Jesus' Blood and Forgiveness
<i>Afterlife</i>	Reincarnation	Heaven or Hell

<i>Power</i>	The Indwelling of “Spirit Guides” (Demons)	The Indwelling and Baptism in the Holy Spirit
<i>Church</i>	The New Age Movement	Contemplative, Pentecostal, and Charismatic Christians
<i>Teachers</i>	Yogis, Gurus, Buddhist Monks, and Shamans	Catholic and Orthodox Mystics; Mystical Theologians
<i>Meditation</i>	Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen	Worship, Biblical Meditation, and Divine Contemplation
<i>Revelation</i>	Dreams, Visions, Voices, and Impressions	Dreams, Visions, Voices, and Impressions
<i>Religions</i>	Every Religion Leads to God (Syncretism)	Jesus is the Only Way to God (John 14:6)

On the surface, an Evangelical mystic and a New Ager might look the same: they both experience dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs from the supernatural realm. They also both get quiet and still in order to practice meditation. They also both experience spiri-

tual ecstasies or “altered states of consciousness.” On the surface level, Evangelical mystics and New Agers seem to be having the same spiritual experiences and practicing the same thing: meditation. But as you can see from this chart, things are not as they may appear. You can see why, for example, in King Nebuchadnezzar’s pagan mind the prophet Daniel was just considered a really good magician because he could interpret dreams well: “I said, ‘Belteshazzar (Daniel), chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me’” (Dan. 4:9). But just like King Nebuchadnezzar, there are people today—both Christian and pagan—that do not think there is a difference between Evangelical mystics and New Agers. I hope that this chart has helped to convince you that there are **many differences** between Evangelical mystics and New Agers. However, I would say that *the main difference is that New Agers deny Christ’s exclusive claim of salvation in John 14:6.*

John 14:6 vs. Religious Syncretism

Things get really tricky when New Agers don’t identify themselves as New Agers per se, but rather as “Christians” or even “Christian mystics.” It gets even trickier when they say that they are Pentecostal, Charismatic, Episcopalian, Catholic, or Quaker. But if we test their beliefs and practices thoroughly enough, it is possible to identify such New Agers that are hiding behind a Christian persona. *There are plenty of “New Age Chris-*

tians” around today; very many in fact. Basically, they are liberal Christians that believe all religions lead to God. They practice Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, Zen, and maybe even a counterfeit form of “contemplative prayer” to “Jesus” as if he were the god of all religions. These people are in all of the liberal mainline denominations and even in some of the conservative denominations. They preach health and wealth through visualization techniques not guided by Scripture, positive thinking, and “name it claim it” without any Biblical basis. (However, when the Bible and Jesus’ Name are involved, those visualizations are permissible).

They dominate the field of parapsychology. Psychics like Edgar Cayce, Jeane Dixon, and Sylvia Browne are their heroes. They are supportive of modern Hindu gurus like Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Swami Muktananda, Rajneesh, and Sai Baba. They praise Buddhist monks like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. They receive their latest inspiration from popular New Age authors like Deepak Chopra and Eckhart Tolle. They preach that man is not really created by God, but that man *is* God. They emphasize self-esteem instead of self-deliverance through faith in Christ. They are emphatic about spiritually evolving into godhood, supposedly like “Christ” did. They are overly concerned about world peace and environmentalism, because they have lost the Creator-creation distinction, and believe that nature is divine. They are liberal, pluralistic, syncretistic “Christians” that dabble in Eastern mysticism and meditation (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, etc). They believe that Jesus is only one

of the many helpful “spirit guides” from the world of “ascended masters” which also include Buddha, Maitreya, Sanat Kumara, Confucius, the Virgin Mary, and various Catholic saints. And they believe that in the future there will be one world religion that will bring all religions and governments together into unity through the United Nations. Sounds like an Antichrist religion to me (Rev. 13:7-8)!

I met such a person once at a United Methodist summer camp. He had a study Bible in a bookcase, but inside the pocket of this case, he had a copy of the *Tao Te Ching* (6th century B.C.), a Taoist scripture. He viewed that book and the Bible as if they were equally inspired by God! He was also very excited about looking back to the 1960s and the hippie counterculture. Aside from atheism, this syncretistic mentality is very popular in state universities. We should grieve that these people are so deceived and make a kind attempt to persuade them why it is that **Jesus said, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).** But we should remember to do this with love, gentleness, and kindness: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15). This is the essence of what I mean when I use the phrase “Evangelical mysticism”—it is truly a New Testament mysticism that adheres to Jesus Christ as the only way to God, and openly rejects other world religions and occult practices. Hinduism is false. Buddhism is false. Sufism is false. Taoism is

false. Jesus Christ is the *only* way to God the Father!

The Centering Prayer Movement

During the 1970s, a “New Age Christian” contemplative movement developed in **the Catholic Church** called the Centering Prayer movement. It was led by the liberal monks William Meninger, M. Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, and Thomas Merton. Other Christian mystics reading this might be shocked that I would label centering prayer as New Age. However, who can deny the familiarity that they have maintained with Eastern mystics? Especially **Thomas Merton**, of whom *Nelson’s New Christian Dictionary* (2001) says, “Toward the end of his life, he began to move away from a strict orthodoxy into a greater acceptance of non-Christian traditions.” This centering prayer group’s blatant approval of Eastern religions is the fruit of Vatican II in the 1960s, which liberalized the Catholic Church’s attitude toward world religions. Nowadays many Roman Catholics are actually New Age Christians. Thankfully, this was not so for most of church history.

This also goes for liberal Quaker groups, such as **the Religious Society of Friends** (not to be confused with the early Quakers). My wife and I found this out the hard way. We attended one of the Religious Society’s meetings once and felt okay about it initially. For about one hour we sat in a circle and practiced “silent worship” or divine contemplation. There was a little bit of sharing from our hearts and then we ate some food together. Dur-

ing the silent worship session my wife mentally asked, “God, should I bring food for potluck next time we come here?” And she heard a loud spiritual voice say, “No!” And then for one second she saw an apparition of a five foot black snake on the ground. Rebekah kept this experience to herself. After the silent worship, I was talking with a friendly guy who was trying to explain to me what their particular Quaker group believed in. And he directed me to the corner of the room where a bookshelf of their religious literature was. I picked up one of their booklets and opened it at random only to find kindly references to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism. “This is a New Age group,” I whispered to Rebekah. And she said something like, “I picked up on that.” Later on she shared her vision of the black snake with me, and I felt that it was God’s way of saying that there was a spirit of witchcraft in that Quaker group because of their New Age leanings. The leader of that Quaker group was influenced by the writings of Thomas Merton.

**Mystical Literature:
New Age, Catholic, and Evangelical**

I want to caution readers against **William James’** *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). It is a helpful book in regards to cataloging spiritual experiences and interpreting them in light of modern psychology—especially Lectures XVI and XVII on “Mysticism.” However, it is a “proto-New Age” book that has many kindly references to psychedelic drugs and monistic

Hindu spiritual experiences of the so-called Higher Self. If you choose to read it, then do so with sensitivity to the errors of New Age spirituality and the truths of Evangelical theology. It was James who started the psychology of religion. **Charles Tart**'s *Altered States of Consciousness* (1969) as well as **Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg**'s *The Mystical Mind* (1999) are other notable works on the psychology of spiritual experience that follow suit with James' New Age leanings.

I want to caution any budding mystical theologians about the writings of **Evelyn Underhill**, and especially her best known work, *Mysticism* (1911). Underhill was an influential Oxford scholar of mysticism in general: both Christian and pagan. Although she claimed to be a Christian, she was also what we might call a "proto-New Ager" because her writings favorably quote and endorse pagan mystics alongside Christian mystics. It is also this woman that may be blamed for the widespread misconception that Christian mysticism is a Christianized form of Neoplatonism, a mystical sect that followed a pagan teacher named Plotinus. Her works have some very helpful bibliographical material and citations of real Christian mystical literature, and can be helpful for research in that regard. But make no mistake: though her quotations of the Christian mystics are dominant, her book also endorses pagan mysticism. Therefore her writings are occultic.

Two major New Age texts are **Helen Schucman**'s *A Course in Miracles* (1976) and **Marianne Williamson**'s *A Return to Love* (1992). These are occult guide-

books to counterfeit spiritual experiences. The first book, also known as the Course, is the classic handbook of the New Age movement. Schucman wrote it as she heard the voice of a counterfeit “Jesus.” It is a false revelation based on all kinds of anti-Biblical teachings—the world isn’t real, Jesus didn’t die for your sins, reincarnation, and other false doctrines. It is based on Christian, Platonic, and Gnostic theology. The second book was an interpretation of the Course that made its concepts more understandable and popular. I also urge all seekers to avoid these popular New Age books: **Starhawk’s** *The Spiral Dance* (1979), **Shirley MacLaine’s** *Out on a Limb* (1983), **James Redfield’s** *The Celestine Prophecy* (1993), **Neale Donald Walsch’s** *Conversations with God* (1995), **Eckhart Tolle’s** *The Power of Now* (1999) and *A New Earth* (2005), and **Rhonda Byrne’s** *The Secret* (2006).

I also warn spiritual seekers to avoid the writings of **Morton Kelsey**, who is certainly a pluralistic New Ager¹ and advocates Yoga and Zen practices in his so-called “Christian meditation” book, *The Other Side of Silence* (1976). This book has been immensely influential and is often cited by Charismatic Christian writers on meditation and spirituality. But it is not an Evangelical mystical book; it is a New Age book. **Agnes Sanford** is another syncretistic New Age Christian author,² whose oft-cited

¹ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), pp. 130-132.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

book *The Healing Light* (1947), influenced **John and Paula Sandford's** Christian inner healing book, *The Transformation of the Inner Man* (1982). Both espouse visualization techniques for healing prayer in Jesus' Name. However, while John and Paula Sandford are Evangelical, Agnes Sanford was a New Age Christian.

A. W. Tozer's *The Pursuit of God* (1948) is not a New Age book either, but it does quote from Lao-tze once, who was a Taoist mystic. What Tozer quotes is not anti-Biblical: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step." Compare this to what Paul wrote on Christian perseverance: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24). Tozer found a Biblical parallel in a non-Christian writer and felt at liberty to quote it; and a good quote it is. This kind of approach to quoting pagans every once in a while was also taken by Luke and the apostle Paul. Aratus is referred to in Acts 17:28; Euripides is quoted in Acts 26:14; Menander is quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:33; and Epimenides is quoted in Titus 1:12.

But this "inspired selection" mentality is not the same as the fellow that I met at the United Methodist camp. While I think that guy felt the Bible and the *Tao Te Ching* (6th century B.C.) were equally inspired, Tozer only had the approach of quoting Biblical truth even when it is found outside of the Bible (like St. Augustine did). The fact of the matter is, we should stick to the revelations of Biblical truth and teaching, and never allow ourselves to be overtaken by the non-Biblical teachings

of New Agers and pagans (e.g., reincarnation, self-esteem, Yoga techniques). But sometimes pagans break into Biblical truth and produce quotations that are amenable to Biblical and Evangelical writers.

I also want to add that one night I was contemplating God in my dorm room at college when I was very tired. As I laid prostrate with my head turned to the left, I sunk into a trance or a half-asleep state of mind. This was a very rare experience. Then I felt as if my dorm room had become 30 feet larger than it was in the physical realm. I felt the presence of someone standing in front of me about 15 feet diagonally to my right. This means that this person was floating in the air outside of my window. I think it was an angel. I didn't see him, but I only heard him say in the voice of a young man, "Who wrote *The Pursuit of God*?" And I replied, "A. W. Tozer." I want you to know that this book is a foundational work of Evangelical mysticism. When the neo-Evangelical movement started to take shape in the 1940s, Tozer was considered one of the great Evangelical leaders. But as an Evangelical, he stood out in his respect for the Catholic mystics and the practice of contemplative prayer.

I have respect for **Richard Foster's** *Celebration of Discipline* (1978), which is an Evangelical book on meditation and contemplation (Chapter 2); as well as Chapters 13 and 14 of his book *Prayer* (1992). Foster is an Evangelical Friend—a conservative Quaker; he believes in John 14:6, and is not a New Ager. Richard Foster is one of the few Evangelicals in modern times to advocate the practices of meditation and contemplation. His book has

had a widespread influence on Evangelicalism and Charismatic Christianity. However, I offer a word of caution about Foster's books: though they are written from a sincere Evangelical perspective (non-syncretistic and non-New Age), they are nevertheless scattered with quotations from New Age Christians. Whether or not Foster discerned this when he first penned his works, I don't know. But what I do know, is that many of the contemplative teachers that Richard Foster quotes in his books have come from a Christianized New Age perspective. These include Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Merton, M. Basil Pennington, Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Jung, Morton Kelsey, and Agnes Sanford.

In addition to Foster's books, some people may feel that **centering prayer** books are all that they can find for spiritual direction about divine contemplation. If that is you, then never fear, because in addition to Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* and *Prayer*—still good works of Evangelical mysticism—there are plenty of non-New Age Christian books out there about divine contemplation that have come down to us through the ages:

1. *The Desert Fathers* (late 300s) by Benedicta Ward
2. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (600) by John Climacus
3. *The Triads* (1338) by Gregory Palamas
4. ***The Cloud of Unknowing* (late 1300s) by Anonymous**
5. *The Scale of Perfection* (1494) by Walter Hilton
6. *The Third Spiritual Alphabet* (1527) by Francisco de Osuna
7. ***The Way of Perfection* (1577) by St. Teresa of Avila**
8. *Holy Wisdom* (1657) by Augustine Baker
9. *The Spiritual Guide* (1675) by Miguel de Molinos
10. ***A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (1685) by Madame Guyon**

11. *The Philokalia* (1782) by Ss. Nicodemus and Makarios of Corinth
12. *Divine Contemplation for All* (1920) by Savinien Louismet
13. *The Pursuit of God* (1948)—Ch. 7 by A. W. Tozer
- 14. *Listening Prayer* (1994) by Leanne Payne**
15. *Contemplative Prayer* (1999) by Pat Gastineau
16. *Wasted on Jesus* (2000)—Ch. 3 by Jim Goll
17. *Praying the Bible* (2003)—Ch. 7 by Wes and Stacey Campbell
18. *How to Hear God's Voice* (2006) by Mark and Patti Virkler

Catholic Mystics and Marianism

The first 12 books were written either by **Catholic or Eastern Orthodox mystics** and will include references to other like mystics. I want to say that most of the writings available to Evangelical mystics today will be from the past history of either Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox mysticism. These are old-time mystics that predated the New Age movement of the 1960s and following. These pre-New Age mystics were also non-New Age mystics and were against the notion that all religions lead to God. Although they were Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, many believed that salvation was only through faith in Jesus Christ—not the Virgin Mary, Buddha, or some other ascended master. Although the soteriological doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone wasn't theologically recovered until the Protestant Reformation, several pre-Reformation mystics at least emphasized Christ's passion and substitutionary work on the cross as the means of our salvation. The so-called "meritorious works" of His mother Mary were also valued, but were only highly valued among some of the mystics—not all

of them.

However, over time the concept of **Marianism** developed and corrupted the salvation view of Catholic mystics. For the first 500 years of church history, Mary was mainly viewed as the mother of God, and some debated about whether or not she remained a virgin after Christ was born. However, most of the church fathers did not approve of any sort of goddess worship of Mary. However, **Ephrem the Syrian** (4th century) was an exception to this. But concerning the “mother of God” title, the facts are true: Jesus is God, Mary gave birth to Jesus, and so Mary is the mother of God. But this should not be confused with goddess worship.

However, when **Bernard of Clairvaux** came around, the attitude of Christian mystics changed towards Mary. Early in the 12th century, Bernard was praying to a statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus. Then he saw a vision of a woman with her child that claimed to be the Virgin Mary. Pornographically, the spirit squeezed its naked breast, and milk squirted into Bernard’s mouth—this has been called the “lactation of St. Bernard.”³ This

³ This might have been a succubus spirit, a demon that tempts to sexual arousal through dreams and visions. Also, this spirit has told countless Catholics to pray to her, worship her, venerate her, focus on her more than Jesus, and believe that salvation is *only* through her. This contradicts John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, and Hebrews 12:2. Some say that there is no literary evidence that this was Bernard’s experience, but rather Henry of Clairvaux’s experience—Bernard’s successor—and legend attributed it to Bernard. Nevertheless, “lactation experiences” of the Virgin Mary were regarded as very holy by these

demonic experience led him to make several conclusions about Mary that would change the landscape of Marianism in the entire Catholic Church. She is not simply Christ's mother anymore, but she is also the "Mediatrice of All Graces." That is, salvation is to be acquired through faith in Mary, who in turn brings us to Jesus, who in turn brings us to the Father. She is now the "Blessed Virgin Mary," the "Queen of Heaven," and the "Gate of Heaven." This private revelation of Bernard was accepted by the Catholic Church and eventually experienced again and again by other subsequent mystics. However, there were a few that disagreed: Bonaventure, a follower of St. Francis of Assisi, maintained that Mary was born with a sinful nature—that is, he rejected the so-called "immaculate conception" of Mary. St. Catherine of Siena, a profound Catholic mystic, said that the real Virgin Mary appeared to her in a vision and told her that she wasn't immaculately conceived—and therefore, the Catholic Church was wrong about that.

But eventually a man named **Alphonsus Liguori** dogmatized Bernard's soteriological view of Mary in his work, *The Glories of Mary* (1750). From the early Middle Ages onward, the Virgin Mary became equally important to meditate on, if not more important, than Jesus Christ. Some Catholic mystics emphasized meditation on Christ and His passion, but others began focusing on the Virgin Mary and the saints; while others practiced both more or

monks. See James France, *Medieval Images of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), p. 207.

less. This opened them up to tremendous deceptions and encounters with demons that masqueraded as the Virgin Mary and various saints; and these demons became their “spirit guides.”

In reaction to these excesses, Christian mysticism was rejected for the most part by **the Protestant Reformation**. Because they didn’t want to be deceived by demons pretending to be the Virgin Mary or saints, the Protestants almost completely abandoned the disciplines of meditation and contemplation on God. The Protestants wanted to get “back to the Bible,” and not open up the doorway to non-Biblical experiences like the Catholic mystics did. However, this also oversimplified Christian spirituality down to one of belief in doctrines, Bible reading, and growing in holiness. No visions. No impressions. No voice of God. No healings. No miracles. The mystical and Charismatic dimension of spirituality had been lost for the most part. There were some radical Protestants that held on to mystical and Charismatic experiences (e.g., the Zwickau prophets, the French prophets, and the Quakers). But most Protestants held miracles in suspicion, if not only open to them in spontaneous and rare occasions. What resulted was a general Protestant attitude that knowing the Bible was more important than direct guidance from the Holy Spirit; or that direct guidance from the Holy Spirit wasn’t even necessary at all. William James said, “Through the practice of [contemplation] the higher levels of mystical experience may be attained. It is odd that Protestantism, especially Evangelical Protestantism, should seemingly have abandoned every-

thing methodical in this line.”⁴ This changed with **Pentecostalism** and **the Charismatic movement**.

Although many Catholic mystics were deceived about Marianism and praying to saints, this does not mean that Catholicism is magical, occultic, or New Age. Their views on salvation were often encumbered by dogmas about works and things, but I still believe that some of the Catholic mystics had genuine encounters with the God of the Bible. This is why I feel free to refer to their writings in regards to meditation and contemplation—especially to Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. Though many of them were deceived about Mary and the saints, they were also right on point when it came to quietude, stillness, concentration on God, and spiritual discernment for the most part. So, when it comes to reading the Catholic mystics, I feel that one should “eat the meat and spit out the bones”—or accept what is good and true in their writings, but reject that which is bad and false, even though one might find occasional venerations of Mary.

New Age Publishers of Catholic Mystics

Finally, I want to add that as spiritual seekers and Evangelical mystics continue to explore Christian mystical books, they may be frustrated to find that New Age book publishers will sometimes publish orthodox (pro-

⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), p. 312.

John 14:6) Christian writings! For example, G. B. Scaramelli originally published an Italian work in 1754 entitled *Il Direttorio Mistico*. But in 1913, a proto-New Age publisher named **John Watkins** produced an abridged English translation of it called *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*. Today, a New Age publisher named **Ibis Press** prints it. What was once an inaccessible work to English speaking people was made available by a New Age publisher. The content by Scaramelli himself is theologically orthodox, but the book is encased in a New Age cover. On the first page, the book also has a New Age advertisement on it, speaking about the unity of world religions. Because New Agers believe in the unity of all religions, they feel free to turn to Christian mystical theology, incorporate it into their pluralistic religious ideology, and publish it as their own. No doubt, G. B. Scaramelli, who was a zealous Jesuit, would be absolutely disgusted to know that pagans were capitalizing on his work, and making him look like one of them. Perish the thought! As an Evangelical mystic that opposes New Age spirituality, I hate that Scaramelli's book is only available in English through a New Age publisher. However, my conscience feels free to simply rip out the first page of the book, and keep the rest of it. But I'm sure that several Christians would disagree with me on this point—let each of us judge what is right by our own conscience in this matter (Rom. 14).

Paulist Press is renowned for publishing many orthodox Christian mystical texts through their "Classics of Western Spirituality" series; also, many of these editions

have scholarly commentary. However, this is a New Age publisher because they happily publish works of non-Christian spirituality in Jewish, Muslim, and Native American traditions. **Kessinger Publishing** is a secular publisher of rare antique books from all genres. This includes not only occult books and Christian mystical books, but everything from anthropology to earth sciences to history to medicine to drama. Another New Age publisher is **Shambhala Publications**, who have taken it upon themselves to publish theologically orthodox Christian books such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* (1300s), *The Way of a Pilgrim* (1884), and Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* (1694).

Mirabai Starr, a New Age religious scholar, has translated a modern English version of St. Teresa of Avila's theologically orthodox work, *The Interior Castle* (1577). Again, the book itself is orthodox in doctrine, although it was translated by a New Ager; and might I add, that although Starr is a New Ager, she has done a beautiful job at modernizing what was once a difficult to understand English translation by E. Allison Peers. Do I like it that non-New Age Christian mystical books are being published by pagan New Agers? No, I hate it. However, I also feel that God does not consider it unlawful or sinful to own, read, or endorse such a book—so long as the content of the book itself does not convey any pluralistic New Age teachings.

Regeneration

Finally, after this long discussion, it is time to discuss the experiences of worship, meditation, and contemplation. Most of this book assumes that the reader has already experienced both regeneration and the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is the spiritual experience of being born again at conversion (John 3), or going through a change in the will towards living one's life for the glory of God. A true Evangelical Christian is a regenerated Christian—one who has felt the desire to live a godly and holy life, to live by the principles of the Bible, and to sacrifice his old sinful ways of living and replace them with godly and holy habits. A regenerated Christian has experienced an awakening of faith in Christ and an awareness of the reality of God (Heb. 11:1). Sanctification is the ongoing process and growth of regeneration in the life of the Christian believer, and is evidenced by a deepening experience of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). Zealous obedience to the moral commandments of God is another sign of sanctification, but more than anything it is that of divine love transforming the heart of the Christian (Matt. 22:37-40).

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a Charismatic experience that is secondary and distinct from the experience of regeneration. It's function is two-fold: (1) it fans the flame of moral regeneration and (2) it confers Charismatic spiritual gifts of revelation, healing power, and miracle working. Whereas regeneration is an experience of the internal work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an external work. Praying and worshiping in tongues is the primary external sign that one has experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Other signs of Holy Spirit baptism include spiritual drunkenness (2:13, 15), dreams and visions (2:17), miracles and healings (2:43), and zealous worship (2:46-47). When a Christian has the Holy Spirit both on the inside and outside, we may say that he is a *Spirit-filled* Christian. He is then both internally and externally absorbed in the Spirit of God. This book is an attempt to guide Spirit-filled Christians into a deeper experience of God through the practices of worship, meditation, and contemplation. So, now that I have primed you about these things, let your curiosity be satisfied as we learn together what it means to experience God.

John Boruff
Crossville, TN
November 20, 2009

PART 1:
MYSTICAL PRACTICES
AND EXPERIENCES

This is the core of the book; especially Chapter 3 on “Contemplation” and Chapter 4 on “Spiritual Experiences.” Chapters 1 and 2 deal with Charismatic worship and discursive meditation (repetitive thinking and visualization). My message in these chapters is to point you to Chapter 3—that contemplation is *the* main way to experience God. God can be found in the other practices for sure, but it is in contemplation that God is experienced most completely. **Contemplation is the central practice of the Christian mystics. To be quiet and simply concentrate on Jesus with your eyes closed for a long period of time—this has the power to develop your spiritual senses to experience ecstasies, impressions, visions, and voices from the Holy Spirit and God’s angels.** If someone were ever to ask me, “How can I experience God? What do I have to do?” I would answer with one simple word: contemplation. It is not really a practice of *listening to Jesus* as much as it is a practice of *looking at Jesus* in your imagination. Nevertheless, if you look at Jesus for long enough, then you will eventually hear Him speak through your mind. If you can keep your mind concentrated on Jesus for long enough, then you will eventually experience God. These will usually be small experiences; nothing like apparitions of physical visitations from Jesus—but they will be experiences nonetheless. But sometimes, you never know—Jesus might really ap-

pear to you in an extraordinary visitation! Contemplation is very hard to persevere in, so it will develop patience in you; but also humility as you realize what terrible contemplators we are without the help of the Holy Spirit. But God is gracious to meet our needs.

CHAPTER 1
WORSHIP

Worship: Contemplation with Music and Movement

I want to start with the topic of worship because I feel that it is the easiest and most direct way to experience God's presence. I understand that there are several different Christian traditions of worship ranging from the most serious and liturgical to the most lighthearted and Charismatic. I am going to be discussing Charismatic worship and supporting it. In my experience, *Charismatic worship is the loud way to God*. It's not that it absolutely has to be with blaringly loud music or shouting, but those things are certainly welcome. From here on, I'm going to refer to "worship" in the Charismatic sense, because I believe it is Biblical. Worship is not about singing songs, beautiful music, raising or clapping hands, shouting, prostrating, bowing, kneeling, closing the eyes, or falling under the power of the Spirit. Worship is about adoring God in His manifest presence, which is really a contemplative state even though it might not be quiet and still. All of those other things, like music and body motions, are really only accompaniments to the worship experience. Anyone who has not had a true worship experience does not know what this means. They think that worship means to sing songs to God. No, no, no. The songs are only intended to *accompany* the loving contemplation of God's presence. True worship is loving on God.

Spirit-Filled Worship

The music, the lyrics, the closing of the eyes, the group setting, and the concentration on God all mixes together to merge into a wonderful contemplative experience. Unlike divine contemplation, there is not solitude, quiet, or stillness. Rather there is the company of fellow worshipers, the sound of worship music, and the motions of your body responding to holy impulses from God's Spirit. However, what divine contemplation and worship do have in common is that they both are efforts to feel after God's presence and experience the infused contemplation of God: the *perfect concentration of the mind and heart on God, to the exclusion of all distractions*. The apostle Paul said that people "should seek God, in the hope that they might *feel* after Him and find Him. Yet He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27, RSV).

In the state of infused or Spirit-filled worship, the worshiper feels the presence of God. The eyes are closed, the mind is concentrated on God, and the Christian is aware of nothing but God. He stops paying attention to the lyrics of the worship song, and the music remains in the background of his mind. He has lost his self-consciousness and has become completely abandoned to worship God. He doesn't care what others in the church meeting might think about him; he just wants to feel the Holy Spirit; he just wants to immerse himself in God's peaceful presence. Thoughts might tempt him about what others might think: "Oh, he's just being a show-off"; "She's trying to draw attention to herself"; "What a nui-

sance!” and many other such things. Pay these thoughts no mind. Just enter into God’s presence. That’s all that matters (2 Sam. 6).

Feeling God’s Presence During Worship

Once God’s Spirit is felt, He will give all sorts of feelings to the worshiper. First and foremost, *the experience of God’s Spirit as present*, or the manifest presence of God, is a spiritual phenomenon all in itself. The mind is perfectly concentrated on God with reverence and love. The eyes are closed and generally all that is seen is the black or purplish color of the imagination. But the worshiper can definitely feel the presence of Someone on the other side of the eyelids. It is like Someone is standing three inches in front of you, facing you, or even enveloping your body like a cloud of Spirit. It is a presence. Were you to open your eyes, you would see nothing, but it’s almost as if you expect there to be Someone standing right in front of you; and that Someone is God. In mystical theology, St. Teresa of Avila called this sort of experience an intellectual vision (*The Interior Castle* 6.8); in more recent times, it could also be called an external impression from the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes this special presence of God is felt internally as well, as if you were a sponge that is saturated with the sweet water or ghostly mist of God’s comforting Spirit. Indeed, sometimes people’s spiritual eyes have been opened to see the glory of the Lord, or the visible light-filled mist of the Holy Spirit. It is like a luminous

cloud (Exod. 24:16). But most of the time this Spirit is invisible, waiting for us to “feel after Him and find Him”; this we can do through Jesus—the only Way, Truth, and Life—because it is by the shedding of His blood that we are enabled to enter into the Most Holy Place and feel God’s presence (Heb. 10:19). Since the Old Testament veil was rent between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place in the temple (Matt. 27:51), God’s presence can be felt anywhere in the world at any time. What was once only accessible to Old Testament priests and prophets, can now be felt by any worshiper of God.

Bodily Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

Physical manifestations, or *bodily manifestations*, are inspired body motions that a worshiper experiences as he is in a state of Spirit-filled worship. To those who don’t understand these manifestations in a congregation, they are repulsive; but to the worshiper experiencing them, they are wonderful. As your eyes are mainly closed, and your mind is focused on God, as you worship you may feel the desire to raise your hands up high to God in Heaven; the desire to worship God by praising in tongues; the desire to kneel in reverence before His Majesty; the desire to prostrate yourself in reverence and fear before the King of Heaven; or the desire to get up and dance in the Spirit; the desire to clap your hands in praise to Him; the desire to shout “Hallelujah!” or “Praise the Lord!”; the desire to laugh joyfully in the presence of God; the desire to quietly groan or moan sounds of de-

light as the Holy Spirit comforts you inside and outside; or you may feel sudden surges of divine “energy” or excitement pulsating through your body, making you want to jerk your arms and legs!

These and many other such things can happen as the worshiper enters into the worship experience. For those that are skeptical of these bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit, I recommend reading Guy Chevreau’s *Catch the Fire* (1994), which demonstrates quite extensively that Jonathan Edwards approved of these things during the Great Awakening. After worshiping like this for several years, I eventually made accommodations to position myself for some of these experiences. For example, if I know that if I am in a church that is remotely open to dancing in the Spirit, then I will make sure that I have a few feet of *dancing space* as I worship in the congregation—this is so that I don’t bump into someone while my eyes are closed and my mind is intently focused on God. Also, since I’ve noticed that in the Spirit I’m often led to raise my hands or bow before God, my shirt would have a tendency to ride up in the back. Unfortunately, it would initially ride up and show the skin of my lower back for any onlooker to see. So, I made the accommodation of *tucking in an under shirt* and wearing an over shirt, so that whenever I would raise my hands or bow, only the over shirt would ride up, and the under shirt would continue to cover the skin of my lower back.

Worship Music

The worship music in the Charismatic setting should be rhythmical, melodious, majestic, and intimate. The reason why **rhythm** is important for spiritual worship is because it has a tendency to lull the mind into a restful contemplative state. It is this restful posture of the mind that makes it possible to enter into the Spirit and make contact with God's presence. However, as plenty of Fundamentalists would like to tell you, drums and rhythms can induce sexual overtones—which is true sometimes. So, worship leaders ought to be sensitive to the rhythms of each song to see whether or not a song could be interpreted sexually through its rhythm or otherwise. However, if a rhythm is discerned to be non-sexual and fit for spiritual worship, then some amount of repetition is necessary to aid the minds of the worshipers into a restful concentration on God. The reason why **melody** is important for spiritual worship, is because it soothes the soul and helps the mind to concentrate on the worship song, which in turn helps to point the worshiper towards God. If the song has an attractive melody, then it's all the better, because it draws the attention of the worshiper. If a song has a boring melody, then it will not help the worshiper very much to concentrate on God. However, if the melody of the song is too flamboyant or flashy, then it can actually distract the worshiper from God Himself—and the worshiper will be drawn to simply enjoy the tune of the song. These are sensitive issues that a worship leader ought to feel out for himself.

The reason why the element of **majesty** is important in the rhythm, melody, and words of a song, is because we are worshiping God Himself. He is the King of Heaven, the Creator of worlds, the Majestic One, the Sovereign over all things, and His kingdom shall have no end. Cherubim and seraphim bow down before Him, lightnings and thunderings proceed from His throne, and thousands of thousands come and minister before Him. There is no limit to His knowledge, no measurement of His love, and no comparison to His powers. His mind is of light, love, and purity. We ought to worship Him with such an attitude since we are the people of His pasture, and the citizens of His kingdom and vast domain.

Nevertheless, the worship song should also contain words that bespeak an element of **intimacy** in our love for God, since true contemplative Charismatic worship is to love on God in His presence. He is our Father, our Abba, our Best Friend in this world, our Comforter, and closest companion. His presence is near to us and we can feel the fire of His love burn in our bosoms almost physically. Why then would we only sing to Him as if He were a God far off? He is a God that is also near to us, and dwells within our spirits; and He makes us cry, “Abba, Father!” Behold the gentleness and sweetness of His love. Oh, the great love of God! Oh, how sweet is His presence! It is like living waters and honey for my spirit, soul, and body. So refreshing! So wonderful! Oh, the joy of the Lord! The peace that surpasses understanding! The ecstasy and bliss! It’s like Heaven on Earth!

Worship music is usually loud and involves singing in a group setting, but I would recommend the *WOW Worship* compilations for private worship in your home. **Soaking music** is a little bit different—it is usually quiet and calming and involves instrumental music, but is intended as an aid to soaking prayer (contemplation) in God's presence. Depending upon the artist, soaking music can have a special ability to impart revelatory power and welcome the manifest presence of God into the room it is played in; for soaking music I would recommend John Belt's *The Soaking Presence Pack*. I also recommend looking at the Soaking Worship section on <http://store.tacf.org>.

Divine Contemplation: The Purpose of Worship

Divine contemplation is the goal of all true worship of God. This means to bring the mind and heart into a state of perfect concentration on God, and to set the imagination to lovingly see God and fix its attention on Him. Close your eyes. Focus on the Lord. Concentrate on God. Seek God's face and you will find Him appear to you in your imagination. His image will appear in your mind. Focus on Him. Concentrate on the face of Jesus and worship God in your mind, as the worship music plays, and as your mouth continues to sing or pray—for there is flexibility in the Holy Spirit. When you're worshipping God in Spirit and in truth, you don't necessarily have to sing. You can just stare at God in your mind. Just gaze at Him, love on Him, and be with Him. He is your

God, your Maker; you are His creature; relish in the moment. You may not see His image in your imagination—just as well; so long as you're concentrated on God and you are in His presence, feeling the Spirit, loving the Spirit.

Absorb yourself into God's presence; soak in His Spirit. Lose your awareness of everyone in the church meeting. Don't think about them. Don't think about the chair that you have been sitting in. Don't be conscious of your self. Just close your eyes and think about God. Don't even try to think too hard about the words of the worship song or about keeping time with the music. Just concentrate on God. Close your eyes. Focus on God. Be conscious of God and you will understand that you are just a humble creature and He is the High and Lofty Creator of the universe, who has descended to your low estate to love you and be with you in the depths of your bosom. Nothing is in your mind but God. You are lost in God, in a sort of ecstasy detached from the world. All distractions are gone now and only God is in your mind. You love Him. You ask Him to forgive you for doubting His existence. You repent, because you realize that God is real. Your faith is renewed, because you are conscious of God's presence. He is near and you know it. You love Him, you praise Him: this is spiritual worship. "God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

CHAPTER 2 MEDITATION

Dwelling: The Central Theme of Meditation

When Americans and other Westerners think of the word “meditation” it is usually the New Age understanding of it: emptying the mind and absorbing oneself into the nothingness of “nirvana.” Images of Yoga, Buddha, hippies, crystals, and Hindu gurus start to fill the imagination. Therefore when most Christians encounter the idea of meditation, they think it means a pagan occult practice that should be resisted like the plague. However, meditation is a tool and there are many methods of it. Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and Zen are not the only methods of meditation. If that is what you think, then it is probably because your church tradition is not familiar with the contemplative spirituality of Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

Because there are many different methods of meditation not only in non-Christian religions, but also within Christian denominations, it can be difficult to give a simple definition for what meditation is. There is no one definition for what meditation is, but there is a common theme that is shared by all of the different methods; and that common theme is *dwelling on a topic*. You see then with such a broad theme as this, meditation can pretty much be applied to anything. Meditation is a mental practice that can be used for good or evil. Meditation becomes Christian when it is applied to Biblical topics such as God’s Law (Ps. 1:2), God Himself (Ps. 63:6), God’s

works (Ps. 77:12), or how to conduct oneself ethically (1 Tim. 4:15).

Abiding in Christ

If this is the case, then what does it mean to “dwell on” something? It means to stay there, to live there, and abide there mentally. Jesus spoke of meditating on Him when He spoke of abiding in the Vine:

I am the true Vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. *Abide in Me, and I in you.* As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. *I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.* If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,* just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full (John 15:1-11, NKJV).

Although Jesus uses a parable in order to teach this lesson, we should be able to see that just like a branch of a vine has to dwell on the vine in order to stay alive, so also Christians must dwell on Christ mentally if they are to stay spiritually alive. What does it mean to be spiritually alive? To have His love and His joy in our hearts (Gal. 5:22). In the above passage Christ teaches a method of meditation that a monk named Brother Lawrence came to call “the practice of the presence of God.” It is a very difficult practice and requires the help of the Holy Spirit. But it is basically concentrating on God throughout the day in the ordinary tasks of life. In Brother Lawrence’s case it was often while doing the dishes at his monastery. It is, in a sense, a holy obsession with God; not allowing the mind to stray to other things for too long. Or, if the mind has to concentrate on other things, it does them in the midst of keeping a conscious awareness of God continually. Basically, this is meditating without ceasing or “walking in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). However, this is only one of the many methods of meditation. So do not feel discouraged if you find yourself failing at continually keeping your mind on God. But please do get up and try again, for God will keep those in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him (Isa. 26:3).

Rumination: Repetitive Thinking About a Topic

Meditation is something that people usually do with their eyes open, and while they are active. The mystical theologians of old used to call it “discursive meditation”

in order to show how the intellectual faculty is usually what is being used. In a sense it is “in-depth thinking,” but thinking is not the essence of the meditative experience. Dwelling is the essence of it. Obsessing is the essence of it. Sometimes meditation is likened to a cow chewing, regurgitating, and re-chewing its cud—the technical term for this is “rumination.” In man’s mind, meditation is an experience in which that one topic *cyclically* passes through one’s thoughts. There is a *repetition* in the mind of certain issues surrounding the meditative topic.

For example, in the above passage on abiding in the Vine, the Lord Jesus repeated the word “vine” 3 times, “abide” 8 times, “fruit” 6 times, “love” 5 times, and personal pronouns like “Me, My, and I” 25 times. Clearly the central meditative topic in Christ’s discourse is Himself. All of the other related issues such as the vine, abiding, fruit, and love are connected to the central topic: Christ Himself. This is what discursive meditation is. It is in-depth repetitive thinking about one topic: dwelling on the central topic. The mind might run in sort of a circuit, but it will always come back to the beginning where it began: the central topic. For Christians, that central topic always is and always should be Christ Himself. He is not a vain repetition, but a good one.

Spirit-Led Meditation

There can be a supernatural dimension to discursive meditation, like when one feels his mind constantly being

drawn back to think on and to dwell on a divine topic such as God's attributes (John 6:44), or why it is that God became a Man, or why God decided to make events in Christ's life parallel to so many things in Moses' life, or why Christ chose twelve apostles rather than seven, or why Christ was transfigured, or why it is that God chose to atone for the sins of the world through the cross rather than by some other instrument of torture, or why Christ ascended into Heaven rather than be teleported. These types of **meditations on the life of Christ** are another time honored method of meditating in the contemplative tradition. In a sense, they are *thoughts about God that stupefy the mind* so much that they bring it into a restful state.

Meditative Visualization and the Imagery Controversy

One thing that some mystics liked to practice was visualizing certain scenes from the life of Christ in their private meditations. I suppose one could do this with either the eyes opened or closed, but I think closing the eyes makes it easier. "The Mysteries of the Life of Christ" in 261-312 of *The Spiritual Exercises* (1548) of St. Ignatius of Loyola were designed around this principle. Here is one of the mysteries or visualizations taken from St. Ignatius, called "How Christ Our Lord Calmed The Storm":

First Point. While Christ our Lord was on the lake, asleep, a great tempest arose.

Second Point. His frightened disciples awaken Him; and He reprehends them for their little faith: “Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”

Third Point. He commanded the winds and the sea to cease, and the sea grew calm. The disciples marveled at this, and asked: “What sort of Man is this, for even the winds and the sea obey Him?”¹

Some Christians are against using the imagination in order to visualize Christ, such as Douglas Groothuis and Dave Hunt.² They think that it goes against the Scriptural mandate not to make a graven image for idol worship (Exod. 20:4-6). Unfortunately, I feel that this is an “iconoclastic” mindset³ and leads to the assumption that Gospel artwork and movies are inherently blasphemous

¹ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. George Ganss (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), pp. 107-108; Section 279.

² Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 180-185; Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1985), pp. 123-188.

³ *Iconoclasm* is the destruction of religious images believed to be idols—usually artistic renditions of Jesus or saints. In the Byzantine Orthodox Church, this became a major issue in the 8th century. When the Protestant Reformation emerged in the 16th century, iconoclasm was revived through Andreas Karlstadt, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. Today several Protestants are still influenced by this Reformation iconoclasm.

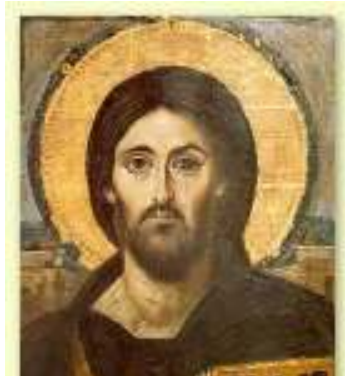
simply because they portray artistic renditions of Jesus. Furthermore, this would also render t-shirts, crucifixes, and all sculptures with Christ on them to be blasphemous. Some godly Christians to this day have an iconoclastic viewpoint when it comes to Christ imagery, and we should respect them to live as their conscience dictates (Rom. 14).

But I am not an iconoclast. I feel that my conscience is free to exercise my imagination to portray imagery of Jesus in both visualization and art. I have two reasons for this:

(1) Colossians 1:15 says that Christ “is the image of the invisible God.” The very fact that Jesus Christ made Himself visible and tangible to the twelve apostles and others in the first century proves that God’s heart is not to hide from man. He wants people to see Him. Christ told Philip, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). From the moment that Christ was born into this world, throughout all His earthly life, to the moment He ascended into Heaven was living tangible proof that God did not think it was a sin against Exodus 20:4-6 to look at a visible image of God. Christ did not walk around with a veil covering His face. Rather, the very fact that Christ was visible in the first century should cause us to interpret Exodus 20:4-6 as a prohibition against pagan idols, not against images of God. If you read the Second Commandment closely, it does not prohibit making images of God, but rather prohibits worshiping images of creatures—like how occultists use idols. I don’t think it

even prohibits making images of creatures, only the *worship* of images of creatures.

(2) Dreams and visions *of* God that are given *by* God prove that God is not against people seeing images of Himself. This was even true in the Old Testament days when people were more against imagery of the Lord. Isaiah 6:1 says that the prophet “saw the Lord.” According to *The Babylonian Talmud* (5th century), it was Isaiah’s testimony of this vision that condemned him to death by the hand of Manasseh (*Yebamoth* 49b). Isaiah was sawn in half simply because he reported a vision in which he saw the Lord in the form of an image. In Revelation 1:12-16, the apostle John describes in detail the imagery of Christ’s face and body in glorified form. People throughout church history and today have and are still experiencing “beatific visions” of God. If modern iconoclasts want to continue in their anti-imagery of God position, then we should let them be free to do so. But I believe that the evidence is more than enough in favor of a pro-imagery of God position. If God is against people using their God-given imagination to think of Him in pictures, then why would He appear in the flesh and why would He appear in visions? It is only natural for people to create artwork of such experiences. Therefore, I believe that God inspires artwork of Himself—even imagery of His face. Personally, I’m led to believe that artwork such as “Christ Pantocrator” could possibly be the divinely revealed image of Christ.



Could it be possible that God has revealed His image to people in dreams and visions after many years since His time on Earth in the first century? I think it is not only possible, but probable. If I may, I will quote Richard Foster at length here to present his defense of using visualization in meditation:

Some have objected to using the imagination out of concern that it is untrustworthy and could even be used by the evil one. There is good reason for concern, for the imagination, like all our faculties, has participated in the fall. But just as we believe that God can take our reason (fallen as it is) and sanctify it and use it for His good purposes, so we believe He can sanctify the imagination and use *it* for His good purposes. Of course, the imagination can be distorted by satan, but then so can all our faculties. God created us with an imagination, and, as Lord of His creation, He can and does redeem it and use it for the work of the kingdom of God.

Another concern about the use of the imagination is the fear of human manipulation and even self-deception. After all, some people have an overactive imagination, and they can concoct all kinds of images of what they would like to see happen. Besides, does the Bible not warn against the vain imaginations of the wicked (Rom. 1:21)?

The concern is legitimate. It is possible for all of this to be nothing more than vain human strivings. That is why it is so vitally important for us to be thrown in utter dependence upon God in these matters. We are seeking to think God's thoughts after Him, to delight in His presence, to desire His truth and His way. The more we live in this way, the more God utilizes our imagination for His good purposes. To believe that God can sanctify and utilize the imagination is simply to take seriously the Christian idea of incarnation. God so accommodates, so enfleshes Himself into our world, that He uses the images we know and understand to teach us about the unseen world of which we know so little and find so difficult to understand.⁴

For Christians like Douglas Groothuis and Dave Hunt, it really boils down to two main concerns: (1) demonic deception from occult visualization and (2) self-deception from not distinguishing between visions and visualizations. In Groothuis' first concern, he makes reference to a popular New Age book called *Creative Visu-*

⁴ Richard Foster, *Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 148.

alization (1978) by Shakti Gawain. The main teaching in this book is that one can magically create his own reality by visualizing it into existence by one's natural psychic "god" power. Whether it's health, wealth, fame, or romance. All one has to do is visualize it enough times in order for it to come to pass in physical reality, and it will come to pass. This, by the strictest definition, is a form of witchcraft: using visualization to manipulate the physical realm for *selfish* purposes, and this is why witchcraft is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:20).

So far I have presented an Ignatian form of meditative visualization of Christ, which has the power of opening up our spirits to actual encounters with Jesus Christ beyond visualization, and crosses over into the realm of visions and apparitions of God! It's up to you to decide whether you think it is a selfish work of witchcraft to want to encounter Christ through visualization, but I believe that *the pure in heart* will see God (Matt. 5:8). Douglas Groothuis and Dave Hunt insist that miraculous visualization of Christ is a selfish work of witchcraft because the Bible is supposedly silent about it, but occultists aren't.⁵ They are entitled to their opinions, but I don't agree with them on that point.

While the Bible may not have any thorough in-depth teaching on visualization, I do believe that there are a few verses that involve visualization: "Look to the Lord and His strength; *seek His face* always" (1 Chron. 16:11)

⁵ Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age*, p. 183; Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity*, p. 140.

and “*I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken*” (Ps. 16:8). I believe that the former verse means that *we should visualize the face of Jesus in our minds during contemplation*. In the second verse, David says that *he* has set the Lord in front of himself. To me, that means that David visualized the Lord standing in front of him and at his right side. New Agers also practice this kind of meditative visualization in order to contact their “spirit guides” and their unorthodox versions of “Jesus,” as if he were some sort of ascended Hindu guru.

But orthodox Christian mystics throughout church history—especially the Beguines—have practiced visualization of the Biblical Jesus Christ, and I believe it resulted in them experiencing face to face encounters with the God of the Bible!⁶ **Both Christian mystics and pagan psychics agree that concentrated visualization on one point is the best way to develop the spiritual senses.** The pagans may visualize their gods to contact them, but we Christians should visualize Christ alone—whom we know is the one true God. It takes time, dedication, and patience to develop these senses. Both experienced witches and Christian prophets have developed their spiritual senses for apprehending visions, voices, and impressions with great clarity. What the psychics call clairvoyance, the Bible calls the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10). The only difference between clairvoyance and the

⁶ Bernard McGinn, “Visions and Visualizations in the Here and Hereafter,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98:3 (2005): 235-236.

Biblical gift of prophecy is the power source. Witches draw from what they think is a natural psychic power, but is actually a demonic source. Christian prophets draw from the power of the Holy Spirit and God's angels.

The Christian mystics' **visualizations of Christ**, in some mysterious spiritual way, opened them up to real **visions of Christ** that then became no longer psychologically induced images but divinely introduced ones. Unfortunately, many of the Catholic mystics also visualized Mary in their meditations and it would open them up to encounters with a "Mary" who would tell them to trust in her for their help and guidance. That is not Biblical. Only God is to be our inner spiritual Guide (John 16:13), not any saint or angel. Though sometimes God sends saints and angels to guide us, it would be wrong for us to try to enter into a miraculous visualization of them.

Not only is miraculous visualization a method of encountering God, but it can also be used as a method of manipulating physical reality for God's purposes like healing the sick or even moving a physical mountain! Visualize the sick being well as you pray for them in Jesus' Name, and it will be so through the power of the Holy Spirit and your visualization. Dave Hunt would insist that this is not of God but "Christianized" white magic, because it would be an "at will" miracle.⁷ But we have a free will *and* God's Spirit lives within us. When we pray or visualize a thing *in* the Spirit of Jesus—even

⁷ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity*, pp. 106-107.

for financial provision, the Holy Spirit in us will gladly cooperate with our desire to draw from His inner reserve of power.

This is “at will” miracle working through a synergistic⁸ cooperation with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not about commanding God to perform miracles for *selfish purposes*, but about commanding defects in creation to come into miraculous alignment with *God’s purposes*—on Earth as it is in Heaven (Matt. 6:10). There will always be those that will say it’s not always God’s will to heal the sick, and that we shouldn’t be so presumptuous as to command or even pray for healing—God will do it in His sovereign timing. While God’s timing is an issue in healing, it’s not Biblical to stop praying for healing (Jas. 5:14-15). We should *assume* that God always wants us to exercise the authority over sickness that He has given to all of us as Christians (Matt. 10:1, NIV; Mark 16:17-18). Using the laying on of hands, visualizing healing, and authoritatively commanding sickness to be healed are the most effective methods of doing this.

In contrast with Gawain’s occult teaching, these at will miracles do not draw from innate “psychic” power, but from the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is delighted to

⁸ *Synergism* is the reality that God’s Spirit cooperates with human will, but does not force human will to do anything. This teaching is implied in Biblical passages such as Mark 16:20, Acts 7:51, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 3:9, and 2 Corinthians 6:1—which all show instances of God’s way of working *with* man for various purposes. This is taught by the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Arminians, and the Wesleyans.

act through His children in the spreading of the Gospel through miracles. **Occult visualization and Christian visualization are different on all counts except that they both use the imagination.** Therefore, just because visualization is practiced by pagans does not mean that it is sinful for Christians to practice visualization in their own way. In fact, because satan is a master counterfeiter (2 Cor. 11:13-15), we should conclude that meditative visualization is originally a Judeo-Christian practice that has been counterfeited and perverted by satan for the occult world—even though the Bible is silent about it for the most part. Why? Because the fruit of the Spirit is evident in Christian visualization, and that is how we are to judge spiritual truth from spiritual error (Matt. 7:17; Gal. 5:22-23).

For Groothuis' second concern, he says:

It needs to be clarified that the many **visions** given in the Bible are not the same as **visualizations**. A vision is objectively given by God for a specific purpose: to foretell the future (as with Daniel), to call a prophet (as with Ezekiel), or for some other God-directed reason. Visualization is the subjective activation of the imagination by human will. Visualizing a certain scene is not the same as receiving a vision sent by God. The one is psychologically induced; the other is divinely introduced.⁹

⁹ Douglas Groothuis, *Confronting the New Age*, pp. 181-182.

Groothuis then goes on to state that he thinks receiving spontaneous visions from God are okay, but only if they are received outside of the context meditative visualization. I disagree with this, because I have been telling you that miraculous visualization can lead to genuine visionary encounters with Christ. He contends that meditative visualization of Christ leads to false, imperfect, man-made images of God in our minds. And because they are images of God produced by the human imagination, they must therefore be idolatrous to worship. However, I say that **any reasonable Christian should be able to make the simple distinction between a genuine vision of God that's passively received and pictures of God that he is simply making up in his mind on purpose.** A vision of God is received passively—it happens to an observer and is mainly out of his control. Visualization is something that we make up in our minds actively; that is, if we stop imagining mental pictures, then images will stop appearing in our imagination. Either way we look at it, we should never worship images; even if God were to present us with genuine images of Himself in dreams and visions.

We must worship God alone—not visions of Him, our own visualizations of Him, or any artistic representations of Him. We must worship His *person* in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). But if images of God can draw us closer to His Spirit, then I say that is a good thing. For more on the topic of Christian visualization, I recommend David Yonggi Cho's *The Fourth Dimension, 2 Vols.* (1979, 1983). But I would advise against the writings on

visualization by Agnes Sanford, Morton Kelsey, Norman Vincent Peale, and Robert Schuller, because they were New Age Christians.¹⁰ Let me end this by saying that I disagree with the use of Word of Faith extremes of visualization in order to get “miracle money” from God—while it is sometimes necessary for God’s provision, it should always be tempered by this: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9).

Lectio Divina

Another method of meditation is called *lectio divina* or “divine reading.” This is when one reads the Bible, theology, or some other Christian book with a prayerful or meditative attitude. One reads a sacred passage, and all the while in his heart, he is listening to the Holy Spirit to speak a special *rhema* word to him through the reading. Sometimes people will *personalize* a Biblical passage, and try to see what God may be speaking to them through that passage. Then they reflect on it; they run it through their minds over and over along a circuitous route. And it isn’t just any passage. It is something special that sort of “jumps off the page” at them and hits them hard. They read the passage, and one topic just really stands out to them. Then the reflection process begins; and they find

¹⁰ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity*, pp. 124-136, 132, 148.

themselves dwelling on that topic. It then leads them to dwell on God Himself. Eventually, after they have been still and quiet and restful in all of their reflections, they find it easy to simply focus on God with their eyes closed. Divine contemplation begins, and after several minutes of feeling God's presence, God Himself may even speak to them through mental images and a still small voice (1 Kings 19:12).

Divine Contemplation: The Purpose of Meditation

I have found that God has spoken to me personally through devotional books on many occasions. I have also found that when I have been studying the Bible in-depth with commentary notes, or studying theology for prolonged periods of time, or reading some other devotional book, that sometimes my mind becomes drawn into the desire to practice the simple *contemplation* of God in stillness. Then it may be that I really start to have some spiritual experiences of God. Sometimes when I study theology for a very long time, I hear a still small voice as I'm studying. Divine contemplation is the goal of meditation. Some may call it "contemplative prayer" if they please, but it is not really "prayer" in the usual sense of the term. It is not petitioning or interceding by asking God for favors. It is simply concentrating on God in your mind—with imagery or not. Only God is in the mind, and nothing else; all distractions are pushed out. This is the best posture to be in for receiving spiritual experiences and revelations from God. G. B. Scaramelli says that

meditation is “the mother of contemplation in the sense that it prepares the way with its laborious use of the mind; while contemplation is the extraordinary means. Both methods produce the same benefits, but they are acquired by meditation more slowly and with more fatigue than by contemplation.”¹¹ Some people can jump right into contemplating God without any distractions, but others have to tire their minds out into a restful state before they can enter divine contemplation (Heb. 4:11). This second approach is what meditation is all about. Richard Foster says, “While meditation focuses primarily on a rumination upon Scripture, God, His works, the creation, and other significant devotional writings, contemplation consists in resting in the loving awareness of God and is not usually attached to any particular thought or Scripture passage.”¹²

¹¹ G. B. Scaramelli, *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*, trans. D. H. S. Nicholson (Berwick, ME: Ibis Press, 2005), p. 29.

¹² Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 263.

CHAPTER 3 CONTEMPLATION

Divine contemplation is the simplest but most profound of all spiritual practices. By my definition, it is **perfect concentration on God, with no distractions, with eyes closed, in silence, for a prolonged period of time, feeling and loving His presence**. Some refer to it as “loving attention” to God or a “loving gaze” at God. This simple contemplation or “gaze” may or may not involve visualizing the face of Christ or God on His throne. Just as the imagery controversy applied to meditation in the prior chapter, so also does it apply to contemplation in this chapter. Richard Foster explains:

There is a division among the great devotional writers over the use of the imagination in contemplation. Some view it as a useful aid; others feel it should be reserved for meditation rather than contemplation; still others believe it should never be used. At times the issue has been tied to the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth century and following in which many felt that the use of icons was a form of idolatry. William of St. Thierry, a twelfth-century Cistercian monk, for example, believed that praying with images was idolatry because God was found only in the purity of relationship in His image stamped in every human being. Many of the Puritan leaders in the seventeenth century had similar convictions.

I have chosen to side with those who see the imagination as a useful aid in contemplative

prayer. This is not a law but a practical help. I do not draw a hard line between meditation (where the imagination is much more widely accepted) and contemplation. Also, while contemplation is usually wordless, it does not necessarily need to be imageless. Indeed, some of the great contemplatives, such as Juliana of Norwich, received profound visions from God during times of contemplation.¹

I side with Foster and the mystics who feel that visualizing God is helpful in contemplation, because it gives you something to gaze at or fix your attention on in your imagination. However, in my experience, I don't always use imagery. In fact, sometimes I find it easier not to try to visualize God at all, maybe because I'm not that imaginative. **I just close my eyes, get still for several minutes, and focus on God to the best of my ability.** Visually, I usually see nothing but the blackish color of my imagination. But I'm focusing my attention on God just as I would if I was getting ready to pray a prayer of petition or intercession. I'm concentrated on God and ready to continue, but I say nothing to God; I just stay very concentrated on God for several minutes. "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in Heaven and you are on Earth, so let your words be few" (Eccl. 5:2).

¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 264.

I have used the phrase “divine contemplation” throughout this book several times now. I prefer this phrase because some like to use the phrase “contemplative prayer,” but to me this is not a prayer practice. Most consider prayer to be “talking to God,” but this is more like concentrating on God or even listening to God intently. It is the non-verbal practice of drawing near to God through the intellect, will, imagination, intuition, and feelings. **It’s focusing on God with closed eyes; concentrating on God with undivided attention and pure intention.** I have tried to steer away from using the phrase “contemplation” all by itself, because the word alone simply means to “gaze at one thing without being distracted.” All by itself, contemplation could be used for anything; like meditation, it is a mental practice. One could just as well contemplate God as one could contemplate a tree, a coin, a flower, the moon, or a building.

Since this book is about experiencing God, I choose to use the specific phrase “divine contemplation” to describe the contemplation of God and nothing else. For it is not just any kind of contemplation that will yield the spiritual experiences that the Christian mystic seeks. **It is only divine contemplation, God contemplation, or Christ contemplation that will open the mystic up to Biblical spiritual experiences and revelations—especially if mixed with fasting.** Mystical contemplation of anything else would be not only a deviation, but can lead to idolatry. It is, however, a beautiful experience to meditate on features in the natural world in light of our Creator’s design. But we must be careful not to worship

trees and mountains and things, because that would be idolatry. If we meditate or contemplate on nature as God's *creation*, it will fill our hearts with praise for our great Creator. God must receive praise for His creation, but we must not turn animals, trees, clouds, mountains, and lakes into idols like New Agers and pagans do (Rom. 1:21-25). These things are not divine but are creations of God. Therefore, it is ultimately the contemplation of *God* that is the highest and most glorious practice.

Just as there are many methods of meditation that have come down to us through church history, there are also many methods of divine contemplation that have come down to us through the years. In my opinion, each contemplative writer has his or her own "pet method" of practicing divine contemplation. So, I'm going to fall into that mold and tell you what my pet method is. I will tell you what has worked for me and led me into spiritual experiences and revelations from God.

First, I want us to examine **the exterior conditions of the body** as we are preparing ourselves for divine contemplation. In my opinion, four physical things are absolutely necessary for a fruitful time of divine contemplation: setting a time frame, solitude, silence, and finding a contemplative posture.

(1) Setting a Time Frame

The first of these is the need to set a time frame to practice divine contemplation. Generally, if you are new at this, then concentrating on God for 5 to 10 minutes a

day should be enough. If you have been contemplating God for about a week consistently, then you should start trying for 15 minutes to a half an hour a day. If two weeks of contemplating God have past, then I would say that you should try for one hour or more a day from there on out. These time frames are my own invention that have come out of my personal experience. Each person is different, and some people may be faster than others in growing as a contemplative. I feel that a healthy goal should be to reach at least one hour of contemplation on God every day. “Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Could you men not keep watch with Me for *one hour*?’ He asked Peter. ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak’” (Matt. 26:40-41).

But don’t allow yourself to feel condemned if you can’t bring yourself to that level yet. Your spirit might be willing to contemplate Christ for one hour, but your body just might be too weak for it. And if you fall asleep while contemplating, it is not always a bad thing. If you fall asleep in the presence of God, then sometimes He will give you dreams and visions! Also, don’t feel condemned if you have allowed yourself to backslide in your contemplative experience—you haven’t lost your salvation. Just get up and keep trying, but you might have to start all over again from square one: from the whole 5 minute progression thing.

In the beginning stages of divine contemplation, I find that using a **timer** on a wristwatch is helpful to reach my time goal. In fact, you may find yourself being dis-

tracted from God a lot and looking at your timer or thinking of other things. It's kind of funny how fickle we can be! The spirit can be willing, but the body is usually unwilling to practice divine contemplation. In time, God's Spirit will help you to enter into deeper contemplation of Himself, so that you will need no timer to help you reach your time goal. **An advanced contemplative often feels supernaturally drawn by the Holy Spirit to practice divine contemplation for prolonged periods of time. Those are the people that end up becoming prophets or seers of profound visions!** Finding the right time for you should contribute to the stilling of your body's five senses: touching, tasting, seeing, hearing, and smelling. I'll mention this again when I talk about finding a contemplative posture. **The stiller our senses are, the easier it is to hear God's still small voice.** I feel that as soon as we rise from bed in the morning—that should be the set time for contemplation, because our body's senses have already been stilled for several hours during sleep. This must be why Abraham “went *early in the morning* to the place where he had stood before the Lord” (Gen. 19:27, NKJV). There is a song called “Step by Step” by Rich Mullins that says,

Oh God, You are my God
And I will ever praise you
And I will seek You in the morning
And I will learn to walk in Your ways
And step by step You'll lead me
And I will follow You all of my days

(2) Solitude

The next factor for a meaningful contemplative experience is solitude. **For the duration of time that you plan to contemplate God, it is very helpful if not necessary to find a quiet place where you can be all alone.** This is so that phone calls can't distract you, loved ones can't distract you, and pets can't distract you. And **if there is anything else that can distract, then you just need to get away from it.** Generally, when we steal away into a solitary place, and the further away from people and civilization we can get, then the better off we are to practice divine contemplation. The early church mystics known as the Desert Fathers stole away into the Egyptian deserts to find solitude with God. **Distractions are greatly diminished if not completely removed in solitary places.** Getting rid of distractions is one of the most fundamental elements of contemplative life.

While it is possible to practice divine contemplation outside in nature, I have found it to be extremely difficult because of mosquitoes, gnats, flies, and changing weather that distract quite easily. If you go out to a solitary place in the forest to contemplate God, then expect that once you start to get still, close your eyes, and concentrate—the bugs start playing around your head and face, itching, buzzing, causing irritation and distraction. Therefore, I would generally advise against trying to contemplate God in the outdoors. **I recommend that you find a special room in your house where you can close the door and be alone (Matt. 6:6).** Politely tell your family or those

living with you that you are going to meditate or pray in your room, so they will know not to distract you. Disconnect any phones in the prayer room. Make sure that there is no way for the outside world to break into the room and distract you from God. Lock the door and put a sign on the door if you have to: “Praying: Please Do Not Disturb.”

(3) Silence

Quietness or silence is absolutely essential for a meaningful time of divine contemplation. Now that you have found your solitary place where you won't be distracted by outside influences, you need to add to the anti-distraction process the element of finding silence. You may have succeeded in finding that special solitary place in the house for divine contemplation, but are there any outside sounds that are passing through the door or walls? If these sounds or noises are present, then contemplating God will still be a virtual impossibility. **Eliminate the sounds and noises to the best of your ability.** If the stereo or TV is on, then turn it off. If people are making noise in the house, then politely ask them if they could speak quietly while you're in the prayer room.

If the noises persist into your holy sanctuary of prayer, then you might have to either go out and pray in some other place or get some hearing protectors or ear muffs to block out the noise. **I've personally used ear muffs many times in contemplation to block out the noises from outside of my room.** You can buy these at

any hardware store like Lowe's or Home Depot. People usually use them for noisy activities like mowing the lawn or shooting guns, but you can also use them for times of contemplating God. Monks have quiet monasteries to their advantage, but modern non-monastic Christians like ourselves need to make whatever accommodations we can to bring ourselves to the point when we can honestly say, "For God alone my soul waits in silence" (Ps. 62:1, RSV). Jan van Ruysbroeck, the 14th century mystic, in a search for solitude and silence, regularly contemplated God in a little hut in the forest. It stands to this day in Groenendaal, The Netherlands:



Ruysbroeck Chapel

(4) Contemplative Postures

The fourth factor on the physical level is finding a good contemplative posture for your body. I warn that **we should avoid any Yoga postures such as the lotus position. This is the position of sitting upright and cross-legged, with the feet on top of the thighs—and the fingers in a circle shape on the knees.** Indian Christians understand that the Hindu yogis developed this meditation position in order to welcome the presence of Hindu gods—which are demons. K. P. Yohannan, an influential Indian evangelist, says, “Yoga is designed for one purpose only—to open up the mind and body to receive visitations from demon spirits.”² In the Septuagint, the early translators made Psalm 96:5 say, “All the gods of the nations are demons.” **The lotus position has been popularized in the West by the New Age movement, and should not be practiced by Christians.** There are safe Biblical meditation positions: sitting normally cross-legged or in a chair (1 Chron. 17:16), prostrating (Lev. 9:24b), bowing (Exod. 34:8), kneeling (Ezra 9:5), standing (Neh. 9:5), and raising the hands (1 Tim. 2:8). Any one of these postures is Biblical and okay for divine contemplation. **I personally find normal cross-legged sitting (feet under the thighs) and prostrating to be my favorite contemplative postures.** I still keep open to any

² K. P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton, TX: Gospel for Asia, 2004), p. 137.

leadings of the Spirit to bow, kneel, or stand before God reverently, but unless I feel led, I find these positions to be a distraction to divine contemplation. Bowing and kneeling generally wear my knees sore. Standing for prolonged periods of time usually makes my legs and neck ache. Raising my hands for very long makes my arms sore.

So, generally if I'm trying to enter into a restful contemplative state, then I'm going to be like David and **"sit before the Lord"** (1 Chron. 17:16) or be like the Israelites who prostrated themselves after they saw the miraculous fire of God: "When all the people saw it, they shouted for joy, and fell facedown" (Lev. 9:24b). **Prostration**, which I prefer to do, involves lying on my belly with my legs fully on the ground. In order that my face does not get sore from my nose and cheeks pressing into the floor, I like to mold my hands underneath my face in order to cradle it comfortably. I also usually turn my face to the left a little bit. This is a very restful position that is good for reverent contemplation, and is yet not very conducive to falling asleep. It is absolutely essential that when you are searching for your "pet position" for contemplation, that you find a comfortable posture which at the same time is not going to put you to sleep. Divine contemplation works best when you are restful, and somewhere between being asleep and awake.

Full prostration is a restful position that doesn't necessarily put you to sleep—but not all the time. Sometimes you do fall asleep, and that's okay; especially when you experience dreams from God! If you want to use a

pillow or blanket in a way to help you be more comfortable, then feel free; just make sure they don't put you to sleep—because sleep is one of the greatest distractions from contemplation on God. As far as *sitting before the Lord* is concerned, sometimes I like to do this cross-legged with a comfortable blanket wrapped around me and my back pushed up against a pillow; or simply sitting upright in an armchair. Comfort and restfulness are important, but so is alertness. Finding a contemplative posture is all about finding that happy middle place between *restfulness and alertness*. And more than anything, a good contemplative posture needs to be maintained in *stillness* of your body. Stillness of body is essential to stilling and quieting your five senses: touching, tasting, seeing, hearing, and smelling. When your physical senses have been successfully stilled, then it becomes easier to hear the still small voice of God. So, try not to be like a wiggle worm when you are entering divine contemplation, but rather try to be like a rock solid cocoon.

Next, I want us to examine **the interior conditions of the soul** as we are entering into divine contemplation. In my opinion, three interior things are absolutely necessary for a fruitful time of divine contemplation. By this point we have set the stage in the physical realm through finding a time frame, solitude, silence, and a contemplative posture. Now it is time for us to set the stage in the spiritual realm through the interior practices of concentrating on God, loving God, and fearing God.

(1) Concentrating on God

Concentrating on God, loving God, and fearing God. These three things combine into a one-pointed experience of concentrated attention on God. This brings the mystic into a combined experience of attention and intention towards God. The mind's imagination is exercised to concentrate on God through the power of attention. The heart's will is exercised to feel after God with love and reverence through the power of intention. **Concentrating on God is the simple, but rigorous act of keeping the mind so focused on God, that you allow no intruding thoughts or images to remain but God alone.** Distracting feelings, thoughts, and mental images are brought under control to the best of your ability. Closing your eyes, you push the distractions away—all of them away, except for the thought or image of God. (We have already said that some contemplatives are against using a mental image of God to contemplate. What they do is simply contemplate the thought of God or the simple idea of God. They concentrate on the abstract thought of God as being present in Spirit or in Heaven.)

In my view, mystics should feel at liberty to contemplate both the thought of God and a contrived image of God or Jesus in the mind. You may do this by imagining the face of Jesus and staring at Him in your imagination without allowing yourself to become distracted. The Bible says that we should fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2). Another method is to imagine God the Father and the Son sitting on their thrones in Heaven. Another

method, that taught by St. Teresa of Avila, is to imagine God sitting on the throne of your heart within you (*The Way of Perfection*, Chapter 28). If you are a non-imaginative mystic, then concentration on God will take the form of imageless contemplation on the abstract concept of God. This is lawful, and not a Hindu or New Age practice, as some may think. Non-imaginative Christian mystics are not contemplating an impersonal force, but the personal God of the Bible, just without any mental imagery. The abstract and imageless contemplation of God may be difficult for some, but to those that can practice it, I think it might be more fruitful, because of the absolute simplicity of it.

In my opinion, concentrating on God is the essence of divine contemplation. For mystics that are non-imaginative, they focus on God in Spirit without any mental image—they usually see nothing but the blackness of their imagination as their eyes are closed. For mystics that are imaginative, they focus on God in Spirit, and with the help of their imagination, they try to form an image of God to focus on. All of this should be done with closed eyes. The goal is to get rid of all distractions: physical, mental, and emotional. Detachment from your physical surroundings is a key. **Concentrate on Jesus, close your eyes, and try to lose your awareness of your surroundings.** If you press into God for long enough—in my experience at least 15 minutes—eventually God’s Spirit will fill you and help you to enter into a powerful concentration on God which some call “infused contemplation.”

This loss of awareness of external surroundings is what St. Teresa called “the prayer of recollection”: it is a light **ecstasy** in which you feel yourself shrink into your belly to be with the indwelling Holy Spirit (*The Interior Castle* 4.3). *The Cloud of Unknowing* (1300s) recommends that concentrating mystics should try to forget every creature that God has made. Because **when we forget everything in the world except God, we zero into that one-pointed center of the target: God.** If we attain that blessed state of perfect concentration on God with no distractions, then we have entered into a spiritual experience that has been called by several names. St. Teresa called it “the prayer of union” (*The Interior Castle* 5.1). This is a temporary experience of union with God; and this is when you feel God’s presence. Your spirit and His Spirit have merged together into a loving spiritual communion. “He who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). Oh, how wonderful and peaceful this is! Hearing God’s still small voice in your mind can happen during this quiet union (1 Kings 19:12), as well as seeing mental pictures in your imagination. These spiritual voices and visions can sometimes be demonic or from your own brain, so it is important to practice spiritual discernment, which we’ll deal with in the next chapter.

(2) Loving God

The act of concentrating on God is mainly an act of the mind, but the acts of loving God and fearing God are

acts of the heart. Concentration, by itself, is mainly an act of *attention* on God. Loving God, by itself, is an active motion of your will, where you decide to reach out to God's Spirit with your **feelings**. Loving God, in the affective sense I'm describing it here, is exercising your will towards God with **intention**. There are many definitions of love, because there are different kinds of love. The love I'm describing here is not agape (God's love for creation), not storge (parental love for a child), not phileo (love between friends), and not eros (sexual desire). This is a spiritual love, but it is not agape which is directed from God to man. This is a love which is directed from man to God. *The American Heritage Dictionary* has a definition for love that says, "To have a feeling of intense desire and attraction toward a person." This love is a love of **attraction**. It is desiring Someone's presence: God's presence. That's the kind of love I'm talking about. **We are actively and willfully reaching out with our feelings, and desiring to feel the presence of God.** That is what I mean by an act of pure intention in loving God. It is the second interior act that mixes into the experience of concentrating on God.

(3) Fearing God

The third interior act to throw into the contemplative mix is the act of fearing God. This fearful reverence is when we approach God with a spirit of humility, awe, and wonder. The Bible refers to this attitude as **"the fear of the Lord"** (Prov. 9:10). This is not the same kind of

fear that a man might have of men, beasts, or demons (2 Tim. 1:7). All of those are creatures. But this is the fear of the Creator I'm talking about. Jesus said, "I tell you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: **Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into Hell.** Yes, I tell you, fear Him" (Luke 12:4-5). God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and transcendent. In the former intention of loving God, we are reaching out with our feelings to touch our immanent and tender Father. But in order to keep ourselves from falling into a lovey-dovey heretical view of God, we add a dose of divine reverence into the mix. This makes our intention in approaching God a mixed one, but not a confused one. The fear of the Lord is not a spirit that is going to make you want to run away from God; if it were, then that would contradict the loving desire of drawing near to God. Rather, what it will do is lovingly press you into the floor as you lie prostrate under God's almighty power. You will get a sense of your littleness and of God's greatness; you will understand the great gap between your sinfulness and God's holiness; and you will know how strong He is and how weak you are. **It will press you down to the earth with divine humility.** Yes, we need to love God's presence and approach Him dearly as a Spouse—but also as the Creator of all things, great and terrifying in power.

Rest and Concentrate on God

Divine contemplation is a beautiful gift from God. It is the doorway to God through which Jesus paid the price on the cross for our entry (Heb. 10:19). Yes, it requires discipline, skill, and discernment. But it also requires rest. It is a peaceful practice, but not so peaceful and restful that you don't stay concentrated on God. We must strive to enter the rest of God (Heb. 4:11). Some of the followers of Madame Guyon, known as the Quietists, got addicted to spiritual comforts so much that they lapsed into a mental passivity similar to Zen meditation. However, there is no evidence that Guyon herself practiced such non-concentrated spiritual absorption. Many Christians today still find inspiration from her book, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (1975).³ As a final word of encouragement to mystics everywhere: Set a time frame, find solitude, find silence, find a comfortable contemplative posture, concentrate on God, love God, and fear God. **Mix all of this together into one quiet concentration on God and you will eventually experience Him.** Because of this, the next section is going to deal with the different spiritual experiences that arise in divine contemplation. Remember, all of these experiences come from one simple principle: being still, and knowing that God is God (Ps. 46:10a).

³ This was the easy-to-read modern English version that was translated by Gene Edwards during the Charismatic movement. The original title of the book was *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (1685).

To-The-Point Instructions for Divine Contemplation

If you are a beginner to the practice of contemplation, then maybe digesting this chapter has been difficult for you. You may be thinking to yourself, *“All of this is a lot of information. I just want to know how to contemplate God!”* Well, if that is you, then I’m going to give some point-by-point instructions right now for how to contemplate God. If you follow every one of these instructions carefully, then you will eventually start to experience spiritual visions and voices, as well as other things. So, you must be ready for those kinds of experiences. However, most of the time you will be immersed in silence and the blackish color of your imagination, because your eyes will be closed. So here we go. Because these points are simple and practical, they have power to bring you out of your rational mind and into a contemplative state.

HOW TO ENTER DIVINE CONTEMPLATION:

1. Find a quiet place where you can be all alone.
2. Lay prostrate on the floor.
3. Close your eyes; and try to concentrate on God for at least 15 minutes.
4. Feel after God with loving reverence.

CHAPTER 4
SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

Proceed With Caution

The purpose of this chapter is intended to reasonably evaluate, confirm, and discern spiritual experiences and revelations that may arise as we progress in the practice of divine contemplation. If you have been practicing divine contemplation for at least one month every day, then there is a high probability that you have had some spiritual experiences already. Some may have been from God, your brain, or from demons. Richard Foster says, “In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as supernatural guidance that is not divine guidance.”¹ As we mature in our contemplative practice we must grow in our **spiritual discernment**. Spiritual discernment is essential to experiencing God for real. Both our own minds and the lying spirits that surround us daily can deceive us when we are deeply contemplating God. If we are pursuing the reality of God, then we must know how to reject the imaginary and demonic counterfeits of Him.

I want to warn with utmost caution that **spiritual pride must be resisted** strongly as we enter into this area of Christian spirituality. Remember that every true spiritual experience is a gift from God that we don’t deserve, because He gives the gifts as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11); and

¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 157.

every false spiritual experience is either the product of our imagination or a demon. Therefore, we have no reason to be prideful of our revelations, but only thankful to God for them. We should have no pride of our achievements in contemplation either, because to get very far in it, we greatly need the help of the Holy Spirit. Any divine experience justifies thanking God, not gloating over ourselves for being spiritual prophets or mystics.

Also, we need to **avoid obsession with spiritual gifts**—because these naturally distract us from a simple concentration on Jesus. Madame Guyon, one of the greatest spiritual masters in church history, strongly believed that spiritual gifts have a tendency to distract people from God Himself. Charismatics too easily become enamored with dreams, visions, and voices—that they become distracted from contemplating the simple person of Jesus Christ. If we are to make spiritual progress, then Guyon says that we need to cease from being dazzled by spiritual experiences. We need to “get used to” spiritual experiences, and then move on from dwelling on them too much, and get refocused on God Himself. This orientation will only bring us into a deeper relationship with God in our contemplative life.

This does not mean to avoid spiritual gifts, only to avoid obsession with them. This is not about becoming an “open but cautious” Charismatic that never allows himself to believe in a prophetic experience. This is about getting beyond the initial obsession that consumes Christians when they first discover the reality of dreams and visions. After several months or years, it is wise to get

over visionary obsession, dream interpretation, words of knowledge, praying for healing, and so forth. Spiritual gifts are good, and will be experienced in God's good time, but the highest achievement in the spiritual life is to move beyond a deep-seated interest in spiritual gifts, and into a beyond-the-gifts lifestyle where everything is about Jesus. Gifts then become merely an add-on to the Christian's simple focus on Jesus. If our affections are detached from a love of dreams, visions, and such, then it will be easier for us to maintain a simple attachment to Christ; and not be distracted from Jesus, even by supernatural phenomena. Miracles *can* distract us from God Himself.

Lastly, in addition to the need for discernment and humility regarding revelations, we also need to exercise **self-control** with regard to how we share these revelations with others. "A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly" (Prov. 12:23). When you first begin to experience dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs—it can be tempting to share them with everybody. But don't do that. You know that they're real, but most people don't. Most people explain away *all* revelations as hallucinations, and they are likely to consider all of your spiritual experiences as such (and it doesn't matter if you're mentally healthy). If you are too open about revelations around the wrong people, they might think that you have developed schizophrenia, and maybe try to get you admitted to a mental hospital. And believe me, you don't want any of that! Take my advice and generally share your supernatu-

ral experiences with people that you trust—with people that believe in the supernatural. In some cases, sharing experiences applies to power evangelism. But if you know that someone's heart is closed to the supernatural, and they have the ability to put you in a mental hospital, then please refrain from sharing your experiences with them, because they will usually think you are going crazy (2 Kings 9:11).

Rules for the Discernment of Spirits

In the prophetic movement based out of Kansas City, there is a “discernment” catch-phrase that has developed. It is based on John 10:4-5, 27. In essence, Jesus said, *“My sheep hear My voice and the voice of a stranger they will not follow.”* There are many godly prophetic teachers today that adhere to this catch-phrase as if it were enough to bear for that weighty statement in 1 John 4:1: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” From the perspective of mystical theology, this “discernment” catch-phrase is by far not enough to examine those subtle spiritual motions, experiences, and revelations that come from the other world. I’m not saying that John 10:4-5, 27 is not true, but that some people’s application of it is too limited. Beginning in the 1500s, mystical theology started to get more advanced and in-depth as far as cataloging spiritual experiences and developing what have come to be called “rules for the discernment of spir-

its.” The sixteenth century Saints Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola—the three Counter-Reformers—all wrote extensively on mystical theology. Since their time, mystical theologians have built on their work, such as G. B. Scaramelli, Augustin Poulain, Adolphe Tanquerey, Albert Farges, and Benedict Groeschel. They have produced detailed works on spiritual mysteries and principles for discerning the true from the counterfeit. And, in fact, some of the major writers of prophetic manuals in the Kansas City movement, such as James Goll and Chuck Pierce, have produced works that have their own set of rules for spiritual discernment, which are additionally helpful.

But the whole “rules for the discernment of spirits” thing began with section 313-336 of *The Spiritual Exercises* (1548) of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which was the first well developed treatment of the subject. Mystical theologians like Augustin Poulain would later have a list of rules that would by far exceed the amount that St. Ignatius laid out. Basically, these “rules” are built around the simple idea that one can more easily detect a true or false spiritual experience by applying some simple tests. Each “rule” serves as a test for a spiritual experience to pass. For example, if a vision passes the test of 3 discernment rules, then its likelihood of being from God is good. But if a vision passes the test of 25 discernment rules, then it is probably from God, if not certainly from God. The philosophy behind the whole system is: the more rules, the better. In my view, an extensive study of discernment rules is very good. However, it can tend towards an un-

healthy trend away from one of the most vital elements of spirituality: **simplicity**. Too much intellectualism and rationalization can lead to spiritual insensitivity and a deafening of our spiritual senses! That would negate the entire world of spiritual experience! On the one hand we need to keep it simple and just concentrate on God with love and reverence. On the other hand, we need to be aware of the devil's schemes so that he does not outwit us through counterfeit spiritual experiences that may arise during times of divine contemplation (2 Cor. 2:11).

I am going to give a list of Augustin Poulain's rules for the discernment of spirits that were based on the work of prior mystical theologians and his own experience. But before I do that, I want us to remember to keep it simple. There is something to be praised about the simplicity of the "discernment" catch-phrase of the prophetic movement. Now if only we could give some substance to the meaning of what the Shepherd's voice sounds like, and what a stranger's voice sounds like. We don't want to hear the devil's voice but Jesus' voice, right? Then let us know a few simple things. In my examination of St. Ignatius' original discernment rules, I formed the simple opinion that **holy feelings and holy thoughts** are the two basic aspects of a spiritual experience from God. If the following list becomes overwhelming for you, then just remember these two rules to guide you to Jesus' voice: holy feelings and holy thoughts. Holy feelings consist of things like an increase of *hope, faith, love, joy, and peace*. Holy thoughts are pure thoughts—things that make you want to be *good, righteous, honest, and obedient to God's*

commandments. The fruit of the Spirit is basically the best test of whether or not a spiritual experience is from God. This includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). You will often find that **PEACE and HOLINESS** are recurring rules among different lists. I once asked an experienced prophetess how she knows God's voice from other voices, and she told me that *when God speaks there is peace*.

Now we will turn to outline some rules for the discernment of spirits as they were laid out by Augustin Poulain over 100 years ago in Part IV of *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (1910). I will put the page number of each rule in parentheses—e.g., (71).² With the help of the Holy Spirit, may these guide you as you walk in the prophetic, and as you try to discern the revelations that you receive from the spiritual realm. These rules are designed as such:

A REVELATION IS PROBABLY DIVINE IF...

1. It begins with **the fear of the Lord**, but becomes **peace** (88-9)
2. It produces **holy tears** (99)
3. It encourages **holiness** and doesn't focus on nonessentials (82)
4. It doesn't justify a personal desire (90-1)
5. It doesn't portray angels or saints as deformed (86)

² Augustin Poulain, *Revelations and Visions: Discerning the True and the Certain from the False or the Doubtful* (New York: Alba House, 1998), Chapters 2-4; Part IV of *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (1910).

6. It doesn't make women have spiritual authority over men (92)
7. It's confirmed by **miracles** or **divine coincidences** (65-6)
8. It's not borrowed from the prophet's natural knowledge (68-9)
9. It's tested by trials and tribulations (74-6)
10. It's theologically, historically, and scientifically sound (79)
11. It's not sinful according to the Bible (80, 84)
12. It's about **salvation** issues (83)
13. It's about a bold and useful mission (91-2)
14. It's stood the test of time (92-3)
15. It's produced **good fruit** (93)
16. It's approved of by spiritual leaders (93, 126-7)
17. The prophet is physically, mentally, and morally healthy (67-8)
18. The prophet experiences **holy feelings** (70-1)
19. The prophet is not in bondage to ascetic practices (71)
20. The prophet is **humble** (72)
21. The prophet has had **ecstasy** in divine contemplation (73)
22. The prophet cautiously fears demonic deception (77)
23. The prophet allows friends to judge his revelations (77)
24. The prophet doesn't misrepresent righteous leaders as evil (81)

These are 24 rules for the acquired discernment of spirits that I've extracted from Chapter 3 of Poulain's work; the chapter is entitled: "Course To Be Followed In Our Judgments With Regard To Revelations." But there are still more rules that have been given to help us in the discernment process. I have four more lists to share. **The first two lists** are designed to help prophets safeguard themselves from falling into delusions, illusions, and false revelations—these lists are based on Chapter 2 of Poulain's work. **The last two lists** are designed to help both spiritual leaders and prophets to deal with revelations in a clear-headed and reasonable fashion—these lists are based on Chapter 4 of Poulain's work.

Now I will present the two lists from Chapter 2 that are designed to safeguard prophets from false revelations:

Five Distortions of True Revelations From God:

1. Misinterpreting Revelations (33-7)
2. Assuming Visions Are 100% Historically Accurate (37-40)
3. Assuming True Revelations Are 100% from God (40-9)
4. Misrepresentations of Impressions (48-9)
5. Exaggerations About Revelations (49-50)

Five Kinds of False Revelations:

1. When Witches Pretend to Be Christian Prophets (51-2)
2. Overactive Imagination with No Holy Feelings (52-3)
3. Cryptomnesia: Remembering a Forgotten Idea as if it Were a Revelation from God (53-5, 102)³
4. Demonic Counterfeits (55-6)
5. Inventions of False Revelations (56-60)

Finally, the last two lists are from Chapter 4 of Poulain's work, and they deal with proper conduct in regards to

³ *Cryptomnesia* is when one invents an idea from his own mind, forgets the idea, and later remembers the idea; but he thinks it is a revelation from God when he remembers it, because he doesn't recall inventing the idea at all. For example, a man may come up with the idea of starting a certain business, but he forgets about it. Later on in his life, he remembers the idea of starting that business—but it is as if he experiences the idea for the first time all over again. What's more, is that this time *he has no memory of inventing the idea* of starting a business a long time ago. The error comes when he interprets this remembered idea as if it were a revelation from God.

how prophets and their spiritual leaders are to respond to revelations:

Seven Rules for the Spiritual Leaders of Prophets:

1. Take Time to Discern Revelations (105)
2. Don't Approve of a Revelation Until You Know It's True (106)
3. If a Revelation is Questionable, Be Gentle to the Prophet (106)
4. Ask for Signs and Wonders from Prophets that Require Someone Else to Obey One of Their Revelations (113-14)
5. Direct the Prophet to Holiness (114-15)
6. Avoid Being Controlled By a Prophet (115)
7. The Spiritual Leader and Prophet Should Pray for Insight (116)

Seven Rules for Prophets:

1. Submit Revelations to Spiritual Leaders (116-17)
2. Be Slow to Trust a Revelation (117)
3. Do Not Pray for the Gift of Prophecy (118)
4. Resist All Private Revelations (119-23)⁴

⁴ Rules 3 and 4 in this list are mainly from St. John of the Cross' *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (1578), Book II. Because I disagree with him about these two rules, I have grayed them out. His concern is valid in that he seeks to caution prophets against being too enthusiastic about experiencing revelations, because it is a zeal that can easily be deceived by the devil. However, I believe that this is legalistically going beyond what is written in the Bible: **"Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy...be eager to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1, 39)**. See also the apostle Paul's prayer for others to receive private revelations in Ephesians 1:17-19. Rather than resisting revelations, we should be content to pray for God to give us a wise

5. If a Revelation is Demonic, Don't Insult Satan (123; Jude 1:9)
6. If You Experience Revelations, Then Focus on Holiness (124)
7. Be Calm and Patient if Spiritual Leaders Disagree with a True Revelation (124)

A Catalog of Spiritual Experiences

Now that we have gone over these lists of rules for the discernment of spirits, I will now go on to catalog every spiritual experience that I know about. The reason for this is to confirm and affirm you mystics out there that are hungry to experience God. Sometimes when beginning mystics start to receive real spiritual experiences, they doubt and question themselves, *"Is this God or not?"* But surely, after you have read the catalog of spiritual experiences that I am about to present, you will feel more confident in knowing that they are from God. For 2,000 years Christian mystics have been experiencing what we are about to study: everything from ecstatic states, to dreams, visions, and voices, to interior fire, and spiritual drunkenness. Many of these spiritual experiences happen during divine contemplation, but some of them happen during ordinary times of the day. But, usually they happen more often to people that are well practiced in divine contemplation, because they have opened up their spiritual senses to the spiritual realm. The catalog is as follows: I have chosen the number 4 to designate

and discerning mind about the divine revelations that we are eager to experience.

Chapter 4 of this book and the verse numbers to designate each spiritual experience. The topical headings of the first 12 verses are influenced by Chapter 3 of G. B. Scaramelli's *A Handbook of Mystical Theology* (1754); so often in fact are the first 12 experiences known in divine contemplation, that he considered them "grades of contemplation."

- 4.1. Recollection**
- 4.2. Spiritual Silence**
- 4.3. The Prayer of Quiet**
- 4.4. The Intoxication of Love**
- 4.5. Spiritual Sleep**
- 4.6. The Thirst of Love**
- 4.7. Divine Touches**
- 4.8. Mystical Union**
- 4.9. Ecstasies and Rapture**
- 4.10. Spiritual Marriage**
- 4.11. The Flame of Love**
- 4.12. The Wounds of Love**
- 4.13. Spiritual Voices**
- 4.14. Dreams and Visions**
- 4.15. Spiritual Impressions**
- 4.16. The Gifts of the Spirit**
- 4.17. Supernatural Coincidences**
- 4.18. Tongues**
- 4.19. The Spirit of Prayer**
- 4.20. Holy Laughter**
- 4.21. Healing and Deliverance**
- 4.22. Nature Miracles**

4.1. Recollection. During divine contemplation, sometimes mystics have experienced the feeling of shrinking within themselves. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit dwells within believers in Jesus (1 Cor. 3:16). **Because the Spirit lives within our inner regions—near our bellies (John 7:38, KJV), it is no wonder that God would call our souls to feel a shrinking sensation inward to feel nearer to Him.** It is a comforting sensation, sort of like cuddling close to Daddy, only deep inside of your belly. This is a light ecstatic experience—a pulling out of our natural senses—and into the inner realm of the spirit within us where God dwells. We are not God, but His creatures. However, God indwells our hearts if we are true Christians. This fact can be experienced and known through recollection. In this experience, we slightly or strongly lose awareness of our bodily senses, and we gently retire into the center of our hearts to feel the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a comforting, peaceful presence of God within. This can sometimes happen with the eyes open, and outside of contemplation, in the most ordinary times of the day—but if that is the case it presses one towards an intense desire to contemplate God.

4.2. Spiritual Silence. During divine contemplation, after already having entered into the interior shrinking of recollection, one experiences **an intensification of concentration on God.** This intensification brings about a stillness of the bodily senses. The body becomes still and undisturbed. A few moments ago, the mystic was easy to

distract, but now his attention is so centered and tuned into God, that all is silent and still. Only God is in the mind. Everything else has vanished. The mystic rests in the tranquility of God's presence, and he experiences "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Php. 4:7).

4.3. The Prayer of Quiet. The peace that the mystic just began to experience at the end of spiritual silence, quickly turns into what St. Teresa of Avila called "the prayer of quiet." Whereas spiritual silence was an experience of bodily stillness and the attention being intensely fixed upon God, the prayer of quiet is **an emotional experience where the presence of God floods the inner spirit with great peace.** "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding" (Php. 4:7), continues on and expands from the inner regions of the spirit and extends to flood both the soul and body. The mystic's whole being—spirit, soul, and body—become flooded and overwhelmed with great peace and spiritual comfort. Also, the contemplator *knows that he knows* he is not merely contemplating God anymore, but that he is feeling the presence of God. He is *feeling the Holy Spirit*, whom Jesus called "the Comforter" (John 14:26, KJV). This is a delight and increases your faith. I echo the mystics when I say that there is nothing greater in the world than feeling the presence of God.

4.4. The Intoxication of Love. After one has been in the prayer of quiet, with its great peace and comfort of God's

presence, the mystic can enter into a rare and glorious experience of divine contemplation called “the intoxication of love” or “spiritual drunkenness” (see Jer. 29:3; Acts 2:15). This also happens during Charismatic worship. Internally, the mystic feels the high **joy of the Lord** (Neh. 8:10). You may have heard the catch-phrase, “There’s no high like the Most High!” That phrase says it all. It may produce strange physical manifestations in the body, such as sudden “jerks” of the arms and legs; and spontaneous desires to praise God in tongues, shout praise, cry, sing, or dance before the Lord. Clearly, this is no longer a quiet and still experience. **It is a sudden exultation of joy from being in the presence of God. The mystic’s spirit gets excited, because he knows he’s in God’s presence!** The Toronto Blessing, considered by some to be the power of God, is a spiritual phenomenon that broke out in 1994 through the ministry of Randy Clark. It has been a source of much controversy in Charismatic and Evangelical Christianity. Most of the controversy has revolved around the physical manifestations I just mentioned; others include loss of bodily strength, heavy breathing, eyes fluttering, lips trembling, oil on the body, changes in skin color, weeping, staggering, travailing, falling, visions, voices, mental sounds, inspired utterances, jumping, rolling, screaming, and the inability to speak normally.

But there are some manifestations that are especially bizarre to critics, such as “holy laughter” and “ani-

mal sounds.”⁵ Personally, I believe the Toronto Blessing is a real intoxication of divine love, and should be sought out as one of God’s greatest mystical gifts. It can be received through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). Two books that I endorse in support of this spiritual blessing are Guy Chevreau’s *Catch the Fire* (1994) and John Arnott’s *The Father’s Blessing* (1995). Because the intoxication of love is an ecstatic yet contemplative experience, Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (Catch The Fire Toronto), who dispenses the blessing more than any other, has come to regularly refer to divine contemplation as “soaking prayer,” as in soaking oneself in the presence of God. However, **we should be aware that there is a New Age counterfeit for the intoxication experience called “the kundalini awakening.” The difference is not really the physical manifestations, but the so-called “revelation” that you are “one” with everything and are divine—pure Hindu mysticism.** Many Charismatics and Evangelicals that are critical of the Toronto Blessing, such as Andrew Strom, insist that the Toronto Blessing is not the power of the Holy Spirit, but a demonic kundalini manifestation.⁶ This is *only* because of the resemblance between the *physical* manifestations of

⁵ “Animal sounds” are considered to be symbolic expressions of the Holy Spirit—when they are holy. They are considered prophetic signs that need to be interpreted. For more on this topic, see Chapter 11 of John Arnott’s *The Father’s Blessing* (1995) and *Manifestations & Prophetic Symbolism in a Move of the Spirit* (2008).

⁶ See Andrew Strom’s *Kundalini Warning* (2010).

the Toronto Blessing and the kundalini awakening. However, I contend that **the real kundalini experience will actually lead a person into Hinduism and away from a strict faith in Jesus.**

When teaching on the discernment of evil spirits, **Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits”** (Matt. 7:16, NKJV). The concept of spiritual fruit was expanded by the apostle Paul: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23). This is the standard by which to test spirits and mystical phenomena. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “You will know them by their fruits.” **Jesus did not say, “You will know them by their physical manifestations.”** Just because the physical manifestations of the Toronto Blessing are similar to the physical manifestations of the kundalini awakening—it doesn’t mean that the Toronto Blessing *is* the kundalini awakening. The contrary is true. Many people that have experienced the physical manifestations of the Toronto Blessing have also experienced an increase of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And more importantly, devotion to JESUS.

However, sometimes there are New Age Christians who practice Yoga and Transcendental Meditation—who have *also* gotten into the Toronto Blessing. It is no wonder then that these people have received a kundalini spirit, but have blamed the Toronto Blessing for its destructive effects. **The kundalini spirit is a spirit of witchcraft from India.** It oppresses and possesses people

through the practice of Yoga, which brings one into union with Brahman—the god of Hinduism. That is the *true* kundalini spirit. The Toronto Blessing has nothing to do with that, but rather opposes it, because it draws people into a deeper relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

4.5. Spiritual Sleep. What often happens when one receives God’s anointing or the Toronto Blessing—and usually through the laying on of hands—is that the recipient “falls out under the power” or is “slain in the Spirit” as Pentecostals say. This spiritual phenomenon has been faked and misunderstood by many, and should not be understood as simply resting on the floor while thinking about God. **This is an authentic spiritual experience like an ecstasy or a trance.** What happens is that the mystic—whether in divine contemplation or receiving impartation through the laying on of hands—receives a portion of the power of God upon his body. The power of God then weakens him, he *faints*, and falls to the floor. “The priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (2 Chron. 5:14, RSV). Then he goes into a half-asleep state where he enjoys the peace of God in his soul. “I sleep, but my heart is awake” (Song 5:2, NKJV). He is unable to move his body, because it is **temporarily paralyzed by God’s Spirit**. So, he lies still on the floor and enjoys the presence of God within. He may hear God’s voice and experience visions vividly. The counterfeit of this experience is hypnosis and is practiced by psychics,

hypnotherapists, and stage hypnotists. Whereas the genuine Holy Spirit experience involves enjoyment of the peace of God, the counterfeit comes from demon power.

4.6. The Thirst of Love. Also called “aridity” or “the dark night of the soul,” to use St. John of the Cross’ expression, this is a **spiritual dryness** that one experiences on-and-off throughout the Christian life. Once a mystic has gotten used to feeling the presence of God in worship or contemplation, he becomes keenly aware of the times when the presence of God seems to have left him. Jesus appears to have experienced this on the cross because He said, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). The Christian’s spiritual life consists of deserts and oases; highs and lows; ups and downs. There are times when the presence of God is strongly manifest and tangible; but times when it is almost impossible to feel the Holy Spirit, even after long sessions of worship and contemplation of Jesus.

In this dark night, doubt increases and faith is weakened. One is not that aware of the reality of the spiritual realm or the existence of God. Atheism is tempting the rational mind. Philosophical materialism—the concept that everything is physical—also assails the soul. All that is mystical, spiritual, and supernatural is brought into question—and it requires an ardent will to resist these notions of unbelief. But deep down inside, the man knows that God is real and that there is a spiritual realm. He asks God to forgive him for doubting. He remembers the good old days when God’s manifest presence was so

near, the desire to pray was frequent, and spiritual experiences were abounding. He develops a thirst for the presence of God again, and eventually starts to desire to worship and contemplate God. This **spiritual thirsting** becomes satisfied once God blesses the mystic with His presence again, as well as voices and dreams and visions.

4.7. Divine Touches. These are **spontaneous experiences of feeling God's presence**. Usually they happen outside of the context of prayer and worship **during ordinary times of the day**. G. B. Scaramelli says, "They occur as a rule unexpectedly, very often during conversation."⁷ You may be at the mall, or at Walmart, at McDonald's, or talking with a friend—and POW! You feel the Holy Ghost! You have been touched by God and you experience a heightened awareness of God's presence near you. You may feel like praising God in tongues. You may fall out under the power of God in public. This sudden awareness or consciousness of God increases your faith in God's existence and fills you with the fear of the Lord. You suddenly give God your undivided attention as your spiritual consciousness is opened up through a spontaneous spiritual impression of God's presence. You suddenly feel God's Spirit near you, and you feel great excitement and reverence.

4.8. Mystical Union. While in a concentrated state of Charismatic worship or divine contemplation, the mystic

⁷ G. B. Scaramelli, *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*, p. 64.

may lose both his self-consciousness and world-consciousness, and become conscious of nothing but God. In this high concentration on God, the mind is set on God and only God—all other things have been successfully pushed out. Therefore, it is a light ecstasy where one is “lost in God.” There are no distractions whatsoever, because the mind has become perfectly fixed on God (Heb. 12:2). In the feelings, the mystic’s heart is enlivened with an emotional love for God’s presence. This is the highest grade of contemplation, the highest goal: “He who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). This should not be mistaken for the feeling of “oneness” with the universe in the New Age. Rather, in mystical Christianity, this is a feeling of being *attached* to the presence of God.

4.9. Ecstasies and Rapture. In the deep contemplation of God, in the deep God-consciousness of mystical union, in that divine cloud of unknowing, in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, come the various grades of ecstasy. Acts 10:9-10 says, “About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a **trance**.” This last word, “trance” is translated from the Greek word *ekstasis* or ecstasy. It is a compound word: ek (out) + stasis (state). In other words, it means “out of one’s regular mental state.” “Static” is a term that we use to describe that which stays put and constant. Therefore, to be ec-static or “out of”

that which is “static” means a deviation from that which is normal.

The normal mental state is our waking consciousness. It is the state that we are in when we eat breakfast, drive the car, engage in activities at work, clean the house, and do other errands pertaining to the active life; it is a lucid and alert state of mind. But ecstasy is not the normal mental state. It is temporarily being “out of one’s mind” in order to experience God in a heightened state of spiritual consciousness. Profound visions are often experienced in a spiritual ecstasy. This should not be confused with **psychosis** or mental illness. Those illnesses are the products of a chemically imbalanced brain. If they are not properly treated with antipsychotic medicines by a psychiatrist, then they will produce effects on the mind that would resemble a **continual ecstasy**. It is not God’s will to put a mystic into a continuous ecstasy without end; that would mean that the mystic would be continually out of his mind; he would no longer be able to function in the active life of eating, socializing, hygiene, and work. **The ecstasies that we are speaking of here are only temporary spiritual experiences, lasting anywhere from a few seconds to 30 minutes to one hour.**

There are different levels of ecstasy. There are **light ecstasies** where one feels a pull away from physical consciousness towards the inner realm of the spirit. Recollection, spiritual silence, the prayer of quiet, the intoxication of love, divine touches, and mystical union are all experiences that occur in a light ecstasy. Although they are all different kinds of experiences, they all have one thing in

common: they all involve a slight loss of awareness of one's self-consciousness and physical surroundings. And then there are **strong ecstasies**; these would include experiences like spiritual sleep and raptures. Strong ecstasies are more than being merely asleep though; in fact, they are more like supernatural sleep. They can occur with the eyes opened or closed; it doesn't matter, because the body becomes nothing but a shell while the personality has retreated into the inner realm of the spirit, either in a dream, vision, or out-of-body experience (2 Cor. 12:2). Scaramelli explains the effects on the body that a strong ecstasy produces:

The loss of the use of the senses amounts to a condition in which the eyes see nothing, however obvious it may be; no sound, however loud, is heard; no pain is felt even if the body be burnt or tortured; nothing can be smelt or tasted; and there is a complete inability to move. The necessary functions of the body, such as the circulation of the blood, of course continue, but it appears probable that both the pulse and the respiration are sensibly modified...the body becomes cold.⁸

Someone that is in a strong ecstasy may appear to be dead or in a coma (Rev. 1:17), but the body continues to live somehow. It can be very frightening for onlookers to see someone in a strong ecstasy—often they don't know

⁸ G. B. Scaramelli, *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*, pp. 73-74, 81.

whether or not to wait and pray, call a psychiatrist, 911, or a funeral director. Strong ecstasies usually last no longer than 30 minutes.⁹ My advice would be to call 911 if someone has been in a strong ecstasy for more than an hour. At least that way an ambulance can come to get EMTs to monitor the ecstatic's vital signs, even if he remains in ecstasy at the hospital.

Both light and strong ecstasies occur in a calm manner through contemplation or a gradual ease by the Holy Spirit. However, a **rapture** is a sudden strong ecstasy that comes upon the mystic. It may cause a sudden jerking of the body, followed by instant flashings of images in the mind, and a quick loss of bodily control. The body then quickly falls to the floor or “falls into a trance” like Peter (Acts 10:10)—fainting in the Spirit, slaying in the Spirit. Vivid, profound visions from God are often experienced. In rare cases, like Enoch and Elijah and Christ,

It is in rapture that **levitation** occurs (though it is not of itself a proof of rapture), **the body being raised and held suspended in the air**; and as this may happen towards the beginning of the state, and before the consciousness has been lost, it is possible for the contemplative to realize what is happening. If there be no levitation the body generally remains in the precise position it occupied when the rapture commenced, and when the condi-

⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

tion has passed the body retains a feeling of health and inexplicable lightness. Cases have also been known in which rapture has had the effect of **cur-ing weakness or ill health**.¹⁰

4.10. Spiritual Marriage. This phenomenon was first described in detail by St. Teresa of Avila in 1577 (*The Interior Castle* 7.2-3). After the mystic has well developed his spiritual senses through contemplation, for several years, God eventually rewards him with a **continual awareness of His presence!** The mystic's spirit and God's Spirit are continually united and the man is aware of it. This carries over into the mystic's active life. Even when he is not contemplating God, and is going about his daily tasks, he still has a strong awareness of God's presence with him and in him. Prior to this blessing, the mystic received temporary experiences of feeling God's presence, as in the mystical union or divine touches. But in the spiritual marriage, he constantly feels the Holy Spirit wherever he goes! "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20a).

In St. Teresa's experience, she had an intuitive impression that the Trinity was dwelling within her. Somehow she "knew that she knew" that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all one God, and enmeshed deep within her spirit. She also saw a vision of Christ appearing to her, and giving her a wedding ring, symbolizing a permanent spiritual union with Himself. There's no way to

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 81-82.

know for sure that the Trinity and wedding ring experiences always happen when someone experiences spiritual marriage to Christ. But the essence of it is a continual awareness of God's presence with you at all times. This brings great indescribable peace that never leaves you.

4.11. The Flame of Love. Once one has advanced in divine contemplation enough, it is possible to experience an inner spiritual impression called "the flame of love" or *The Fire of Love* (1300s) as Richard Rolle came to call it. In this book "he describes such unusual experiences of intense heat around his heart that would cause him to reach down to feel his chest to be sure that it was not literally on fire."¹¹



Richard Rolle Feeling the Fire of God's Love

¹¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 133.

It is like a divine touch, but within your belly and innermost heart. **It is a “holy heartburn” of the presence of God within your belly. It is a way of God making known His existence and love for the mystic.** You may call it interior fire, inner fire, spiritual fire, or mystical fire. But it is a feeling of intense heat that suddenly manifests within the heart or belly; and it is the heat of God’s presence. It is not easily mistaken for natural heartburn caused by indigestion. This is not stomach acid in the esophagus from reflux. This is a comforting warmth in the belly and lower chest area; and through it, God’s indwelling Spirit comforts the emotions. Scaramelli says that it “is a certain hurt of love which occurs in the spirit alone, and has the effect of healing the soul as by burning—it is a touch of the fire of God which heals all ills.”¹² I like to call it interior fire or holy heartburn. **It usually occurs as a sign from the Spirit when the mystic has received a revelation from God.** When Jesus explained to the two disciples the meaning of messianic prophecy, they said, **“Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).** When John Wesley received the revelation of justification by faith, he experienced the flame of love and famously

¹² G. B. Scaramelli, *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*, pp. 91-92.

wrote, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”¹³ For more on this topic, see 4.15.1 on “gentle interior impressions.”

4.12. The Wounds of Love. Sometimes God inflicts physical or emotional “wounds” upon His children in order to prove their faith in Him to be genuine. This should not be taken in the view that God is masochistic and loves to hurt people. No, not at all. But the fact of the matter is that man is born into sin, totally depraved, and the physical body naturally feels evil desires (Rom. 7:18). Catholic theologians are right when they speak of “redemptive suffering.” This teaching holds that while Christ’s suffering and blood are sufficient to grant us the forgiveness of our sins, our own personal sufferings that God brings us through, in a mysterious way gradually release us from the earthly penalty that we deserve for our sins. This does not mean that we earn our salvation through suffering, but that the justice of God is satisfied through our sufferings caused by God. When we are forgiven of sin, we’re forgiven—but that doesn’t mean we still won’t have consequences to pay for these sins on Earth. God has His ways of evening out these sins and consequences in our lives through suffering (Heb. 12:5-6). Furthermore, when we reverently offer up our sufferings to God as a sacrifice to Him, in union with Christ’s passion, and in essence say to God, “Not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42),

¹³ John Wesley in *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns* edited by Frank Whaling (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 107; *Journal*, May 24, 1738, verse 14.

God has a way of purging sinful desires out of us. It's mysterious, but God can actually develop the fruit of the Spirit in us—love, joy, peace, patience, etc (Gal. 5:22-23)—through the sufferings that happen to us in our lives.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that **the testing of your faith develops perseverance**” (James 1:2-3). The apostle Peter said, “For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of **trials**. These have **come so that your faith**—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—**may be proved genuine** and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Paul says, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that **suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope**” (Rom. 5:3-4). The Biblical evidence is plenty: it is God's will for all Christians to go through some amount of earthly suffering, because through the testing of our faith, it comes to be proved genuine, and produces a steadfast heart full of perseverance and hope in God. (As a side note: this teaching is in direct conflict with the Word of Faith group that teaches positive confession for the continual health and wealth of Christians.) So, in this worldview that God can and does allow suffering to happen to His people for the development of their sanctification and faith, we have a theological groundwork for certain **miracles of suffering** that can happen to mystics and other Christians. These suffering miracles are called “wounds of love” and come in all sorts. They are directly caused by God or an angel.

Yes, these miracles have been faked by the mentally ill who mutilate themselves. But we are here referring to supernaturally caused wounds that miraculously appear on the body. While a demonic counterfeit of this is called “ghost scratching,” I am here referring to afflictions of the human body by God or angels. Isaiah’s desire to use profanity was purged when a seraph touched his lips with a heavenly coal (Isa. 6:5-7). Jesus told Ananias that He would show Paul “how much he must suffer for His Name” (Acts 9:16)—it was in this context that Paul was struck blind by God for three days (Acts 9:8-9). In 1224, St. Francis of Assisi is said to have received **stigmata** through the affliction of a seraph—these are the wounds of Christ’s nail holes in the palms of the hands and sometimes the feet. This miracle is not confined to Catholic saints either; there have been reports of this happening among the New Mystics group associated with John Crowder.

In the late 1500s, St. Teresa of Avila was apparently also afflicted by a seraph like Isaiah and St. Francis. Only this time, the affliction was a red hot spear of God’s love that pierced her heart several times. **These “loving wounds” from God are never completely painful, but are always a mixture between spiritual pleasure and pain.** Peace, love, and joy are felt during these experiences just as much as agony, pain, and anguish. “If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory” (Rom. 8:17).

4.13. Spiritual Voices. A “voice” or as they say in mystical theology, a “locution” or “audition,” is a supernatural voice that one hears either internally in his mind or externally with his physical ear. Usually voices are only heard in the mind, but in very rare cases, voices can be heard with the natural ear. In our society, if someone says that they are “hearing voices” it is usually frowned upon. This is because of the influence of rationalism and materialistic psychiatry. While there are some psychiatrists that believe in God, few are willing to admit that they believe God can speak to people. There’s a catch-phrase that floats around their ranks that goes: “When we talk to God it’s called prayer, but when God talks to us it’s called a hallucination.” Psychiatrists, who deal with the mentally ill on a regular basis, have popularized the concept that *all* mental voices are “auditory hallucinations.” This is true of *some* mental voices, but is it true of all of them?

The Bible teaches that **God** speaks through both internal and external voices; through mental voices and audible voices. Of course, so does the **devil**. The **brain** can also produce mental voices. *Discernment is necessary!* I understand there to be basically 4 different kinds of supernatural voices:

1. Quiet Mental Voices
2. Loud Mental Voices
3. Quiet Audible Voices
4. Loud Audible Voices

(1) Quiet mental voices are supernatural voices that you hear in your mind through your thoughts, but they are very quiet. Have you ever talked to yourself in your mind, without saying it out loud with your mouth? You can do it right now; in fact, if you are reading this book silently, then you are hearing the voice of your brain speaking the words on this page. The soul is where your free will, individuality, emotions, and mind are located. When you want to talk out loud with your physical voice, your brain translates information that your soul tells your tongue to say. You are a spirit and a soul inside of a body; you are not just a body—you are comprised of spirit, soul, and body. And the “soul” part of you is your personality. So, the voice of your brain is also the voice of your soul.

The reason why I mention all of these things is because *your soul has a mental voice*. It usually sounds like your physical voice when you utter it out loud, only it is inside of your mind. Of course, you have always known this. Your physical voice is a reflection of the voice of your soul that you hear in your mind. You can hear your soul’s voice whenever you read silently, pray silently, or say any words in your mind silently. The sensation of hearing your soul’s voice is that it is usually in your head, but mental voices can sometimes even be heard as if rising up from the belly (where the spirit is), and coming

into the head.¹⁴ If a man is a true Christian, then he has the Holy Spirit of God living in his human spirit: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16).

Just as a man can hear himself speaking when he physically speaks out loud, so also can a man hear his own soul when he speaks silently within his mind. But the human spirit is in the very center of our belly region; the soul envelops the spirit, and the body envelops the soul. Usually we either hear the outside physical world, or the inner voice of our soul through the brain, but our spirit’s voice stays muffled. **In order for us to hear the voice of our human spirit, and therefore the voice of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we need to be still and know that God is God (Ps. 46:10a).** The brain hears all mental voices, and also hears the indwelling Holy Spirit when He speaks. It is important to discern the true voice of God and not brush it off as an “auditory hallucination,” which only results from chemical imbalances in the brain.

When God, an angel, or a demon speaks, it is always *spontaneous*—but not so with your soulish voice. Your soul’s voice only speaks within you when you want it to, at your own free will. If you hear a mental voice, you’ll know it’s your soul when it’s *you* that decided to say it! But when God, angels, and demons speak through mental voices, the word intrudes into your mind unex-

¹⁴ Augustin Poulain, *Revelations and Visions*, p. 10; Jesus said: “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his *belly* shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38, KJV).

pectedly and spontaneously. **Spontaneity is one of the great principles of private revelation.** You might have heard someone say, “That thought came out of the clear blue sky!” Believe it or not, but that expression perfectly illustrates the nature of a revelatory experience. I understand “clear blue sky” in that metaphor to be a reference to Heaven (see Matt. 3:17). When one thinks of Heaven, one thinks upward and beyond the blue sky where God the Father lives. Consequently, blue is also symbolic of revelation. The expression illustrates the idea of God speaking to someone from Heaven or the sky: “That thought came out of the clear blue sky!” When God speaks experientially, it seemingly comes at the most random times during contemplation or worship. You might be quiet in divine contemplation, and “all of a sudden” hear a voice in your mind say something that you didn’t put forth the effort to say yourself—it is an intruding mental voice or thought.

That isn’t your soul’s voice in this case, because you didn’t say it; and—if you are mentally healthy—it isn’t your demon afflicted brain producing a hallucination, because you don’t have any known psychosis, schizophrenia, or some other mental disorder. In this case, it is either God, an angel, or a demon speaking (in a mentally healthy context). Materialistic psychiatrists, who think all voices are only brain produced, would call this experience a “sane hallucination.” But this is only a matter of worldviews. It is perfectly Christian to believe that what materialistic psychiatrists call sane hallucinations are messages from spirits. If there is no drug or alcohol

abuse in your life, and you are experiencing so-called “sane hallucinations,” then they are probably real messages from spirits. This brings me back to what the nature of a *quiet mental voice* is. It is like a supernatural *whisper* in your mind that comes from an external or internal presence: “After the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a *still small voice*” (1 Kings 19:12, KJV). Sometimes this mental voice is so quiet that it takes being still, closing the eyes, and concentrating on Jesus for a while to be able to hear it.

(2) Loud mental voices are supernatural voices that you hear in your mind through your thoughts, but they are loud and clear, and are easily heard. In the previous kind of locution, a quiet mental voice, it is usually only possible to hear it while being still and quiet in divine contemplation, or in a passive napping position. But this is not the case with loud mental voices. With a loud mental voice, you could be out and about doing normal everyday tasks, and “all of a sudden” hear a loud mental voice in your mind. You don’t necessarily have to be quiet and still in order to hear it. It is a voice that is so loud and clear that it is like a supernatural being is shouting into your mind, or is using a little microphone to amplify the volume when it speaks to you in your mind (not that it is as loud as a P.A. system or anything—the voice is still somewhat muffled, because it is mental). It’s great when it turns out to be God, but unfortunately demons also speak in loud mental voices. I have had times of spiritual warfare in contemplation when evil spirits have harassed me with loud obscenities or harsh commands in my mind.

They may say things like, “Do this! Don’t do that!” in a very rough and demanding way. Sometimes their voices are so distinct, that I can hear the rough or deep demonic tones in their voices. When this happens, discerning is very easy—it’s a demon.

If you ever experience this, then take up the shield of faith and declare: “The Lord rebuke you, satan, in the Name of Jesus!” (see Jude 1:9). Do not give into the temptation to curse at and accuse the devil, because that’s what he wants. Try not to freak out. Just be patient and humble, and remember: “The Lord is with me to help me, so I will see my enemies defeated” (Ps. 118:7, NCV). The devil will eventually leave, especially if you start to worship God, pray in tongues, or just turn on some worship music in the room: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8, NKJV). As a general rule of thumb, *the voice of God is gentle, sweet, and majestic*. Demonic voices are harsh, mean, and obscene. *God’s voice exalts Jesus Christ* (John 15:26). Demonic voices are just destructive or try to puff up your ego. *God’s voice shows that He loves you*, but demonic voices show that they hate you.

Sometimes, the Lord can give you a firm command through a loud mental voice, but it is always accompanied by a reverent or peaceful impression: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). Generally when the indwelling Holy Spirit speaks, you will have a feeling that the mental voice is rising up from within your belly. But when an angel speaks to you in a mental voice on

behalf of God, the perception will be that it is coming from outside of your head and into your brain. Angels and the Holy Spirit can be hard to distinguish sometimes, but that is okay, because they both bear the presence and word of the Lord.

(3) Quiet audible voices are supernatural voices that you hear with your natural physical ear, but they are quiet. An audible voice of any sort can be a frightening experience. It is as if a supernatural being is within close proximity to you, and though he may even be invisible, you can hear his ghostly whisper come out of the thin air! The Holy Spirit, angels, and demons can all speak in this way. Usually, it's only people that are well developed in divine contemplation, or have a very powerful prophetic anointing that are gifted with hearing audible voices, but it can happen to anyone. When someone encounters a spirit in an open vision, apparition, or visitation, audible voices usually accompany the experience. Just as experiencing an open vision is very rare, so also is experiencing an audible voice very rare. They are both forms of very high level revelation, and usually only happen if there is an extremely important message from God.



Gustave Dore's *The Annunciation*

High level revelations such as open visions and audible voices are sometimes given to someone that is about to go through trials, tribulation, or persecution on account of what was told him in the vision or voice. For example, the virgin Mary was told by Gabriel in a visitation that she would give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38). When Mary saw Gabriel in the vision and heard him speak to her with an audible voice, she was “very startled” (1:29). But this high level revelation of hers *gave her the faith and perseverance* for the tribulation that shortly laid ahead of her. In her ninth month of pregnancy, she not only traveled cross-country with her husband to Bethlehem to register for the Roman census (Luke 2:1-6), but she submitted to her husband who was warned by an angel in a dream to take his family to

Egypt, so that he could protect them from Herod's decree to kill the Christ child (Matt. 2:13-15).

Had Mary not received the high level revelation from Gabriel, she probably would not have believed as strongly that her infant Son was the Messiah. But because she did receive this spectacular experience, God imparted a special *gift of faith* for her to take drastic measures to protect her Son from the rage of Herod. Most of the women in Palestine at the time lost their baby sons to the forces of Herod (Matt. 2:16-18), but because Mary had the faith to believe that an angel spoke to Joseph through a dream to go to Egypt, she willingly cooperated with him. This would have meant that they left their friends and relatives in Palestine; and family life played an important role in Jewish culture during the first century.



Matthias Scheits' *Ten Commandments*

(4) Loud audible voices are supernatural voices that you hear with your natural physical ear, but they are loud. If a quiet audible voice is frightening, then just think about how much more frightening a loud one would be! I don't know for sure just how loud Gabriel's voice was when he was speaking to Mary, but it was probably at a conversational volume level, a quieter level. When I think of Mary's encounter with Gabriel, I imagine it occurring in a room within a house: "God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee" (Luke 1:26). Church tradition says that the archaeological remains of the house that Gabriel spoke to Mary in, are within the confines of "The Church of the Annunciation" in Nazareth. If this is true, that Gabriel did indeed speak to Mary

in a house, then he probably spoke to her at a quieter, conversational volume level. But there have been times when people have had experiences of spirits speaking to them VERY LOUDLY, and in an audible way! For example, Moses and the Israelites heard the loud audible voice of God speak the Ten Commandments to them from Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:1-20:17), and their reaction was one of terror: “When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet, and when they saw the lightning and the smoke rising from the mountain, they shook with fear and stood far away from the mountain. Then they said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak to us, or we will die’” (Exod. 20:18-19).

Peter, James, and John were also terrified when they heard the loud audible voice of God on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter was talking to Jesus as He had been transfigured with Moses and Elijah, but God the Father interrupted and corrected him: “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!’ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified” (Matt. 17:5-6). If you hear the loud audible voice of God, it can be as loud if not louder than a P.A. system (a microphone amplified through speakers)! In *The Prophetic Ministry* (2006), Rick Joyner explains that he had really wanted to hear the audible voice of God. One day when he was praying in his room, God spoke to him audibly so that he could hear His voice with his natural ear.

The voice came out of thin air. It was so frightening, he said, that he never wants to hear it again unless the Lord absolutely wills it. May we too have the same fear of the Lord in regards to His audible voice. We are not worthy of such high level revelations, but God in His love still desires to speak to us today through these ways. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

4.14. Dreams and Visions. A “vision” is a photograph-like or movie-like experience occurring either in the imagination or in front of one’s eyes. They *can* be hallucinatory—produced by demons and the brain if one is psychotic, schizophrenic, or mentally ill. But they can *also* be from the Holy Spirit, an angel, or a demon (in a state of mental health). That God speaks through dreams and visions today is taught by Acts 2:17: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see *visions*, your old men will dream *dreams*.”¹⁵ I understand there to be 5 different kinds of visions:

¹⁵ This Bible verse is a quotation of Joel 2:28. It is an Old Testament prophecy that the apostle Peter said is now fulfilled in the New Testament dispensation. According to Peter, we are now living in *the last days* of world history. From the time of Christ, even until now 2,000 years later, it has been the last days of world history from God’s perspective (2 Pet. 3:8); therefore, dreams and visions are forms of divine communication for today.

1. Faint Closed Visions
2. Vivid Closed Visions
3. Faint Open Visions
4. Vivid Open Visions
5. Dreams

(1) **Faint closed visions** are faint mental images that one sees as his eyes are closed. This happens when the person is awake, not asleep. Your eyes may be closed in prayer, contemplation, worship, laying down to rest, or for some other reason. If you close your eyes, what do you see? You see nothing but dark purple or blackness. That is “the eyes of your heart” (Eph. 1:18), your mind’s eye, or the *imagination*—the place where *images* are displayed in the mind. It is like a mental blackboard for spirits to draw “pictures” on or to screen “video clips” on. The Holy Spirit, angels, demons, and your own soul can all draw pictures on your imagination for you to see. It is not “*just* your imagination”; it is the very window into the world of visions. So, with all this being said, **a closed vision is a mental image that you see when your eyes are closed.** Almost everyone has experienced a mental image happen spontaneously. Guess what? That’s a vision! Spontaneous mental images *are* visions! However, spiritual discernment plays an important role in distinguishing which mental images are from God. But once you figure out how to distinguish which mental images are from God, you will be able to move in the realm of closed visions. How exciting!

In mystical theology, closed visions are also called “interior visions,” “imaginative visions,” or “imaginary visions.” While the Bible is mostly silent about closed visions, **St. Teresa of Avila’s *The Interior Castle* 6.9** talks about them. Closed visions basically come in 2 forms: faint and vivid. A **faint closed vision** is simply a mental image that one sees with his eyes closed, except the image can be hard to make out. Therefore, it is faint, because it is an indistinct, weak, and faded mental image. Faint closed visions are incomplete mental images, but they still convey the visual message successfully to your spirit through an impression. In your intuition, you will receive a spiritual impression of something like what the full image is supposed to look like. So, even though you might see something of a faded image, difficult to make out—the impression that you receive in your heart will make you know what the image is supposed to fully look like. You might not have seen the image fully and clearly in your imagination, but through a spiritual impression you can “know that you know” what the image looks like in its entirety; so much so that you can even draw a picture of it on a piece of paper if you want to.

Obviously, this is a very subtle form of revelation—and if you’re not looking for it, then you will surely dismiss it. You might have been trained to think “it’s just your imagination” or that “your mind is playing tricks on you.” No, this is probably not the case if it is not something you are visualizing in your mind on purpose. A spirit is trying to speak to you through a mental image! Your job is to discern whether or not it is from God. God

speaks more frequently through the subtle ways of revelation than through the more spectacular ways. **In my experience, the most frequent way that God speaks to me is through faint closed visions during divine contemplation.** If you take the time to be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10a), then He will eventually reward you with closed visions from the Holy Spirit or angels. But be on your guard, because demons will try as hard as they can to deceive you through counterfeit closed visions. You must discern! The New Age understanding of this experience is called “third eye vision.”

(2) Vivid closed visions are vivid mental images that one sees as his eyes are closed. They are like faint closed visions, but the images that pass through the imagination are very clear. They may even include colors. In the case of faint closed visions, colors are very hard to distinguish. But in a vivid closed vision, colors can be recognized. This is more like dreaming, only you are awake with your eyes closed, and you are either watching a very clear succession of “snapshots” in your mind, or you are watching something like a short video clip in your mind—everything you see is with your eyes closed in prayer, contemplation, worship, or rest. Whenever the intensity of a vision increases, like in this case, the experience of **ecstasy** begins to increase also (Acts 10:10). D. E. Aune says ecstasy is a “trancelike state in

which people are considered particularly susceptible to communications from supernatural beings.”¹⁶

Just as there are different levels of visions, so there are different levels of ecstasy (as I touched on before in 4.9): there are light trances, medium trances, and strong trances. In the case of a vivid closed vision, it usually depends on how vivid the vision is to determine how strong the trance will be that accompanies the vision. **The stronger the vision, the stronger the trance.** But in my experience, whenever I have had a vivid closed vision, only a light ecstasy accompanies it—that is, I feel my body lose its strength a little bit, like when your arm falls asleep, only it’s your whole body (Dan. 10:8). This experience of failing bodily strength is called “sleep paralysis.” This only happens for a short while, usually no longer than 30 minutes. This should not be confused with the permanent and continual sleep paralysis of those mentally afflicted with **catatonic schizophrenia**.

Why do these “ecstatic experiences” happen when one sees visions? James Goll says, “A trance is more or less a stunned state wherein a person’s body is overwhelmed by the Spirit of God and his mind can be arrested and subjected to visions or revelations God desires to impart...my final composite definition of a trance is a rapturous state whereby one is caught up into the spiritual realm so as to *only* receive those things that the Holy

¹⁶ D. E. Aune, “Ecstasy,” vol. 2 of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988), p. 14.

Spirit speaks.”¹⁷ That is, **visions are so otherworldly, that you can usually only see them if your natural mind is transcended and you are taken up into an altered state of consciousness.** Normal waking state consciousness usually has to be transcended supernaturally in order to see high level visions. In one’s normal consciousness, the mind has a habit of seeing and hearing in the physical realm. Therefore, it usually takes an ecstasy to radically alter one’s consciousness so that the human spirit is enabled to see and hear in the spiritual realm. Otherwise, the human spirit lies dormant within you, and is blind and deaf to the spiritual realm. Divine ecstasies exalt your awareness to the higher plane of the supernatural realm, and position the mind to see very vivid visions and hear very clear voices. No doubt this is what had happened in Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 4.

It is very important to distinguish the difference between a Biblical trance and an occultic trance. Both the topics of trances and out-of-body experiences are closely related. If someone goes into a strong trance, it is very possible that their spirit can come out of their body. Goll cautiously warns:

We are *never* to *will* ourselves into such an experience! This type of experience is *only* to be God-induced and God-initiated! This is *not* self-projection or some rendition of astral projection. It

¹⁷ James Goll and Julia Loren, *Shifting Shadows of Supernatural Experiences* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007), pp. 128-129.

is *not* “willing” to project ourselves forth; that is of the occult, and of witchcraft. God, by His initiative and through the Holy Spirit can, if He desires lift us up into a spiritual realm, but we are not to project *ourselves* forth into anything. When spiritists, sorcerers, and yogis practice this without the Holy Spirit and seem to prosper by it, it is because they are not a threat to satan. They are already deceived. Whether they realize it or not, they are already in league with him and are not his enemies. Do not let the enemy steal what God has ordained. Do not be afraid of these unusual ways of the Holy Spirit, but *always be sure not to enter into some type of self-induced activity*.¹⁸

When studying about the prophetic, it is important to know that GOD’S WILL reigns supreme; but in the occult, SELF-WILL reigns supreme. This is a very important difference! The prophetic and the occult share similar experiences: contemplation, ecstasy, dreams, visions, voices, impressions, miracles, and the like. But while the prophetic is driven by God’s will, the occult is driven by self-will. A prophetic ecstasy may come upon a Christian while worshipping God in the Spirit through music (1 Sam. 10:5; 2 Kings 3:15; 1 Chron. 25:1), dance, fasting, and especially divine contemplation. But even so, an ecstasy is not guaranteed during such practices. The ecstatic experience will only come if the Spirit of God sovereignly comes upon you in that way (1 Sam. 10:10).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

But in the occult, the approach is different. Shamans often have the mindset that they can control virtually anything through self-will. So, in order to experience an occultic ecstasy, shamans take psychedelic drugs, dance, mutilate themselves, and chant the names of their gods to music (1 Kings 18:26-28). They *will* themselves into an ecstasy by working up their emotions. Of course, the danger inherent in this, is that of entering into the spiritual realm without the protection of the Holy Spirit! That is why Evangelical mystics don't force themselves into ecstatic experiences like shamans do; for the Christian mystic must wait on the Lord in contemplation or worship (Acts 1:4). If the Lord sees fit to bless the Christian with an ecstatic vision, then praise the Lord! The Evangelical mystic can rest assured that his journey into the spiritual realm will have God's seal of protection.

(3) Faint open visions are another class of visions. Now, we have left the topic of closed visions and moved onto the topic of **open visions**. In mystical theology, open visions are also called "exterior visions," "ocular visions," and "corporeal visions." An open vision is not a mental image; an open vision is either seeing an apparition of a spirit, a ghostly picture, or a ghostly movie appear out of thin air with one's eyes open. This is a very rare and very supernatural experience! So rare, in fact, that Balaam reiterated that he saw God with his eyes open: "And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the

vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open” (Num. 24:15-16, KJV). To see a vision with one’s eyes open was a big deal in Biblical times, and is still a big deal today. If someone ever has an open vision, and it seems to be from God, it is probably a very important message. Open visions are serious; not that any other form of divine communication is any less valuable. But open visions carry with them a special sense of urgency and high importance. Such was the case when the apostle John saw an open vision or apparition of Christ in Revelation 1:12-17:

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was Someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.”



Matthaeus the Elder Merian's *The Lord Appears to John*

As I have already said, there are 2 kinds of open visions: faint and vivid. A **faint open vision** is a supernatural, ghostly apparition that one sees with his eyes open—but the images are transparent or see-through, like a spider web or a ghostly mist. In the case of a photograph-like vision, it is like looking at a realistic painting floating in the air that you can see through—a transparent image. In the case of a movie-like vision, it is like watching a TV screen floating in the air that you can see through. Sometimes the vision might be so broad that it encompasses your whole surroundings—sometimes it is a simple image floating in the air somewhere. The **length of time** just depends on the case. Some visions only last for one second, others a little bit longer; some last a few minutes, a half an hour or more.

(4) **Vivid open visions**, along with out-of-body experiences, are probably the highest levels of divine communication, because they are the most real. Every other

form of supernatural communication is genuinely supernatural, but not all of them leave the lasting kind of impression on the memory that an open vision can give. **Sometimes the fainter and more subtle revelations can be easier to explain away as natural. But when someone experiences a vivid open vision, or even a faint open vision for that matter, natural explanations appear to be insufficient.** In a **vivid open vision**, the visionary sees a supernatural, ghostly apparition that he sees with his eyes open—but it is substantial, and much less transparent. Sometimes visions like these are not see-through at all, and appear to be just as physical as anything else in this world. In the former case of a faint open vision, the visionary sees an apparition with open eyes, but it is a transparent apparition. Not so in the case of vivid open visions. In a vivid open vision, the seer experiences apparitions with his eyes open, but **the apparitions are not transparent**. They are such well materialized apparitions that they look like they are physical.

A **visitation** is either an apparition or a physical materialization of a spirit that has come to appear to the seer. As we should know, spirits are non-physical beings that can pass through physical objects like walls, etc. Whether it is God, angels, demons, or departed saints—as spirits they have the ability to fly or walk through physical objects. But some spirits have the ability to materialize into a physical form. This is why Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Not only can angels change themselves to look just like

humans, but they can so materialize themselves into physical beings, that people can mistake them for real humans (demons can also do this). To encounter an angel—whether in a transparent apparition or in physical form—is a visitation experience. Sometimes people literally see the Holy Spirit as a luminous cloud, smoke, or fiery light, which is called the glory of the Lord (Exod. 13:21; Num. 10:34; 1 Kings 8:11). That would be a visitation from the Holy Spirit. **Whether we're talking about the Holy Spirit, angels, demons, or a departed saint—spirits have a tendency to appear in the form of supernatural lights, teleporting, floating, flying around, or abiding in places.** Sometimes Jesus appears to people in human form, which is called a “theophany” (Luke 24). All of these types of visitations are examples of vivid open visions—they are extremely rare and extremely supernatural forms of revelation. I personally consider a **theophany** to be the highest level of revelation that a man can experience in this life; this would mean a face-to-face encounter with God in human form. For more about experiencing visions, see **Jim Goll's *The Seer* (2004).**

But we should stand on our guard and stay aware of the devil's schemes (2 Cor. 2:11). I agree with Goll when he writes, “Counterfeits of *all* true Holy Spirit-inspired experiences do exist.”¹⁹ The same is true of open visions, out-of-body experiences, and visitations. There are two kinds of counterfeits of these high level revelations, and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

both of them are demonic. First, are the **occultic counterfeits**. For example, in theistic satanism, there is a revolting practice called “the witches’ sabbath.” This is a sex orgy done for the worship of the devil. During the orgy, the black magicians summon demons and have sexual intercourse with them (see Gen. 6:4). This could only be done through demonic visitations in physical form. Other forms of open visions and out-of-body experiences are associated with occultism of all sorts. Through these counterfeits, witches and New Agers experience the presence of their gods and see their forms while practicing Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, or Zen.

The second kind of counterfeit of these high level revelations is what I would call a **counterfeit revelation**. This is when a demon pretends to be the Holy Spirit, Jesus, an angel, or departed saint, and pretends to speak to a Christian in the Name of Jesus. The demon may even go so far as to use symbolism in the vision. But something about the vision is “off-color.” It might seem to have an immoral message or imagery, and the experience might have tempted you to sin. Further, the dream, vision, or visitation may have included something that contradicted the Bible. Ultimately, you don’t have peace about the experience, nor do you have a confident conviction in your heart that the experience was of God. Paul said that “satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). So even when discussing the topic of high level revelations such as vivid open visions, we can’t be too careful to be on guard against the devil. Discernment is still necessary! Read this demonic encounter that an an-

cient Christian monk experienced, and take his advice as an example of humility and discernment: “The devil appeared to a certain brother, transformed into an angel of light, and said to him, ‘I am the angel Gabriel and I am sent unto thee.’ But he said, ‘Look to it that thou wast not set to some other: for I am not worthy that an angel should be sent to me.’ And the devil was no more seen.”²⁰

(5) Dreams are visions that one experiences while asleep; sometimes the Bible calls them “visions of the night” (Gen. 46:2; Job 4:13; 20:8; 33:15, KJV) or “night visions” (Isa. 29:7; Dan. 2:19; 7:7, 13, KJV). Other than being asleep, a difference between a dream and a vision is that in a vision there is little interaction (unless it is a very high level vision)—that is, you just watch it like a TV. But in a dream, you are in a visionary world, and you are surrounded by the people, places, sights, sounds, and feelings of the dream world. Arguably, **out-of-body experiences** fall into this category. In an out-of-body experience, the Christian seer has the experience of his spirit coming out of his body and is usually escorted by Jesus or an angel to Heaven, Hell, or some place on Earth in the spiritual realm (see 2 Cor. 12:1-4). Mary Baxter’s *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (1993) is a popular account of a Christian out-of-body experience.

The Bible says: “God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on

²⁰ Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), p. 125.

men as they slumber in their beds” (Job 33:14-15). No thanks to the influence of Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913), most people in our society today have been conditioned to believe that all dreams are natural and come from the unconscious self. People say things all the time like, “It was just a dream,” or “I was only dreaming.” Such a flippant dismissal of dreams is not found among the people in the Bible. **In my experience, dreams are the most common way that God tries to speak to me, aside from the Bible and everyday circumstances.** When I read the Bible, I get that impression about the Biblical prophets also. It seems to me that high level visions and voices were rarities that were documented on special occasions, but that dreams were a regular form of communication between God and man. The Book of Genesis has many dreams, often related as if they were “casual revelations”; the same is true of the Book of Daniel; and Matthew 1 and 2.

If you want to increase your experiences of divine dreams, I would suggest listening to Biblical dreams and visions on CD or MP3 before you go to sleep, or simply reading them.²¹ I believe this can put a Holy Ghost “dream anointing” on you and increase the frequency of divine dreams that you experience. However, this is NOT the only way to experience dreams and visions, but a

²¹ **Biblical Dreams:** Genesis 15, 28, 37, 40-41; Daniel 2, 4, 7; **Biblical Visions:** Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1, 8-11, 37, 40-47; Daniel 8-12; Amos 7-8; Zechariah 1-6; Luke 1; Acts 10, 22, 26; Revelation 1-22 (except Chapters 2-3, 18).

method of increasing your consciousness of the dream world. I also recommend keeping a **dream journal** and **recording your dreams** on a microcassette recorder right after you wake up, because these practices decrease the chances of forgetting important dreams from God. The Bible says that dreams have an elusive character and are easily forgotten (Job 20:8). Sometimes it requires meditation to recollect the content of a divine dream, or God may simply remind you of it later. However, **I think the most important method of increasing dream experiences is to spend plenty of time in divine contemplation, which opens up your spiritual consciousness.**



Gustave Dore's *Jacob's Ladder*

Like visions, dreams are usually symbolic and need to be interpreted. Some prophetic teachers don't believe

in using dream symbol dictionaries, because they are apparently too limited, objective, and pre-defined—but I believe in using them. The one I have used for years now is **Ira Milligan's *Understanding the Dreams You Dream* (1997)**. This is a concise dictionary/thesaurus that deciphers the various spiritual meanings of symbols that you might see in your dreams. Also, there is no reason why you can't use this book to help you interpret visions and divine coincidences. What is helpful is that Milligan attaches many potential meanings to each symbol, allowing the dreamer the freedom to intuitively interpret which meaning fits his dream symbol the best. Dream interpretation is a highly subjective discipline that requires background knowledge in Biblical symbolism, as well as a sensitive intuition. Also, for almost every dream symbol, Milligan has placed a Bible verse to substantiate it. Of course some dream symbols are modern and therefore extra-Biblical; this is when you have to feel with your intuition and interpret the dream through the peaceful interior impressions of the Holy Spirit. However, Milligan's book is a big help for beginners at dream interpretation.

For me the goal is to get to the point when I don't have to rely on Milligan's book at all, but until then it serves as an indispensable resource for training myself to think in terms of Biblical symbolism. **In my experience, dreams can usually be interpreted right away through using both Biblical symbolism and the intuition.** But sometimes, God hides the meaning of the dream from you for a period of time, so that He can reveal the inter-

pretation of the dream to you later when you need it. Sometimes, this can take months or even years to unfold; that is why it is good to journal any dreams that you feel are from God. But on one final note: NOT ALL DREAMS ARE FROM GOD—some are demonic and some are from your own heart. It is the dreamer's responsibility to prayerfully discern which dreams are from God. For further study about dreams, I recommend Herman Riffel's *Dream Interpretation* (1993), Steve and Dianne Bydeley's *Dream Dreams* (2002), Ira Milligan's *Every Dreamer's Handbook* (2005), and James Goll's *Dream Language* (2006).

Visions vs. Hallucinations

At the end of this discussion on dreams and visions, it is absolutely necessary that we have an understanding of the difference between a supernatural vision and a visual hallucination. **What is a hallucination?** To answer this question, I have turned to Albert Farges' *Mystical Phenomena Compared with Their Human and Diabolical Counterfeits* (1926). His is the only work of mystical theology that I know of that deals at length with the issue of hallucinations. I agree with Farges as he maintains that **a hallucination is an outward projection of a mental image**. This means that the word "hallucination," properly so-called, only applies to the discernment of open visions or apparitions of spirits. But as we know, modern psychology also considers auditory hallucinations and sensory hallucinations, which are less of an issue usually—

however, we can apply evil mental voices and morbid impressions to this application also. **How does one discern the difference between a visual hallucination and a truly supernatural vision?**

If for example, a man sees a truly supernatural vision of Jesus standing still in a room, then Jesus would stay in the same place, no matter how the seer moved his head or his eyes (Rev. 1:10-13). If the seer puts his hands over his eyes, and Jesus is covered from his line of sight; or, if the seer removes his hands from off of his eyes, and Jesus reappears in his line of sight in the same spot that the seer saw Him before; then that is how you can know that the man is seeing a truly supernatural vision of Jesus. If the man were hallucinating an image of Jesus, then if he turned his head, moved his eyes, and covered his eyes with his hands—he would still see the false image of Jesus, whether as projecting in front of his face or onto his hands.

When human eyes are healthy, they function like cameras, receiving light and color, and transforming them into images for the brain to understand. But when a brain is sick because of schizophrenia, psychosis, or some other mental illness, hallucinations are sometimes produced on top of what the man sees around him. **When a hallucination occurs, the mentally ill man's eyes function like movie projectors, and they actually project mental images in front of the eyes.** Through the lens of the eye, with the light inside of it, in very rare cases, hallucinations can actually be seen by others if a piece of plain paper is put in front of the eyes of the person hallucinating.

The hallucination will actually be projected onto the sheet of paper, just like a movie screen. This is a very difficult thing to test, and it requires special lighting in the room, and all of the appropriate scientific controls. But it is not too hard to believe, since Christ said, "The eye is the lamp of the body" (Matt. 6:22). Much like the luminescent red eye in photo spoofs or the cat's glowing eyes at night time, the human eye is created with a sort of ability to refract light, much better than a manmade camera or a movie projector.

Farges said, "If the image be hallucinatory it is subjective: within the eye, on which it depends. So in shutting the eyes the seer ought still to see it, and on moving the eyes or the head the image ought to move and be thrown in every direction with the look."²² But this would *not* be the case in a real supernatural vision of Jesus. If a seer really sees Jesus, then Jesus will stand still in a definite and fixed place, and even if the man wanted to run away from Jesus out of fear, then he would be able to. But in a hallucination, the image which is dependant completely on the eyes, would never escape him. Therefore, all hallucinations are the byproducts of mental illness; and by proving the eyes to be in a sort of defect by projecting images against their nature, **hallucinations are a symptom of brain sickness. And because all sickness is of the devil, then all hallucinations are of the devil.**

²² Albert Farges, *Mystical Phenomena Compared with Their Human and Diabolical Counterfeits* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), p. 377.

Therefore, God and His holy angels never produce hallucinations. They are caused by the devil and the brain when it is sickened, through an imbalance of hormones, emotional chemicals, and deteriorating brain tissue.

But what of mental voice hallucinations and sensational hallucinations? All I can say about those hallucinations is that they are marked by (1) their spontaneity, (2) their accompaniment to a mental illness, and (3) their often morbid nature. It may be harder to draw the line between auditory and sensory hallucinations and demonic voices and impressions. Just as it is often difficult to discern the difference between the activity of the Holy Spirit and the angels in revelations, so also it can be difficult to discern the difference between the activity of demons and the flesh (the corrupt nature of the human body, bent towards sickness and sin). The Holy Spirit and the angels are on the same team; and the devil and the human body are on the same team. Divine visions come from the Holy Spirit and the angels, but both demonic visions and hallucinations come from demons and the flesh.

Hallucinations only happen to people that are suffering from mental illness—whether it is a temporary illness or a permanent illness. This is not to say that mentally ill people are incapable of experiencing true revelations through visions, voices, and impressions from God. Only they should be extremely slow to trust any vision, voice, or impression; and they should be sure to apply the tests for hallucinations that I have explained. If an extraordinary experience can be proven to originate not in the human eye or brain, but from an outside source that is

not evil, then there is a probability it could be a divine revelation; especially if the experience is confirmed later on by a miracle, sign, or a coincidence.

4.15. Spiritual Impressions. An **impression** is an intuitive feeling that is accompanied by a special piece of information; it is a sensation that is mixed with a little fact or bit of knowledge about something; it is a “knowing,” a “compelling,” a “hunch,” or something that “dawns on you” from out of the middle of nowhere. It is a revelation through the feelings and emotions; it is when you have a feeling that makes you **instantly know that you know** a certain fact that you could not have learned naturally; and whatever that fact is, you are absolutely certain about it, without a doubt. You have a special gift of faith for it (1 Cor. 12:9).

An impression is a sudden thought that is imparted supernaturally and immediately through your feelings. You don’t know why you know that thing, but you just know it! You can’t shake it off; there is no reason or rhyme as to why you know it, but you just know it because you have a distinct feeling that says so. There is no rational or intellectual reason as to why you know it, but you just can’t shake this feeling that you know this thing to be true—that is an impression. It is knowledge that is perceived supernaturally through the intuition (Mark 2:8). There are different natures of impressions (interior and exterior), but there are many different feelings that each impression can communicate: grief, joy, peace, love, conviction, motivation, etc.

Sometimes an impression from the Holy Spirit can come in the form of **a sense of responsibility**. This is like a slight sinking feeling in your bosom; almost as if your heart is weighed down a little bit into your stomach. Or, it may come as a hard pounding of the heart, when you feel that you need to share something from your heart. It may be evidenced by weeping and divine compassion for the lost. It is not depression, but an emotional feeling when you have this distinct feeling that God wants you to do something specific—perhaps it is a commandment from God through your feelings. Once you act on this conviction, the burden will lift, and you will feel lighter. That is a common form of prophetic burden or impression.

Actually it is so common, that Watchman Nee felt that it was the only way by which a man should prophesy—through a “burden” from God.²³ But this is a sensitive issue: it is a highly displeasing thing to God to use the expression “the burden of the Lord” in reference to divine revelation in general (Jer. 23:28-29), because it leaves the false impression on people that most messages from God are negative and burdensome. Not so, for Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:30). However, God is not limited to speaking only positive and joyful messages. He speaks all sorts of emotional messages: correction, encouragement, hope, joy, warning, direction, etc (Job 33:17; 1 Cor. 14:3; Matt. 2:13; Acts 16:9).

²³ Watchman Nee, *God’s Work* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1974), p. 40.

So far, you have been reading about voices and visions; that is, you have been studying the auditory and visual forms of revelation. But just as our physical bodies have five senses, so also do our spirits: seeing, hearing, feeling, and even smelling and tasting! These are called **the five spiritual senses**.²⁴ In my experience, I understand there to be basically 4 different kinds of impressions:

1. Gentle Interior Impressions
2. Strong Interior Impressions
3. Gentle Exterior Impressions
4. Strong Exterior Impressions

(1) Gentle interior impressions are intuitive feelings that are accompanied by a special piece of information or “word of knowledge,” but they are felt **within** the body (the belly and heart)—and they are **gentle**. It is a gentle inward manifestation of the presence of an indwelling spirit; for Evangelical Christians, this is the Holy Spirit. For example, I have already referred to the flame of love in 4.11 and I will mention it again, because it is one of the central experiences of the mystics. This is an experience of the indwelling Holy Spirit making His presence known to the Christian (1 Cor. 6:19). He does it by producing a warming or burning feeling in the stom-

²⁴ See Albert Farges’ *Mystical Phenomena* (1923), Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 10: “The Five Spiritual Senses.”

ach or heart region, and it isn't to be confused with natural heartburn from spicy food or acid reflux.

This spiritual experience of mystical fire is reported as happening throughout the history of Christian mysticism, and also in Jeremiah 20:9: "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones." But be on guard! The evil spirits have a counterfeit for every spiritual experience that the Holy Spirit can produce. Interior fire is found in all sorts of cults like the Mormons and other mystical religions. The meaning of interior fire is two-fold: (1) The indwelling spirit of your god is saying, "Hi! I'm here, I'm within you." In Evangelical Christianity, this is the Holy Spirit. (2) The indwelling spirit of your god is producing the burning sensation in accompaniment with a revelation, in order to **confirm** that the revelation is true. In the case of the disciples at Emmaus, they experienced the interior fire as they realized that Christ died and rose again in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Luke 24:32). That was a revelation, and the Holy Spirit had put His fire in their hearts to prove it! He confirmed it with mystical fire.

James Goll agrees with this: "The reason their hearts were burning was because Someone was taking up residence within them. Their hearts burned within because the Spirit of revelation opened their eyes to understand the Scriptures."²⁵ The Bible says, "It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John

²⁵ Jim Goll, *Wasted on Jesus* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2000), p. 164.

5:6, NKJV). And regarding the revelation that born again Christians are God's children, the Bible says: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16, NKJV). The most notable of this kind of experience in church history was John Wesley's "Aldersgate Experience." Wesley was at a church meeting, when someone was reading from Martin Luther's preface to the epistle to the Romans. As Wesley was listening, he "felt his heart strangely warmed." It was at this moment that he received the revelation that salvation is through faith alone in Christ, a true change of heart is produced, and that he had a subjective assurance that Christ had forgiven him for all of his sins. No doubt, this was a comforting feeling, or as Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross call it, a "consolation." In the KJV, the indwelling Holy Spirit is called the Comforter (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

(2) Strong interior impressions are intuitive feelings that are accompanied by a special piece of information or "word of knowledge," but they are felt **within** the body (the belly and heart)—and they are **strong**. The only difference between a gentle interior impression and a strong one is obvious: gentle interior impressions are slight emotional feelings, but strong ones carry with them a powerful emotional force—an "unction" if you will (1 John 2:20, KJV). These experiences are more compelling and urgent, and therefore more obvious to recognize. For example, those who have ever experienced what James Goll calls **prophetic intercession** know what it means to have a strong interior impression to suddenly and sponta-

neously feel the urge to pray for someone or something unknown: “Often, the Spirit of God will prompt us to pray for situations or circumstances about which we may possess little knowledge in the natural. Thus, we are praying for the things that are on God’s heart. He ‘nudges’ us to pray so He can intervene.”²⁶

Supernatural intercession is not the only thing that strong interior impressions can function in, but this is one of their primary functions. **Interior fire** can sometimes be in a strong form, where it is as if there are living coals of divine fire burning within our chests and bellies (cp. Isa. 6:6-7; Luke 24:32; Jer. 20:9). And with it is the feeling of divine love mixed with intense internal heat. The fire is so hot, so intense within you, that it is like an oven in there! But when you go to touch the area with your hand on the surface of your bosom like Richard Rolle, it isn’t hot at all! Because it is a supernaturally sensed heat, not physically sensed; you feel it with your spirit’s intuition, because it is “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Sometimes this heat is accompanied by your heart beating very hard before you share a revelation. Sometimes “darts of anguish” or “darts of love” can painfully pierce the stomach region as an intercessory emotion; God is letting you know His feelings about the prayer request. St. Teresa of Avila experienced something like this when an angel pierced her through with a spiritual spear, and burned the love of God into her heart.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

Sometimes people sense a cooling feeling, as if cold water were sloshing around within their bosom. Jesus said, “He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water**” (John 7:38, KJV). This too, is a manifestation of the indwelling Holy Spirit; it is a “time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19, KJV). Sometimes this ushers forth in a spontaneous torrent of praying in tongues: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom. 8:26). Sometimes, He manifests as a fire, sometimes as cool waters: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the **still waters**” (Ps. 23:1-2, NKJV). I believe David had a spiritual experience in mind here. At other times, there may be no such “spiritual consolations” as the mystics call them. Sometimes, it will simply be a **prophetic burden**. Not a depressing thing that weighs you down, but more like a feeling of responsibility. You don’t have any reason for why you *will* this sudden burden, but you feel that you must do it. The spiritual burden comes “out of the clear blue sky,” yet it is as if something or Someone has possessed you to do some task that carries a significant sense of purpose and meaning.

You have no rational explanation for why you sense this burden, but you just know that you must satisfy it! You reach a point where you let your feeling override your reason so that you can fulfill the supernatural impression that you feel so deeply compels you—whether it

is spontaneous prayer, prophesying, worship, teaching, writing, etc. But watch out! Everything the Holy Spirit has to offer, so also does the devil in a counterfeit way. Schizophrenics often have delusions in this way. Test every “emotional message” with the Word of God: “To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20, NKJV). And as Evangelical Christians, we need to stick to the New Testament view of Biblical Law, Testimony, and Scripture: it’s all through the grace of God. For further study about the topic of interior impressions and the Biblical function of the intuition, see Watchman Nee’s *The Spiritual Man* (1928), Part 5, Chapter 1, on “Intuition.”

(3) Gentle exterior impressions are intuitive feelings that are accompanied by a special piece of information or “word of knowledge,” but they are felt **upon** the body (externally)—and they are **gentle**. Exterior impressions are sensations in the physical body, yet they are also “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). When people sense the presence of spirits external to their own bodies, they experience exterior impressions; and sometimes interior impressions also. Concerning the experiences of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we were dealing with interior impressions. But when we’re talking about **the baptism in the Holy Spirit**, for example, we may talk of exterior impressions. I understand that Christians disagree theologically about just what the baptism in the Holy Spirit is. I take the Charismatic perspective: that it is mainly for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8-10). I be-

lieve that the indwelling Holy Spirit is mainly intended to produce the moral fruit of the Spirit (Jer. 31:31-33; Gal. 5:22-23), but the baptism in the Holy Spirit is intended to give supernatural power for revelations, healings, and miracle working (Acts 1:8). In the Bible the word “baptize” means to immerse (Gk. *baptizo*); that is, **the outside of the body gets wet with water when water baptized, but the outside of the body gets covered with miraculous power when Spirit baptized**. John the Baptist spoke of this similarity: “I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Therefore, when someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, the **outside** of their body has the Holy Spirit on it, but not necessarily the inside.

Both Samson and Saul had moral problems; one might say that they had a small portion of the indwelling ethical desires of the Holy Spirit, if at all (Judges 16:4-20; 1 Sam. 19:1-24). But both Samson and Saul, though they weren’t very devout, experienced the miraculous *baptism* in the Holy Spirit—Samson had supernatural strength and Saul prophesied. Both men are spoken of as having the Holy Spirit “come upon” them, as it enveloped the exterior of their bodies, but it never penetrated inwardly into their hearts (Judges 14:19; 1 Sam. 19:23, KJV). The *indwelling* Holy Spirit is about morality, but not so much about miracles. The *baptism* in the Holy Spirit is mainly about miracles, but not so much about morality; this is why there are many so-called faith healers that live wicked lifestyles, but have the ability to prophesy and

heal through the power of the Holy Spirit. But concerning these kind of people, Jesus said:

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!” (Matt. 7:21-23).

To reiterate, I mention all of these things because—for the Evangelical Christian—interior impressions are from the indwelling Holy Spirit or the soul, but exterior impressions are from the baptism in the Holy Spirit, or the presence of angels and demons. Interior impressions refer to inside the body, but exterior impressions refer to outside the body. For the sake distinction, demon possession is demonic control from within the heart and will, but oppression is a demonic attack on a person from the exterior.

What is it like to experience demonic oppression? It is torturous, annoying, frustrating, scary, and wearisome: demons try very hard to “wear out the saints of the Most High” (Dan. 7:25, KJV). Demons speak through all of the modes of revelation—if not just to deceive, then to torment. They speak through visions, dreams (nightmares, violence, and pornography), voices, impressions, horrid smells like sulfur, disgusting tastes in

the air that bespeak of spiritual death, and even demonically-orchestrated coincidences (omens) intended to look like signs from God. Because of their mental attacks, healthy victims can look like they're mentally ill, but they might just be very "worn out." Demonic visions often oppress those who are mentally ill or brain sick. Therefore, demonic visions seem to get more attention in our society from psychiatrists. Unless a man is actually indwelt by a demon, he can't feel interior impressions from a demon—whether in his head or in any other place of his body.

Demonic exterior impressions are intuitive feelings that are accompanied by a special piece of information or "word of knowledge," but they are felt *upon* the body (externally)—and they are either *gentle* or *strong*, but *always with a sense of evil or fear*. The kind of "emotional word" a demon might cause you to feel depends upon the circumstance, but it is usually **fear**. Demons love to scare people, because they hate them; no doubt they must enjoy Halloween. All kinds of other demonic impressions can be laid emotionally on people, and they are usually extremely **sinful**: pride, racism, condescension, lust, murder, rape, theft, idolatry, occult practice, homosexuality, pedophilia, incest, etc. Of course, Jesus said that sin proceeds from the human heart (Matt. 15:19), so we can't always declare, "The devil made me do it!" But there are times when a demon does indeed inspire a sinful notion (Matt. 16:23), especially in mental illnesses like schizophrenia. Through the intuitive gift of discerning of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10), we can develop the

ability to sense the presence of demons around us on certain occasions. This sensing is made possible by **emotional emanations** that a demon can “broadcast” while within proximity of your body. I am intentionally avoiding the New Age term “vibrations” or “vibes” here, because that bespeaks of a different mystical philosophy. You may not see the evil spirit, but you can sense precisely where it is. If you are spiritually sensitive enough, it is possible to locate, for example, a spirit of pride to your left diagonally three feet in front of you. It is possible to sense evil spirits that specifically!

The good news is that you can **sense the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit and the angels** in the same way—externally. The Holy Spirit can be externally sensed in all kinds of situations, but more commonly in a worship or prayer atmosphere. When Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians come together to close their eyes, concentrate on God, and really “worship in the Spirit” (John 4:24), they often testify to experiencing the presence of God. They might say, “I feel the Holy Ghost!” or “The Anointing is so strong right now!” They may even feel the sudden urge to praise God in tongues or to prophesy (Acts 2:11). What they are experiencing is an external impression from the Holy Spirit. They might testify to experiencing all sorts of divine feelings: awe, reverence, holiness, the fear of the Lord, peace that surpasses understanding, God’s love for them, the joy of the Lord, humility, smelling supernatural nectar or sweet oil—tasting it in the atmosphere (Ps. 34:8), and an increase of faith produced by an awareness of God’s presence. Atheistic

doubts vanish in the presence of the Lord: you just know that you know that God is real. Your senses are overwhelmed with God's presence. The Holy Spirit is omnipresent, or present everywhere (Ps. 139:7-8), but this goes on undetected by man. In order for the Holy Spirit to be felt or sensed, He has to manifest. The omnipresence of God is hidden, but **the manifest presence of God** is revealed. It is a revelation to feel the Holy Spirit—a revelation in the form of an external impression. (Or, if it is interior spiritual fire or water, then it's a revelation in the form of an interior impression; but now we are talking about exterior impressions.)

Angels can also produce exterior impressions. It is possible to intuitively sense their presences also. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the difference between the presence of the Holy Spirit and an angel, because they're both part of God's kingdom. Billy Graham was right when he said:

At the same time, both angels and the Holy Spirit are at work in our world to accomplish God's perfect will. Frankly, we may not always know the agent or means God is using—the Holy Spirit or the angels—when we discern God's hand at work. We can be sure, however, that there is no contradiction or competition between God the Holy Spirit and God's command of the angelic hosts.

God Himself is in control to accomplish His will—and in that we can rejoice!²⁷

Especially if they remain invisible, sensing the difference between the two spirits can be difficult, because angels carry the manifest presence of God with them (Luke 1:19). As long as you don't knowingly worship the presence of an angel, then you're not sinning (Rev. 19:10). Both God and the angels know who it is you are worshipping in your heart. Focus on Jesus when you worship, and sometimes the angels will even help you to worship God through your feelings. They can impart strength to you (Luke 22:43). The external feelings they impart are the same ones the Holy Spirit imparts. They always help you to exalt and worship God, and not themselves.

(4) Strong exterior impressions are intuitive feelings that are accompanied by a special piece of information or “word of knowledge,” but they are felt **upon** the body (externally)—and they are **strong**. Whether we are referring to demonic encounters, angelic encounters, or divine encounters—these three kinds of spirits can impress us gently or STRONGLY. The Bible says of Samson, that “the Spirit of the Lord came *mightily* upon him” (Judges 14:6; 15:14, KJV). Other passages of Scripture just use a regular expression: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon” (Judges 6:34) or “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David” (1 Sam. 16:13, KJV), etc. But

²⁷ Billy Graham, *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), p. 48.

the fact that Judges 14:6 and other related Scriptures make a special distinction between the Holy Spirit “coming upon” someone and the Holy Spirit “coming *mightily* upon” someone, this tells me that there is Biblical evidence for strong exterior impressions. For example, you may sense a gentle presence of God in the room you are worshiping in, a light sweet presence. You are aware of His presence ever so slightly, but you know He’s there. That would be an example of a gentle exterior impression of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

However, there are times when **the glory of the Lord** fills the room so that you cannot stand, because you fall into a trance and are mightily slain in the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 8:10-11); in such a case, you may see vivid divine visions and hear God’s voice clearly. You might sense that the presence of God is thick, or humid, or dense in the atmosphere; and the Anointing is strong. The fear of the Lord overwhelms you and you cannot stand to say a word, because of the great fear of God’s power and presence. In this case you are not just slightly aware of God’s presence, you are very aware of God’s presence, and you feel as if you are in Heaven in the Throne Room of God. You feel as if the great hand of the Lord is pushing you down to the ground on your belly, so that you lay prostrate in His presence: “He makes me lie down in green pastures” (Ps. 23:2).

4.16. The Gifts of the Spirit. We have already been discussing the nature of the gifts of the Spirit in dreams, visions, voices, and spiritual impressions. But now we’re

going to get more specific. Most of my information on this issue is based off of Derek Prince's *The Gifts of the Spirit* (2007). I generally agree with everything Prince teaches in this book, except for disagreements about his definition of the gift of prophecy, healing gifts, and his insistence that miracles cannot be worked at will. When we refer to the nine gifts of the Spirit or even just "the gifts of the Spirit"—we are referring to the supernatural gifts:

To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:8-10, NKJV).

I recognize that there are lists of **ministry gifts** (Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11), but since our study is about spiritual experiences, we will be focusing on the **charismatic gifts** (1 Cor. 12:8-10)—also called miraculous gifts, supernatural gifts, manifestation gifts, or sign gifts. I agree with most of what Prince says, but not all. Firstly, I disagree with Prince's division of the charismatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. After studying his work on each gift, I have decided to divide them up like this:

I. Vocal Gifts

(8) Gifts of Tongues – Speaking in an Unknown Language²⁸

II. Revelation Gifts

(1) Words of Wisdom – Directive Revelation

(2) Words of Knowledge – Mind-Reading Revelation

(3) Faith – Miracle Working Revelation

(6) Prophecy – Future Revelation

(7) Discernings of Spirits – God, Angel, or Demon Revelation

(9) Interpretation of Tongues – Tongue Revelation

III. Power Gifts

(4) Gifts of Healings – Different Kinds of Healing Gifts

(5) Workings of Miracles – Instant Healing and Nature Miracles

The definition of each of these gifts is essentially the gist of Prince's teaching—except for how he defines the gift of prophecy. Terminologically, it seems to me that there is a controversy among Bible scholars about how to define the word “prophecy.” **Prince teaches that the gift of prophecy is essentially an ecstatic utterance that is spoken through an impression from the Holy Spirit;** and for this reason, he calls prophecy a vocal gift rather than a revelation gift. I find this confusing. Prince basically confines the gift of prophecy to “ecstatic prophecy,”

²⁸ That is, praying or prophesying.

and that's it. I disagree about this, because I believe it is too limiting of a definition for such a broadly used phrase: the gift of prophecy. For more on ecstatic prophecy, see Stacey Campbell's *Ecstatic Prophecy* (2008).

I believe that ecstatic prophesying is to be included within the revelation gifts, but that all of them might function through it, just as they might through dreams, visions, and voices. So, what I mean to say is that I believe the gift of prophecy is not only a vocal gift, nor do I believe that it is confined merely to impressions. I find Prince's definition to be too limiting and contradictory to the other five revelation gifts, which to my mind, can just as well be experienced through ecstatic impressions and utterances. Words of wisdom, words of knowledge, faith, discernings of spirits, and the interpretation of tongues can all be experienced through ecstatic impressions. So, I find it unnecessary to confine prophecy as the only impression-oriented vocal gift aside from tongues. Rather, **I feel that the apostle Paul's idea when he referred to the gift of prophecy was of a revelation of the future.** Even in today's popular culture, when someone refers to a prophecy, they are not referring to just any run-of-the-mill revelation. They are referring to a supernatural prediction about the future. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 are known as messianic prophecies. So, I maintain that the gift of **prophecy** is a revelation of future things.

In respect for Derek Prince's excellent work on the subject of spiritual gifts, now I will expound a little bit more on the other gifts: **tongues** can come in various ways, such as *xenoglossy*—which is when one prays in a

foreign earthly language unknown to the tongue speaker. Their sole purpose is to testify as a sign to unbelievers (Acts 2:4-11). “Mysteries in the Spirit” or *glossolalia* are ecstatic tongues that are not of an earthly language; rather, they come directly from the human spirit indwelt by God’s Spirit. Their sole purpose is to strengthen the human spirit of the tongue speaker (1 Cor. 14:4, 14). **Words of wisdom** are directive revelations; in other words, they are revelations that tell you what to do, where to go, or when to do it. They are very practical revelations, and they can solve complex dilemmas and problems (Luke 5:4-10; Acts 16:6-10). **Words of knowledge** are mind-reading revelations; that is, they reveal secrets about individuals’ lives, circumstances, spirits, souls, and bodies. They can be effective at evangelism, powerful in conviction, confirmation, and faith building (John 4:15-19; Acts 10:19-21).

Faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is a “miracle working faith” or faith for a specific miracle. This is not the normal “saving faith” that we read about in Ephesians 2:8, nor the “faithfulness” that we read about in Galatians 5:22. The gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 is a special faith that is specifically geared towards working miracles. **Miracle working faith is a revelation.** It is received from God as a gift, as He sovereignly wills (1 Cor. 12:11). Like all other kinds of revelations, miracle working faith is imparted through dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs. It is a temporary faith to work a miracle that suddenly and spontaneously comes upon you, like when Moses received revelation that God would

part the Red Sea as soon as he lifted his rod and hand (Exod. 14:16).

Miracle working faith is a revelation that imparts supernatural confidence that God is shortly going to work a specific kind of miracle through you. For example, casting out a demon or walking on water—I believe Jesus probably experienced dreams and visions about these things before He did them. You can, in a vision, see the miracle happen before it happens—and this produces a miraculous feeling of faith for you to move into the miracle. This kind of faith is given by God, experienced by you, and worked through both you and God. It is not the product of psychic abilities, but is rather a private revelation that gives you the confidence to work whatever kind of miracle the revelation says you can do. If I get a revelation through a mental voice that I'll have the power to raise a dead man, then I'll have faith to speak to the dead to be raised. If I receive an impression that I'll have power to heal a blind boy, then I'll have the faith to lay my hands on the boy so that he will be healed. And if I get a revelation through a vision that I will have power to move a mountain by speaking to it, then even so I would have the faith to do it.

Therefore, **the gift of faith is a revelation gift.** Derek Prince echoes the voices of other teachers on spiritual gifts when he says that the gift of faith is a rare occurrence and is only expected to work in sudden, spontaneous, sovereign instances of God's grace. However, I

believe this view is influenced by monergism.²⁹ While partially true, I also differ with Prince on this point also. God is sovereign and in control of the universe, and He distributes the gifts as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11). But just as God sovereignly distributes the gifts of tongues to some believers, so also does God sovereignly distribute the other 8 supernatural gifts of the Spirit—including the gift of faith. **BUT NO CHRISTIAN HAS ALL OF THE CHARISMATIC GIFTS** (see 1 Cor. 12:12-31). Many who speak in tongues know very well that once they have received the gift, they can speak in tongues *at will*. I believe that this also applies to the gift of faith and all of the spiritual gifts that certain Christians have received. Just as I believe in speaking in tongues at will, I believe that some can activate the gift of faith at will, enter revelatory vision and hearing at will, command healing at will, and work miracles at will.

The mystery that needs to be uncovered is how to put these latent spiritual gifts into activation. I believe that there are many things that ministries with prophetic

²⁹ *Monergism* is the Reformed or Calvinistic teaching that man does not have a free will, but that God forces and controls man's will through His grace in order to save and bless him spiritually. This is taught by the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the strict Baptists, and the Dutch Reformed. However, I count this to be a false doctrine, because it excludes the reality of man's responsibility to actively cooperate with God's Spirit once He has convicted or graced man by His presence. A monergistic relationship with God would be no real relationship at all, but rather like the relationship between a puppetmaster and a puppet.

schools and healing schools³⁰ can teach us about in this area of **activating spiritual gifts at will**. But essentially what they will tell you is that the prophetic gifts are activated by spiritually reading individuals or groups of people by looking for mental images, listening for mental voices, and feeling for spiritual impressions that pertain to those people. Interacting with these mental images or visions is also important for tapping into a flow of more visions—this is possible by speaking to the mental images, praying about them, or journaling about them. Healing schools will increase the healing gifts by teaching about divine healing, like John G. Lake taught. Then after your faith for healing is heightened, they will teach you to lay hands on sicknesses and command them to be healed in Jesus' Name. At will activation of spiritual gifts! (However, experience in healing prayer will show you how gifted or not gifted you are in healing.)

I agree with Prince when he argues that the **discernings of spirits** is a revelation of spirits and their activities. Whether it be the Holy Spirit (John 1:29, 31-33), angels (Luke 22:43), demons (Acts 16:16-18), or the human

³⁰ If you do an Internet search for phrases like “prophetic school,” “school of prophetic ministry,” “healing school,” “school of healing ministry,” and the name of your state, such as “Tennessee,” you will be able to find local ministries that will train you to flow in the gifts of revelation and healing. **The International Association of Healing Rooms, Hunter Ministries, and Global Awakening** are ministries that offer healing schools internationally. Material put out by **James Goll, Patricia King, and Kris Vallotton** are also designed to activate prophetic giftings.

spirit (John 1:47)—the discernings of spirits reveals the location and operation of these spirits in our midst. Often it is through open visions and impressions that angels and demons are discerned. Whenever someone sees the glory of God, an angel, or a demon in an open vision, it is the gift of the discernings of spirits in operation. My wife and I sometimes see “orbs,” “sparkles,” and “mists” with our eyes open—and at the most spontaneous and unexpected times. And I do believe that I have seen the mist or “cloud of the Lord” on various occasions. Whenever someone feels the Holy Spirit during worship, it is the discerning of spirits operating through an impression. And whenever someone gets a word of knowledge to read the secrets of a man’s heart—it is also the discerning of spirits in operation. Sometimes the spiritual gifts overlap one another. Essentially the discernings of spirits operate through dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs—just like every other revelation gift. However, I agree with Prince when he teaches that the gift primarily operates through visions and impressions. In my experience, closed visions, open visions, impressions, and sometimes dreams are vehicles for this revelation gift.

Interpretation of tongues is a revelation of the meaning of your own tongues you’ve been praying with, or of the tongues of someone else. Immediately following a tongue, if one prays that he may interpret (1 Cor. 14:13), he may receive a revelation of what the tongue meant. After receiving the revelation through a vision, voice, or impression, the interpreter proceeds to speak the revelation in understandable words (Acts 19:6). This is

how the interpretation of tongues operates. **Gifts of healings** are usually *progressive* supernatural healings of the body or emotions. They are usually invisible to the human eye, because they might deal with the healing of internal organs, or of some other thing that heals in time. Even if an external body part is healed, it is usually indiscernible, because the healing happens over the course of time rather than instantly (Mark 8:23-26). They happen during healing prayer or sometimes in an atmosphere infused with the Spirit of healing. While anyone can normally pray for healing to cause it to come about, quietly listening to the Holy Spirit for words of knowledge, healings usually need some measure of miracle working faith to be mixed in with the healing command to be effective. And some people have special gifts of healings to heal certain diseases through prayer (e.g., cancer, arthritis, blindness, schizophrenia, etc).

Workings of miracles of course also need miracle working faith in order to operate. Only through revelation can God work a miracle through a man. In contrast to the healing gifts, Prince limits miracles to **instant** supernatural acts. Whereas healing gifts are usually progressive, miracle working is always instant. By this we understand instant healing, instant exorcism, instant resurrection, instant power over death, the weather, gravity, etc. And whatever is an instant healing can be called a “miraculous healing.” Any other kind of miracle falls into the category of what may be called a “nature miracle” or a supernatural manifestation over the forces of nature (e.g., the ten plagues of Egypt, parting the Red Sea, calming the storm,

stilling the sun, changing water into wine, moving physical mountains, walking on water, ascending into Heaven, floating an axe head in water, teleporting from Gaza to Azotus, withering a fig tree at your word, multiplying bread and fish, etc).³¹

Faith for these kinds of mighty deeds can only come through revelation to do the task. Prince also notes that there is often an “act” or “work” of faith that has to be applied in order for the miracle to activate, because faith without works is dead (James 2:17). For example, when the men obeyed Jesus and took the water to the master of the wedding feast, it turned into wine along the way. Peter also took a step of faith out of the boat and onto the water with Jesus—notice the at will activation on Peter’s part. In order to make the fig tree wither, Jesus acted in faith by speaking to it. Jesus also spoke to the dead in order to raise them as acts of faith. Moses raised his hand over the Red Sea in order to part it. While God’s grace and power were imparted to these men of faith, all of these acts of faith caused the miracle to move into effect at will—but within God’s will. For more expository teaching on the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, see Donald Gee’s *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (1928),

³¹ These are examples of Biblical miracles. However, in church history, miracles were usually performed by the Catholic saints. In time, as skepticism took hold of the church, the miracle stories of church history came to be called “legends.” The most comprehensive collection of Christian miracle stories is Jacobus de Voragine’s *The Golden Legend* (1260).

Harold Horton's *The Gifts of the Spirit* (1934), Howard Carter's *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation* (1968), Dennis and Rita Bennett's *The Holy Spirit and You* (1971), Smith Wigglesworth's *Smith Wigglesworth on Spiritual Gifts* (1998), Rodney Howard-Browne's *Flowing in the Holy Spirit* (2000), and Sam Storms' *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (2002).

4.17. Supernatural Coincidences. A “sign” or supernatural coincidence is a coincidence that is orchestrated supernaturally by God, an angel, or a demon. Spirits have powers that are so above and beyond our abilities, and most of the time they transcend our recognition. They are so powerful—especially God, of course—that they can control circumstances, situations, and events in our lives. While they do not control our circumstances entirely, they can at least heavily influence them. Everything from giving certain people impressions, to causing natural disasters, to healing people, to giving revelations: spirits can orchestrate quite well our circumstances by supernaturally intervening in our world through their hidden and mysterious ways.

They can plot and plan a chain of events for us to experience, and these chains of events may have some common theme or message—but the events themselves may be seemingly unrelated to each other; they are “coincidences.” Just what is a “coincidence”? *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines a coincidence as “a sequence of events that although accidental seems to have been planned or arranged.” In our society today, entrenched in

rationalistic thinking, most people do not believe that spirits exist. “Everything happens by chance,” the thinking goes; and nothing really has any meaning. The dictionary’s definition of a coincidence as “accidental” is in keeping with our society’s chance-based worldview of these experiences. But is this view of coincidences even Biblical? Actually it isn’t, as we will soon see.

The Biblical worldview of coincidences would define them as “a sequence of events that have been planned or arranged by God, an angel, or a demon.”

As a result of this view, some Christians say, “I don’t believe in coincidences.” What they are really saying is that they don’t believe that these coinciding events happened by random chance, but that they were orchestrated by God to communicate a message. The dictionary defines “coincide” as two things that happen at the same time. It is not the coinciding of events that is disagreeable to the Christian, but the interpretation that coinciding events have no supernatural cause and are the products of random chance—that is disagreeable to the Christian. New Agers and occultists believe in meaningful coincidences, but they use the term “omen.” However, they are entrenched in spiritual darkness, and their omens are from their “gods” or “spirit guides.”

Coincidences are like impressions—they are intuitively discerned, but are usually thought to be strange events that happen at random all by themselves. But since we know that God has control over all things (except free will), we understand that “the Lord does whatever pleases Him, in the Heavens and on the Earth, in the seas and all

their depths” (Ps. 135:6). Regarding our lives, we know that the Lord God controls our comings and our goings, even though we might not be aware of it: “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Prov. 16:9). **God can use coincidences to speak to us.** If you break up the parts of the word “coincidence” etymologically, you will find that *co-* means “together,” and the Latin word *incidere* means “to fall upon.” So, the way I understand the word “coincidence” is as two events that are converging, overlapping, “falling upon” each other, happening at the same time, or at least very near to the same time.

One common way that God speaks to me is through what I call **Bible coincidences**. For example, I felt like the Lord had recently led me to meditate on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, and conclude that not every Christian has the gift of healing. Some members of the Body of Christ have that gift, while others don’t, and God makes it so that Christians have to depend on one another. 30 minutes after I mused on this Scripture, we went to a healing meeting. They had a teaching they were going through from Kenneth Hagin’s *Gifts of the Spirit* (2006). They were halfway through their book study. When we got there, out of all the Scriptures they were studying, they “just so happened” to be currently studying 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. That is a Bible coincidence; and it greatly increased my faith and confirmed to me that sick Christians need to seek Christian healers and not believe that every Christian has the *gift* of healing. This is not to say that every Christian can’t *pray* for healing, but that only some

Christians have miraculous results when they pray for healing. God used this Bible coincidence to confirm to me that this interpretation of Scripture was correct.

Since God can control events, it should make sense that God can orchestrate coincidences in order to show us what we may call “signs from God” or “divine appointments,” to use John Wimber’s phrase. However, even though demons aren’t all-powerful like God, they too can orchestrate coincidences to deceive men into thinking that God is speaking to them about something. Biblical discernment still applies to supernaturally caused coincidences. Those who are familiar with Jungian psychology—which is New Age—use a special word for coincidences that are caused either by demon gods or by God Himself. That word is **synchronicity**; it was a

term used by the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung to describe “meaningful coincidences.” In Jung’s view, it was not uncommon for symbols of the unconscious mind to coincide in dreams or mystical experiences with events occurring in the waking world of physical reality. Jung believed that synchronicity provided a rationale for astrology and some forms of divination, such as the *I Ching*.³²

³² Nevill Drury, “Synchronicity,” in *The Dictionary of the Esoteric* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002), p. 299. Warning: This is an occult dictionary. I advise against bringing this book into your household, because of the possibility of demonic oppression.

The above definition also hints towards another phenomenon related to supernatural coincidence: **déjà vu**. And again Biblical discernment needs to be applied to déjà vu experiences as well, because they too can either be caused by God or demons. By definition, déjà vu is

from the French meaning “already seen,” the sensation of having visited a place “before,” often taken to be evidence of reincarnation. It is normally regarded as a symptom of a psychological process whereby the unconscious mind is stimulated to “remember” events that have previously occurred elsewhere and which are somehow associated by the person with the new location.³³

I believe that sometimes God gives people prophetic dreams of the future, and then they forget those dreams. Then say months later, in their waking state, a piece of that dream will come to pass in their environment, and they’ll say, “Whoa! I just had déjà vu!” At that point, it would be time to seek the Lord for a word of knowledge to interpret the meaning of that déjà vu experience. Katrina Wilson agrees:

Most of us would admit that we’ve been in a situation in which we realized that things were familiar, but we knew that we had never physically been in that place before. **I’ve come to the conclusion that déjà vu comes because we dreamed about**

³³ Nevill Drury, “Déjà Vu,” in *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, p. 68.

something before it happened. You may not remember or write down a dream, but circumstances can bring back to you portions of the dream.³⁴

But as we have seen, New Agers also have their ways of interpreting déjà vu experiences, such as using them to “prove” reincarnation. So, as with all mystical experiences, use the Bible to test déjà vu experiences!

Coincidences can be caused by demons, because Carl Jung thought that coincidences could explain some forms of divination, which is the practice of communicating with demons through the occult. When a demon or a pagan god shows a sign, it is called either an “omen” or an “augury”—which comes from the sin of divination (Deut. 18:10). But when God shows a sign, it is called a “sign from God.” **Is there any evidence in the Bible of God arranging a coincidence to show a sign? The answer is yes.** Let’s take a close look at the divine coincidence about Rebekah and the well of Haran in Genesis 24. In Genesis 24:1-9, Abraham made his chief servant swear an oath to him to find a wife for his son Isaac in Mesopotamia. Abraham didn’t want his son to marry a Canaanite woman. This was God’s will, because God told Abraham that He would send an angel before the chief servant so that he would be able to get Isaac a wife from Mesopotamia (24:7c). In Genesis 24:10-27, we have an

³⁴ Katrina Wilson, *Dream Talk* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), p. 41.

example of a divinely-orchestrated coincidence, or a “sign from God.” Once Abraham’s servant arrived in the town of Haran in Northwestern Mesopotamia,

He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one You have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master” (Gen. 24:11-14).

Then we read that even “before he had finished praying” this prayer (24:15a), that a young woman named Rebekah came out to the well to fill her water jar! When Abraham’s servant asked her for a drink, she said, “Drink, my lord.” After she gave him his drink, without her knowing what the servant was praying about previously, she offered to give the camels a drink too! Precisely what the servant had prayed for about a few minutes ago! Astonished, the servant asked the girl who’s daughter she was. And she told him that she was Bethuel’s daughter, and the granddaughter of Nahor. This was doubly “coincidental,” because Nahor was Abraham’s own brother (24:15b)! Out of all the people in the town of Haran, Abraham’s servant didn’t “just so happen” by random

chance to bump into Abraham's relative; no, this was a **divine coincidence**, and a sign from God—a confirmation of God's will. Abraham's servant was so persuaded that this divine coincidence was a sign from God, that he said: "Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives" (Gen. 24:27).

The casting of lots can also be used as a prophetic method of discerning God's will that depends on divine coincidence. It was used in the Bible times as a means of decision making in light of God's sovereign control over all things—including His control over dice and other similar objects used for casting lots. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." The apostles knew this, so they cast lots in order to discern who the new apostle would be that would fill the place of Judas Iscariot. Acts 1:26 says, "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles." But notice that this was preceded by corporate prayer and was practiced in a Spirit-led atmosphere (Acts 1:24). Like Joshua, the apostles were sure to cast their lots "in the presence of the Lord" (Josh. 18:10). The Hebrew word for "presence" here is *paniym*, which is the same word that is translated to the "face" of God—that is, the manifest presence of God. Therefore, casting lots the Biblical way requires performing it prayerfully in God's manifest presence. This author makes an appropriate comment here:

Does Joshua's action imply that believers today are free to use games of chance such as drawing straws, flipping a coin, or rolling dice in making important decisions? Not everyone will feel comfortable using such an approach, but Joshua's example at least offers it as a possibility.³⁵

The casting of lots was "a way of making decisions in Bible times, similar to drawing straws or casting a pair of dice to determine what course or direction to follow."³⁶ D. E. Aune says that a lot is "a device used to determine the will of God or of the gods, i.e., a form of divination...Lots, though a form of divination, were never a forbidden practice in ancient Israel as were the other major forms of divination (cf. Deut. 18:9-14)...A variety of small objects of stone, wood, clay, or other material were also used...The lots appear to have been kept in a container in which they were shaken until one was thrown or sprang out."³⁷ It is true that casting lots, being a form of divination, is also practiced by pagans. "Among the many forms of divination are predictions based on symbols of the Tarot cards; the fall of dice, yarrow sticks, or colored

³⁵ "Decision-Making" in *What Does the Bible Say About...* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 100.

³⁶ Herbert Lockyer, "Lots, Casting of" in *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986), p. 655.

³⁷ D. E. Aune, "Lots," in vol. 3 of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979-1988), pp. 172-173.

beans.”³⁸ Since “dice may be cast randomly as a form of divination,”³⁹ and Bible scholars have determined that dice were used as a means of casting lots in Bible times, it follows that prayerfully rolling dice and other Spirit-led ways of lot casting are “sanctified forms of divination,” though some Christians may understandably find that expression repulsive! But let us remind ourselves that this is not a New Age practice if done unto Jesus Christ—the Evangelical, Biblical understanding of Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Remember that the apostles cast lots (Acts 1:26).

To some Christians, this idea of casting lots as “sacred divination” might be a stumbling block at first, but a close study of the Scriptures about lots should dispel all doubts about this practice. It was a common practice by God’s people in the Bible—especially in Old Testament times. It is true that the Bible says, “Let no one be found among you...who practices divination...the Lord your God has not permitted you to do so” (Deut. 18:10, 14). But because casting lots is not specifically forbidden by any Scripture, but rather sanctioned by several Scriptures, we can then conclude that casting lots is not meant to be included in this law about divination.

There are several examples in the Old Testament about God using the casting of lots as a means of speaking to the Israelites. There were *the Urim and Thummim*, which were used for priestly decision making (Exod.

³⁸ Nevill Drury, “Divination,” in *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, p. 75.

³⁹ Nevill Drury, “Dice,” *Ibid.*, p. 74.

28:30). While no one knows exactly how these were used, “many scholars believe these gems were cast, much as dice are thrown, to aid the high priest in making important decisions.”⁴⁰ They are thought to have provided a “Yes” or “No” answer from God to serious questions taken before His manifest presence—perhaps the Urim represented “Yes” and the Thummim represented “No.” Casting lots was also used as a means of determining God’s will in *the allotment of land* (Num. 33:54; 34:13; Josh. 18:6, 8, 10; 19:51), determining who God wanted to provide *wood for the altar* (Neh. 10:34), determining who God had privileged to be able to *live in Jerusalem* (Neh. 11:1), and determining who God wanted to be *temple workers* (1 Chron. 24:5).

The practice of casting lots depends on the sovereignty of God, not on chance. If we believe that God is in control of all things, then we should believe that even when a lot is prayerfully cast, its every decision will be from the Lord (Prov. 16:33). That is, when prayerfully in His manifest presence, the Holy Spirit controls the roll of the dice, the pull of the straw, the flip of the coin, etc. Granted, there is room for a pagan to be deceived by a diviner’s interpretation, but when in the manifest presence of the God, even pagans can be guided by God through the casting of lots. Such was the case with the pagan sailors in the Book of Jonah. Jonah’s ship was in trouble on the sea, and the pagans wanted to figure out

⁴⁰ Herbert Lockyer, “Urim and Thummim,” in *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986), p. 1083.

who on the ship brought about this bad omen. God's presence apparently manifested on the ship in Jonah's presence, to move on the lots, in order to judge him for his disobedience: "Then the sailors said to each other, 'Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.' They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah" (Jon. 1:7). God used the casting of lots—a practice shared by both the Israelites and the pagans—in order to speak to the men on Jonah's ship. But casting lots can also be used for non-prophetic, chance-based purposes like gambling or playing games (Job 6:27; Joel 3:3; Nah. 3:10; Ps. 22:18; Mark 15:24).

"What many people think are coincidences are actually valid prophetic impressions from God," says Steve Thompson.⁴¹ So, are *all* coincidences supernatural? It's hard to say for sure; perhaps some coincidences are produced by random chance; it is certainly possible. But one thing is for sure: every time I experience a coincidence, I immediately begin to interpret it as if it were from God. At the same time, I believe that both God and demons can orchestrate coincidences in order to speak to us through signs or omens. Like all private revelations, coincidences are still a matter of Bible-based discernment, and discernment rules should be applied. For further study on the topic of divine coincidences, see Squire Rushnell's *When God Winks at You: How God Speaks Directly to You Through the Power of Coincidence* (2006).

⁴¹ Steve Thompson, *You May All Prophesy* (Fort Mill, SC: Morning-Star Publications, 2007), p. 38.

4.18. Tongues. There is a lot of mystery surrounding the gift of tongues. Many do not really know what they're all about or why they are even necessary for the Christian life. But once you have had the experience of tongues yourself, then you will know that they are beneficial to your spirit and soul. There are several key Scriptures that pertain to tongues:

Mark 16:17: Jesus said, "These signs will accompany those who believe: In My Name...*they will speak in new tongues.*"

Acts 2:4: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to *speak in other tongues* as the Spirit enabled them."

Acts 19:6: "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and *they spoke in tongues* and prophesied."

1 Corinthians 14:4a: "*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.*"

The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 is about the relationship between the gifts of tongues and prophecy and their functions in church meetings. Tongues are difficult to understand intellectually, because they are intuitive and spiritual utterances. Therefore, it is wise that we follow the mystical guidelines of Scripture on the topic.

There are two kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10; 13:1). **Xenoglossy** are the kind of tongues in Acts 2:4 where Spirit-filled men supernaturally speak in unknown earthly languages. In the early outpouring of the Pentecostal movement, this kind of tongues was common. Agnes Ozman, the first person known to speak in tongues in Pentecostalism, is said to have spoken in Chinese for three days straight. She never had learned the Chinese language, but God who is able to confound the wise made this English-speaking woman unable to speak her native language for three days. She was only able to both speak and write in Chinese—supernaturally!⁴²

The second kind of tongues are **glossolalia** or simply speaking in tongues. This is the “normal” kind of tongues that Pentecostals and Charismatics experience. These are ecstatic tongues. They are not an unknown earthly language, but a heavenly language of the Spirit and of the angels. Whereas the former is about speaking in the foreign languages of men supernaturally, this second type is about speaking in the foreign languages of angels supernaturally. But Paul brings us back to what really matters in all of these experiences: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). We must not get so caught up in the strangeness of tongues that we forget a loving spirit is more important.

⁴² Eddie Hyatt, *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), p. 139.

As far as the two different kinds of tongues are concerned, I believe that Paul meant that the “tongues of men” were in reference to xenoglossy and the “tongues of angels” were in reference to glossolalia. As I quoted above, 1 Corinthians 14:4a says, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” This means that it builds the man up spiritually. It increases his awareness of God’s presence and his faith. I have heard some say, “Speaking in tongues is the doorway to the supernatural.” All of these blessings should be available to all Christians. But “do all speak in tongues?” (1 Cor. 12:30). No, unfortunately not everybody does, because not everybody wants to. Some think they’re scary, strange, funny-sounding, weird, and carry more of a stigma than they are worth. But Paul urges the believers to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31). He thanked God that he spoke in tongues more than all of the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 14:18), because he knew the joy of praying in tongues (1 Cor. 14:15-17). He considered “praying in the Spirit” to be the same as praying in tongues.

Personally, I find tongues to be of a great help sometimes when I am trying to concentrate on God during worship. There is something definitely spiritual about **praising God or praying to God in tongues**. With tongues you can experience a blessed emotional release of worship to God that you cannot express through mere English words. This is why it can be tempting not to restrain yourself at times. But Paul advises restraint: “If the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbe-

lievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor. 14:23).

Therefore, "Anyone who speaks in a tongue should **pray that he may interpret** what he says" (1 Cor. 14:13). This of course is in reference to tongues in a church meeting. If you are praying in tongues privately, then it is not as important to interpret them. But how is it possible to interpret an unknown tongue? Especially if it is heavenly glossolalia. What interpreter on Earth would be able to translate your words? No, this is not natural language translation. This is in reference to a supernatural gift of **the interpretation of tongues** (1 Cor. 12:10). Why is it necessary to supernaturally interpret supernatural tongues? Because you can get supernatural information from it. That is, **you can get revelation and prophecy out of tongue interpretation**. Therefore, uninterpreted tongues are like coded prophetic revelations that need to be decoded. It is the gift of tongue interpretation that unlocks the mysterious meanings behind these strange angelic sounds of the Holy Spirit.

How does the gift of tongue interpretation operate? First, either someone nearby or the tongue interpreter himself speaks in a tongue. Second, the tongue interpreter "prays that he may interpret"—that is, he quietly closes his eyes and listens to the voice of God, and looks for any mental images that may appear in his imagination, and feels for any spiritual impressions that he may receive, in reference to the tongues that were just previously uttered. Once he feels like he has received the es-

sence of the meaning of the tongues through divine revelation, then he prophesies the interpretation of tongues.

What can you do to receive the gift of tongues?

1. Sincerely concentrate on God.
2. Don't think about what you are going to say.
3. Make lots of funny sounds worshipfully to God.
4. Express your feelings to Him through these funny sounds.

The Holy Spirit will enable you to do this better the more you practice it (Acts 2:4). Don't give into your doubts. Know that the devil doesn't want you to enter into this experience, because once you are able to **fluently** pray in tongues, then you will be able to combat evil spirits better. I say "fluently," because in the beginning stages of tongues, it will sound like **baby talk**. Just a few of the same syllables and sound expressions repeating over and over. No wonder too, because if you are new to tongue speaking, then you are like a baby about it. But **in time, the more you practice praying and worshiping God in tongues, the more beautiful your tongues will sound**. Eventually you won't even think that they are funny or strange sounding, but normal.

4.19. The Spirit of Prayer. When we begin to enter divine contemplation for a while, it is possible to experience what some call "the spirit of prayer." This can also

happen during ordinary times of the day. This experience comes in various forms, but generally it produces a **desire to pray** in a certain way. There is a **spirit of contemplation**, and the mystical theologians have called the operation of it to be “infused contemplation.” It is the Spirit-filled contemplation of God. The Holy Spirit or an angel—it depends—enables you or energizes you to contemplate God with supernatural easiness. God draws you or assists you in prostrating and stilling yourself to contemplate Him: “*He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters*” (Ps. 23:2, NKJV). The **spirit of intercession** also comes upon certain people that Charismatics have come to call “intercessors.” It is a strong desire to pray for others—even people that the intercessor doesn’t know very well. “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a *spirit of grace and supplication*” (Zech. 12:10a).

Supplication is another word for intercession or praying to God on behalf of others. Certain spiritual phenomena can be experienced when someone is under the influence of a spirit of prayer—namely spiritual voices and visions (and sometimes coincidences). What will happen is the mystic may be contemplating God in silence and then he begins to see mental images of certain people. These images are accompanied with the impression that he should pray for them. The voice of God may also speak a sentence fragment or two in order to communicate more about that person in the vision.

Sometimes, the intercessor can actually **feel the emotions of the Holy Spirit** about the person seen in the

vision. In this case, the intercessory heart of God's feelings about an issue is being imparted to the intercessor. The prayer then—being both informed by revelation and energized by God's feelings—becomes the very **prayer of God** through the intercessor. Sometimes this can turn into praying in tongues and praying in groans: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26). **This is God praying to Himself through you.** But it is important to distinguish this authentic spirit of prayer from its counterfeit found in religious people that suffer from psychosis. These people, even though they may be medicated, can often feel drawn to go off into daydream prayers, dazing off without any sense of awareness in their daily tasks. These people should be encouraged to stay focused on chores and tasks and not pray so much.

4.20. Holy Laughter. Sometimes Christians filled with the Holy Spirit experience a wonderful blessing of **uncontrollable laughter**. This is not a thing that is despised by those who experience it. It is ecstatic and enjoyable. Critics of holy laughter insist that this goes against the spiritual fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23); further, there is a bias against emotional experiences altogether, thinking that they are generally fleshly.⁴³ However, sometimes the Spirit of God overrides our will concerning things that we fully agree with in advance. And God gives us emotional

⁴³ <http://www.gotquestions.org/holy-laughter.html>

blessings to bring about inner healing. In order to experience the full blessing of holy laughter, there must be a yielding of one's control over oneself, and utter abandonment to the moving of the Holy Spirit. This you can call faith or trusting in the Holy Spirit. This is controversial to say, but I believe that holy laughter is a supernatural manifestation of "the joy of the Lord" (Neh. 8:10b); and joy *is* a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Critics also maintain that this experience and other like phenomena are essentially New Age experiences, because there are similar experiences found among the followers of Hindu gurus.⁴⁴ Again, I will come back and say that satan has a counterfeit for every single spiritual experience that God has given. The New Agers experience the counterfeit—not the other way around. Guy Chevreau's *Catch the Fire* (1994) shows in a scholarly way that genuine holy laughter and spiritual drunkenness were both experienced and endorsed by the Wesleys and the Edwards' of the Great Awakening.

In the early 1990s, Charismatic evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne was responsible for imparting this blessing to various churches. The Vineyard and Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship groups have welcomed the experiences and continue to manifest them. Sometimes the phenomenon happens all by itself. I have a friend that has grown up in a house church community his whole life

⁴⁴ Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001), p. 241; http://www.discernment-ministries.org/Holy_Laughter.htm

and has not visited Charismatic churches very often. One day while driving in the car, his son started to experience holy laughter, saying, “Daddy, Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!, Jesus is making me laugh!” They felt it was wonderful. When I asked them if they knew about Rodney Howard-Browne and the holy laughter movement in the early 1990s, they jokingly said, “Sorry John, we missed that one too!” Therefore, holy laughter is a genuine spiritual experience, and is not exclusively tied to New Age spirituality, and is not necessarily the product of mass psychological suggestion either. It’s the real deal.

4.21. Healing and Deliverance. This is by no means intended to be a comprehensive treatment of healing theology. Much of this is based on a few books on healing I’ve read, my personal experiences with healing prayer, and visiting healing ministries. For more books on healing prayer and deliverance prayer, see the sections in Further Reading.

1. Is it Always God’s Will to Heal?
2. Does Sickness Have a Purpose?
3. The Gifts of Healing
4. Finding a Healer or Deliverance Minister
5. Avoiding Fake Healers and Deliverance Ministers
6. True and False Doctrines
7. Healing Prayer
8. Deliverance Prayer (Exorcism)
9. Find a Real Healer with Experience
10. Cooperating with Doctors

Before we talk about the topics of healing and deliverance, we need to ask the most important question about this area. **Is it always God's will to heal?** My answer is it depends on the situation, sickness, and God's timing. There is no quick answer for every and all situations. I can't just say "Yes" or "No." It just depends on several factors. I understand Christians do not believe the same things about healing. So, by me taking a stance here, I'm bound to have someone disagree with me. But what I will say is that my beliefs about healing and deliverance are based on my experiences, my knowledge of the Bible, and from my experience in dealing with healing ministries for my wife's battles with schizophrenia.

Since healing deals with miraculously curing sickness, the second question is also important. **Does sickness have a purpose?** My answer to this question is always going to be "Yes." I can never say that sickness never has any purpose or meaning. While there are many different causes of sickness, some mysterious, and some not so mysterious—most Christians will admit that God has developed patience, perseverance, hope, faith, humility, and self-control in them during seasons of sickness (Rom. 5:3-4). It is also clear from Scripture that God sometimes allows demons to attack saints with sickness in order to test their faith and devotion to God (Job 2:1-7). Peter said, "For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine" (1 Pet. 1:6-7). This is not to say that Christians should not fight sickness with doctors, medi-

cine, prayer, healers, and deliverance ministers. But sometimes even when all of the weapons we have at our disposal—both physical and spiritual—are not working in conquering sickness, we need to seek God about why He is not letting this sickness be healed. We still need to fight sickness, especially with prayer: **“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the Name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well” (Jas. 5:14-15).** This is standard Christian procedure for dealing with sickness. Go to the elders and have them pray for your healing. **But what can you do when praying for healing doesn’t work?** Keep on going to the elders and have them pray for you. It then becomes an issue of hope and perseverance toward God (Jas. 5:11).

Paul asked a very important rhetorical question: **“Do all have gifts of healing?”** (1 Cor. 12:30). My answer is “No.” While every believer can lay hands on the sick and pray for their healing (Mark 16:17-18), not every believer has the same amount of power to heal sickness. This truth is expressed by Paul in various ways, “You are the Body of Christ, and *each one of you is a part of it*. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also *those having gifts of healing*, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:27-28). By listing these gifts, Paul is definitely saying that not everyone has gifts of healing. Only some members of the Body of Christ have these special gifts of healing, and they are known by

their success at healing people when praying for sickness. All Christians can and should pray for healing, because that is how the church can discover who has gifts of healing and who doesn't. But once it is discovered who has gifts of healing, these gifted people should be recognized by the elders of the church; and Christians should come to them in order to receive prayer for their sicknesses.

Paul said, "*To each one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, *to another gifts of healing* by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and *He gives them to each one, just as He determines*" (1 Cor. 12:8-11). Only some Christians have gifts of healing; and these people are revealed to the church by praying for the sick. Once these healers have been discovered—it is *they* who should mainly be sought out for receiving healing. God should get all the glory too, because it is He that gives the gifts of healing to each one, just as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11). Therefore, not every Christian has gifts of healing; only the ones that God has sovereignly determined to have them.

How does one find a healer or deliverance minister? If you or a loved one are very sick or demonically oppressed, then you need to do what James says and call for

the elders of the church to pray for you (Jas. 5:14). When James wrote this, he was writing to an early church that was Charismatic and moving in the gifts of the Spirit, and no doubt had elders with gifts of healing. In the 21st century, things might be different at your church than they were in the church that James was writing to.

Firstly, James' advice to go to the elders and be healed by their prayers can only work if you are part of a church that has elders with gifts of healing. If you don't have that, then it's time to look for help from another church that does have someone with the right gift of healing and is willing to pray for you until you get permanently healed.

Secondly, you need to understand that there are different gifts of healing. The Bible uses the phrase "gifts" of healing, not "gift" of healing. This is important to take note of. Since the days of the Faith Cure movement in the 19th century, through the Pentecostal movement, the Healing revival, and modern Charismatic movements—healing ministries have had a comeback after centuries of neglect. Because of this, there has been an increase in experiential knowledge about how gifts of healing operate, and there have been many books written on the subject, based on Bible knowledge and the experiences of healers. We must truly praise God for these books and teachings, but also note that not every healer or theologian agrees about divine healing. We should rely on the Holy Spirit to show us who is right and who is wrong in certain teachings about divine healing and deliverance.

I think that *experience with healing prayer* is the best teacher about these things. Abstract theological theories about healing don't really mean anything. To me, all that matters is knowing what practically WORKS (what teachings and practices get people healed—that's what matters in the end). Any teaching about healing that doesn't get people healed by Jesus should be thrown out of the window as false and empty. I take the stance that by "gifts" of healing, Paul means that some have a gift to heal cancer, some to heal blindness, some to heal arthritis, some to heal childlessness, some to cast out demons like schizophrenia, etc. This seems to be the belief of those who have any substantial amount of experience with healing ministries. No Christian healer has *all* of the gifts of healing, because if that were the case he could say, "I have need of nobody but God." But by dispensing the gifts of healing to certain members of the Body of Christ, God forces Christians to depend upon one another in times of desperate need.

Thirdly, while most Christians and ministers today do not believe in a **gift of casting out demons** (gift of deliverance/gift of exorcism), I believe that this is a real spiritual gift, and should be considered one of the gifts of healing that Paul had in mind. Wayne Grudem agrees; when referring to the lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible, he says, "No musical gifts are included on any list either, and neither is any gift of casting out demons, even though Paul must have known that some Christians were more effective

in that area than others.”⁴⁵ The Roman Catholic Church, for long periods throughout church history, has retained the belief in a special “gift of exorcism.” Those priests endowed with this gift were initiated into the Order of Exorcists.⁴⁶ The modern teaching that all Christians have the power to cast out demons, because all have the Holy Spirit—is a very inaccurate and misleading teaching. Those Christians who suffer from severe demonization, oppression, and schizophrenia would do well to know that they need to seek out deliverance ministers who have experience and success with casting out demons.

By requesting for them from Pentecostal churches, Charismatic churches, Healing Rooms,⁴⁷ and Deliverance Ministries⁴⁸ in the Yellow Pages and Internet searches, someone with the gift of casting out demons can be found. Just call them up and ask, “If anyone on your ministry team knows of anyone that has experience and success with casting out demons (e.g., schizo-

⁴⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 1021-1022.

⁴⁶ Lyman Coleman, ed., *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1841), p. 122.

⁴⁷ <http://healingrooms.com> – This website has a directory of locations where you can go to receive prayer for healing. However, I would ask questions on the phone about the healers’ experience with healing specific sicknesses before going. This is not a deliverance directory, but mainly for prayer for physical sickness.

⁴⁸ http://www.sw-mins.org/Deliverance_ministries.htm – This website is an international directory of deliverance ministries—the good, the bad, and the ugly (use with caution). Deliverance focuses on casting out demons through counseling and ongoing prayer.

phrenia, depression, fear, anxiety, etc), then please have him call me.” You will eventually get some calls. However, some deliverance ministers are phonies, inexperienced, or want you to pay money, so watch out not to waste too much of your time with them. Someone with the gift of deliverance will not tell you to wait for months and years to get a demon cast out—the demon should come out relatively quickly (unless it’s schizophrenia). Also, there are many out there that don’t theologically believe in a gift of deliverance even though they might have the gift. Don’t quibble with them about theology, just make sure that *they* are the ones casting out the demons!

I am not very experienced with healing ministry, because I do not have any gift of healing that I know of. Most of my beliefs about healing have come from the works of John G. Lake, Charles and Frances Hunter, and Randy Clark. In addition to that, my wife has suffered from schizophrenia for years, and I have spent plenty of effort trying to get her delivered. Even now I am still learning about the area of healing and deliverance, seeing what works and seeing what is just empty philosophy. This leads me to make several statements about what I see as **true and false doctrines about healing and deliverance**. I haven’t heard it all quite yet, but I will tell you what has worked and what hasn’t, in my experience with praying for my wife. Schizophrenia is a demonically caused brain disorder that produces symptoms such as loss of concentration, social withdrawal, clenching of the fists, hearing evil voices, seeing evil visions (hallucinations), looking down all the time, rigid body posture, oversensitivity to sounds,

being in a daze, and believing in unrealistic things (delusions). If not treated with antipsychotic medication, it can also cause catatonia, which is when the person turns into sort of a frozen statue and can't talk or move. In praying and praying and praying for my wife, I discovered that I don't have a gift of healing or deliverance. This is not to say that I won't receive such a gift in the future, but I acknowledge that I don't have the gift right now. Though I will say that *various phenomena have happened as I have experimented with healing and deliverance prayer*. It is by my experiences with these manifestations and phenomena that I can say what works and what doesn't.

Firstly, I will say that I have learned to pray by the **laying on of hands and commanding the sickness out loud to leave or heal**. This is called authoritative prayer. Many times, my wife has testified to feeling "peace" after I have prayed for her in this way. It has been frustrating to know that she hasn't been 100% healed or delivered during these times of prayer, but feeling some peace *is* better than nothing. She has felt the same peace when receiving prayer from other healing ministers, but has yet to be delivered. Again, I think these healers and myself have the Holy Spirit in measure, but do *not* have the gift of casting out demons which my wife needs for her full deliverance.

Secondly, when I have prayed for my wife, there have been times when I have received **closed visions or voices about her sickness**. These have been very few and far between, but nevertheless real. When I pray about these things, there have sometimes been apparent breakthroughs.

Thirdly, **worshiping God with a worship CD** has been very helpful at helping my wife and I enter into God's presence and feel His peace. Though this has been a struggle for her with the evil voices in her head, she has wept and been blessed with peace during worship.

Fourthly, praying through **John Eckhardt's *Prayers That Rout Demons* (2008)** has given me a vocabulary to pray against the devil at times when I wanted to pray but couldn't find the words. She has felt peace also during these prayers.

Fifthly, **fasting and praying for my wife's deliverance** has brought me a little bit of revelation about what to do about getting her delivered. It has not increased or released any gifts of healing that I know of, but has resulted in some revelations into healing schizophrenia.

Sixthly, physical phenomena have happened while I have prayed for her and some others, such as them **feeling tingling, heat, shaking, or electricity** going through their bodies. This does not mean that these people have been healed, but only that God's healing power was moving.

Seventhly, **looking into my wife's eyes and commanding the demon to come out in Jesus' Name repeatedly** has helped somewhat. This I've done for minutes, using my authority in Christ, harassing the demon with Jesus' Name. There were several times when her body shook and she cried tears of release. Making perfect eye contact, in Jesus' Name I commanded the demon up close in the eyes—several inches away from the face—to reveal its name. My wife said she heard 2 or 3 voices in her mind say at the same time, "I am Legion." My wife

said that never in all our times of praying did she feel that we were so close to “getting somewhere”! It’s important to be loving and gentle most of the time, but sometimes militant and authoritative when casting out demons.

There are many other things that I don’t know about casting out demons. But I do know that schizophrenia is a really *tough* family of demons—and they do NOT want to come out! See Chapter 21 on “Schizophrenia” in Frank and Ida Mae Hammond’s *Pigs in the Parlor* (1973). I also believe now that I shouldn’t waste my time seeking out any Joe Schmo that claims to be a healer or deliverance minister. I need to find a deliverance minister with the gift of casting out demons—who has **proven success** in casting out demons over a short period of time. These are the folks that have that extra “umph” of power to push the demons out. While Christians like myself can do a lot to *weaken* a demon through much deliverance prayer, it usually takes someone with a gift of deliverance to use that special anointing to cast the STRONG DEMONS out. At the same token, very strong demons like schizophrenia usually need to be cast out by **persevering** through many sessions of deliverance prayer and hearing God reveal the names and functions of individual evil spirits. Schizophrenics need to find a prayer group that is willing to persevere and walk through the whole thing with them, and to never stop casting out the demons until full deliverance has come. This can take anywhere from 5 to 10 prayer sessions or more.

Now I want to share some of the things I’ve heard people advise me about healing over the past several years

that I think are empty and vain. These things have been said by well meaning people, by misinformed people, and by people that don't really care if you get healed or not. I think that these are popular **myths about divine healing**, false doctrines even, because they haven't "worked" for me. While there are Christians out there that might have had experiences from these ideas, I have reaped no benefit from them—but rather discouragement.

Firstly, people say that **if you confess "healing Scriptures" over yourself repeatedly for a very long period of time, then you will be healed of whatever illness you have**. This comes from the Word of Faith teachers such as Kenneth Hagin and Charles Capps. While they claim that this technique has worked for them, I must say that it has not worked for me, and I think it might be a superstition empty of power. This method of healing is not found in the Bible or church history. While I will admit that the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword and is full of spiritual power, I do not believe that people can be healed by saying, "By His stripes I was healed" over and over and over. And if this is possible, I have never witnessed it, and yet I think it would be more effective to just simply receive prayer from someone with a gift of healing like James 5:14-15 says.

Even if confessing healing Scriptures is a valid way to heal, I don't think it is very efficient, but rather exhausting to already worn out people. People who are sick are exhausted; they don't need any more exhaustion—they need help from others. These people will also tell the sick person to just "receive" their healing. **After only praying**

one time for them, they tell the sick to just “accept that they are already healed.” But the truth is, there is no healing. It’s just a mind game, probably influenced by Christian Science. The sick person leaves just as sick as they were before coming for prayer, with no real hope of future recovery. And folks, that is NOT Biblical healing!

Secondly, people say that if you will just forgive those who have hurt you, then you will be healed—as if that were *all* that is keeping you from getting healed. I will admit that forgiveness is a healing practice, and often necessary for deliverance. But some people have such a limited view of healing that they think it all hinges on forgiveness. No, while forgiveness is a contributing factor to healing, it really all hinges on gifts of healing in prayer. On top of that, this can come off as condemning and accusing, implying that the sick are sinning, and they need to “just forgive” and everything would be better. This is often said in a group setting, and is embarrassing to those who are already suffering from enough emotional pain.

Thirdly, people say that if you will just renounce all occult practices then you won’t have anymore demons. Truth be told, our world is filled with occult influences—TV, books, games, school, items in people’s houses, etc. Most people are unaware of these occult influences. Yet, there is a popular opinion among deliverance ministers that demonization (oppression/possession) is almost *always* rooted in the occult. That is absolutely wrong. Although many people are demonically oppressed because of playing with an Ouija board or some other occult practice, not everyone is.

Fourthly, a popular myth—spread by the great healing evangelists—is that **every Christian can heal because they all have the Holy Spirit**. They point to Mark 16:17-18 where it says that “they who believe” will lay hands on the sick and heal them. John G. Lake was big about this. Yet, in my experience as a believer, I have only been able to give my wife some peace or remove pain from time to time—not heal or deliver. So, there is definitely something to be said about Paul’s comments about the gifts of healing in 1 Corinthians 12. Again, this does not mean that all Christians shouldn’t *pray* for healing, just that all Christians shouldn’t expect themselves to be gifted as *healers*. There’s only one way to find out if you have a gift of healing—start praying for the sick, and see what happens! The proof is in the pudding. However, *don’t ever stop* praying for healing, because the day might come when you *do* receive a gift of healing.

Fifthly—and this is by far the most offensive—is that **people will tell the sick if they aren’t healed they don’t have enough faith**. While there were times when Jesus said, “Your faith has healed you” (Matt. 9:22), experience has taught various healing ministers that unbelievers have been healed because of the faith of the *healers*. It is wrong to always put the burden of faith on the sick, especially since their doctors do so much to make them doubt God’s power to heal. All that is needed is for the healer to have faith in order to heal the sick. Both the healer and the sick do not need faith, but it helps.

Sixthly, people will say that **you just need to wait for God’s timing to heal and deliver you**. This is not in

the Bible or church history. I think this is just a “cop out” for not knowing how to get healed. The Bible says, “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). *This concept of “waiting on the Lord” for your special day of healing is not right. The Bible teaches that if you want to get healed, then you need to have someone with a gift of healing pray for your sickness (1 Cor. 12:9; Jas. 5:14-15).* This is not to say there is no waiting for full healing during the process of ongoing healing prayer. But it is wrong not to go to a healer; and just wait for God to heal you directly in your house or something on some special day in the future. In the Bible what usually happened, is people had to go get healed by someone with a gift of healing that would pray for them—and this person was usually a prophet (see Gen. 20:17; Num. 12:13-15; 2 Kings 5; 20; Matt. 15:30; Luke 8:43-48; Acts 5:15-16; 28:8-9). And the gift that the person has needs to be a gift that can heal your sickness. If a man has a gift to heal blindness, but not cancer (but you have it), then you should not go to him if he has had no success in praying for cancer. If you have cancer, then you need to find someone that has had success in healing cancer. Prior experience is what matters.

Seventh—and this is the most dangerous—is that some healers will say **the mentally ill should not take antipsychotic medication**. These people understand that demonic oppression comes from a spiritual source, but don’t understand that it works through the brain (which is chemical and physical). The Bible uses words like “mind” and “thoughts,” but not the word “brain.” The brain of those with mental illnesses needs to be medicated by a

psychiatrist or else it will deteriorate and damage itself even more. Also, if the person is not medicated he/she can become catatonic—or frozen like a statue—unable to eat, dress, or bathe him/herself. People say it is unbelief to turn to psychiatrists and take these “mind-altering drugs” (they think it is pharmakeia, the Greek word for magic potion or witchcraft), but they don’t understand mental illness or really know what they are saying. Actually, these are “mind-focusing drugs” that help the mentally ill get more in touch with reality. These Charismatic critics know nothing about the brain, neuroscience, or psychology. All they know is that most psychiatrists don’t believe in demons and deliverance, so they react zealously against all psychiatric treatment. Antipsychotic medication plays a vital role in healing those with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. But it is by no means the answer. It is but a band-aid to a severe illness. *The answer is persevering prayer with a gift of casting out demons.*

There are a lot of “**quacks**” and “**frauds**” out there who claim to be healers or deliverance ministers (exorcists). Some are liars and con artists after your money, some are inexperienced and misled, while others are experienced and real. There are all kinds of silly, false, and discouraging teachings floating around the churches about healing. But if you know what you’re looking for—people experienced in healing a specific sickness (e.g., appendicitis) that are willing to pray for you as many times as you need—then you will get your healing and praise Jesus for it. **We have to fall in line with 1 Corinthians 12 and James 5:14-15. There are those with gifts of healing.**

We can't go outside of the bounds of Scripture and expect to get results. If you're really suffering desperately from a sickness, then make sure to find someone with a gift of healing for that specific sickness. And if you can't find someone that has successfully healed someone from your specific sickness, then at least go to a healer that has healed a similar sickness. And the more experience he/she has, the better. Don't go to "wannabe healers" and expect to get healed. It doesn't work that way. You need to receive ongoing prayer from someone with a special gift of healing. God gives the gifts of healing to each one, just as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11).

All of these miraculous phenomena can be quite astounding, exciting, faith inspiring, strange, and wonderful. Excitement, awe, heavenly-mindedness, and confidence in the existence of God and the truth of the Bible are all increased when one is witnessing these miracles. But if you are seriously sick, then let me say this as a final precaution: **work with your physician or psychiatrist.** Take the medicine you need until they say you don't need it anymore. If you have been sick, then tell them of any improvements of your symptoms. Let them observe and confirm that your symptoms have disappeared. Let them be astounded at the healing power of God—don't fight them. Perhaps even tell them that you've gone to see a faith healer, but not to the exclusion of medical treatment. But I wouldn't press the issue too much.

A true healing miracle will be able to stand the test of the medical profession. Divine healing and the

medical profession should be working together; they need not be mutually exclusive. While praying for sickness should take priority over medicine (Jas. 5:14-15), don't be presumptuous like those in Christian Science and come off of your medicine against the advice of your doctor—especially if you are suffering from mental illness. Please wait patiently for the healing power of God to manifest in your body; and wait for the doctor's confirmation that you are healed enough to be weaned off of your medicine.

If your doctor is uncooperative (as many of them are), then as a final concession I would say to **wait until God Himself tells you to come off your medicine**. Remember that your doctor makes money off of you staying sick. If you get healed of an "incurable disease," then they are losing one more customer. Many will try to make you think that you are not healed, even when there is medical evidence to prove it. Then and only then is it safe to go against medical advice. But **remember that Luke the physician (Col. 4:14) wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which are full of healing miracles**. Generally, I believe it is God's will to let medical practitioners witness God's healing power, so please work with them. Don't believe that you have failed God if you go to the doctor for help—even though John G. Lake said it was a sin. If you are receiving all the prayer for healing that you can, and there is no healing yet, then you have not failed God if you go to the doctor.

4.22. Nature Miracles. There are miracles of spiritual, emotional, and bodily healing—but there are also miracles that affect the natural world around us. These are called “nature miracles” or “miracles of nature.” They are supernatural manifestations of either divine or demonic phenomena in the natural world, but do not have to do with healing, raising the dead, or casting out demons. The former category of miracles were focused on curing the afflictions of man, but nature miracles are focused on the creation—and exercising power over nature. Over a three year period, the Gospels record that Jesus worked at least nine nature miracles—no doubt, through the gift of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit:

1. Turning Water Into Wine (John 2:1-11)
2. First Miraculous Catch of Fish (Luke 5:4-10)
3. Calming the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)
4. Multiplying Fish and Bread for 5,000 (Mark 6:30-44)
5. Walking on Water (Mark 6:45-52)
6. Multiplying Fish and Bread for 4,000 (Mark 8:1-10)
7. Knowing a Coin is in a Fish’s Mouth (Matt. 17:24-27)
8. Killing a Fig Tree By Cursing It (Mark 11:12-14, 20-26)
9. Second Miraculous Catch of Fish (John 21:1-11)

Christ was also transfigured (Matt. 17:2) and ascended into Heaven (Luke 24:51), but it is unlikely that He had any part in “working” these miracles through any willful acts of faith. They probably happened to Him by the sovereign will of the Father. Christ is just as fully human as He is fully God, and He had to submit to the will of the Father like any of us have to (Mark 14:36). Therefore, sometimes nature miracles are direct acts of

God upon nature, without any human involved such as a miracle worker. In the Old Testament there were several nature miracles that were not caused by human miracle workers:

1. The Creation of the Universe (Gen. 1-2)
2. The Flood (Gen. 7-8)
3. The Confusion of Languages at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9)
4. The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24)
5. Lot's Wife Turned Into a Pillar of Salt (Gen. 19:26)
6. The Burning Bush Not Consumed (Exod. 3:3)
7. Balaam's Donkey Speaking (Num. 22:21-35)
8. Dagon Statue Falling Twice Before the Ark (1 Sam. 5:1-12)
9. Elijah Fed by Ravens (1 Kings 17:1-6)
10. Daniel's Friends Saved in the Fiery Furnace (Dan. 3:10-27)
11. Daniel Saved in the Lions' Den (Dan. 6:16-23)
12. Jonah Saved in the Fish's Belly (Jon. 2:1-10)

But there are also plenty of examples of nature miracles in the Old Testament that were performed by miracle workers:

1. Aaron's Rod Changed into a Snake (Exod. 7:10-12)
2. Moses and the Ten Plagues of Egypt (Exod. 7:20-12:30)
3. Moses and the Red Sea Crossing (Exod. 14:21-31)
4. Moses and the Waters of Marah Sweetened (Exod. 15:23-25)
5. Moses and the Manna (Exod. 16:14-35)
6. Moses and the Water from the Rock (Exod. 17:5-7)
7. Moses and the Earthquake of Korah's Rebellion (Exod. 16:32-34)
8. Joshua and the Stilling of the Sun (Josh. 10:12-14)
9. Elijah Causes a Drought (1 Kings 17:1)
10. Elijah Prays Fire from Heaven for a Sign (1 Kings 18:19-39)
11. Elijah Causes Rain to Come (1 Kings 18:41-45)

12. Elijah Prays Fire from Heaven for Defense (2 Kings 1:10-12)
13. Elijah Divides the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:8)
14. Elisha Divides the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:14)
15. Elisha and the Healing of the Waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:21-22)
16. Elisha and the Curse of the Bears (2 Kings 2:24)
17. Elisha and the Multiplication of Oil (2 Kings 4:2-7)
18. Elisha and the Healing of Deadly Pottage (2 Kings 4:38-41)
19. A Prophet Multiplies Bread for 100 (2 Kings 4:42-44)
20. Elisha and the Floating Axe Head (2 Kings 6:5-7)
21. Isaiah and the Reversal of the Sun's Shadow (2 Kings 20:9-11)

These are by no means intended to be exhaustive lists of all of the miracles in the Bible, but they are meant to show that there are different kinds of miracles that can happen under different circumstances. If you want to study all of the Biblical miracles, then I suggest Herbert Lockyer's *All the Miracles of the Bible* (1961). There are other strange non-healing miracles throughout church history and today. In the modern Charismatic movement, people report strange things like gold dust appearing, gold teeth appearing in people's mouths, heavenly gemstones appearing, supernatural wind, and rain inside church buildings.

How can a man work nature miracles? Man does not have an "unlimited human potential" like the New Agers would have us to believe. We are not self-existent gods, but creatures made in God's image (Gen. 1:27). We are not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. We are not the lords over our own universe, but God has given us *authority* over His creation. We are to "fill the Earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Jesus said, "With God *all* things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). For some Christians (but not

all), this includes miracle working: “To another the working of miracles...But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:10-11, NKJV). Some Christians have a special spiritual gift from God to work miracles. Men cannot work miracles through their own human will-power. Psychics will tell you that you can work miracles all by yourself through your own natural “psi power,” but that’s an occultic lie. Miracles have to be worked through either divine or demonic assistance (prophetic or magical), but never on human strength alone. Prophets use the power of God and psychics/witches use the power of demons.

PART 2:
EVANGELICAL MYSTICISM DEFENDED

For those who are familiar with Evangelical theology, the phrase “Evangelical mysticism” must sound like an oxymoron. Evangelicalism, the refined Protestant tradition, has a history of being almost completely opposed to all things mystical, supernatural, or miraculous. Often the Protestants would rail at the Catholics and their belief in miracles as “superstitious.” Bible believers, Bible teachers, and Bible churches are the sorts of things that characterize Evangelicalism. Evangelicals have always defended the authority of Scripture, but sometimes emphasize it more than God Himself.

In reaction to the misuses of the mystical life by Marian mystics in the Catholic Church, many Protestants have shunned Christian mysticism from the beginning of the Reformation. Few Protestants have been radical enough to practice contemplation and take spiritual experiences seriously. These have been the Zwickau prophets, the French prophets, the early Quakers, the early Moravians, the early Methodists, the Irvingites, the Pentecostals, the Latter Rain movement, the Charismatics, and Neocharismatics. Even out of these groups, few among them have gone so far as to refer to themselves as “mystics.” The Quakers have been really the only ones who have been comfortable with the word “mysticism,” and even so, not all of them.

Most Protestants and Evangelicals have had a **Ces-sationist** attitude about spiritual experiences. The belief

is that dreams, visions, God's voice, healings, and miracles ceased with the death of the last apostle, John. Of course, there is *no* historical evidence for this claim; in fact, church history tells us that the opposite is true. All one has to do is read Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (1260) or Alban Butler's *The Lives of the Saints* (1759) to see the overwhelming amount of evidence that miracles have always continued throughout church history.

The Holy Spirit has been performing signs and wonders through Christians for 2,000 years—especially through the Catholic monks. But it's not about history with Evangelicals; it's about the authority of the Bible. It's about Evangelical theology, and how it insists on the doctrine of **sola Scriptura** or only Scripture as the authority of theological teaching, practice, and experience. I do not believe in sola Scriptura, nor does any "radical" Evangelical that dares to believe that God communicates through spiritual experiences today. The belief in sola Scriptura leads to condemning any modern-day supernatural experience as demonic or hallucinatory. I simply cannot believe this. It sounds deistic to me; deism is the belief that God created the world, and abandoned it, leaving everything up for man to figure out. I do not believe that God has abandoned the church to fend for itself with nothing more than a Bible and minds to interpret it. There has got to be something more substantial than that! If God is real, then He was not only real in Bible times, but real today too. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). This means that **the gift of**

prophecy has never ceased, and neither have the gifts of healing or working of miracles. It's just that most Christians have been taught to believe that God doesn't give those gifts anymore.

If you're like me, and you believe basically everything an Evangelical believes except for sola Scriptura, then you believe in the validity of Evangelical mysticism. You might not practice contemplation, but you certainly believe that spiritual experiences are for today—and that puts you in the mystical category. Suppose you are ready to call yourself an **“Evangelical mystic,”** like A. W. Tozer and Richard Foster; suppose you actively seek spiritual experiences of God through contemplation; suppose you are willing to be accused with names like “radical,” “heretical,” or “New Age” by your fellow Evangelicals. How are you going to respond to such accusations?

If you have ascended the heights of divine contemplation and experienced God, then you have discovered the greatest treasure in all existence. You want others to know these secrets; it is so good, so wonderful, that you just can't keep this Christian mysticism to yourself. You want to evangelize about it—of course, not more than the Gospel—but you do want to share about contemplation and spiritual experiences. You don't want to be the only guy you know that knows how to experience the depths of Jesus Christ. This is the meat of the Christian life! But the problem is that most Evangelicals are resistant to Christian mysticism, contemplation, and spiritual experiences. They are more comfortable with church tradition and Bible study. I personally wonder how many Chris-

tians would even want to experience God if the opportunity were ever given to them. If Evangelicals ever hear a mystic like yourself talking about dreams, visions, and visitations from Jesus—most will think you're crazy. And if they are theologically oriented, then they will think you are a heretic or a New Ager. But you're not a heretic! And you're *not* a New Ager! How can you respond to these accusations?

That's what this part of the book is about. In this section, I will present: (1) a list of important Bible verses that reveal contemplative spirituality is Biblical, (2) Balthazar Alvarez's defense of contemplation, (3) my own response to the popular objection that contemplative prayer borrows from "Eastern meditation," (4) the history of Christian mysticism, (5) 50 of the greatest Christian mystical writings, and (6) a chapter on the question of whether or not contemplative prayer is borrowed from Neoplatonism. Although my humble work is far from a comprehensive defense of Evangelical mysticism, I have provided a fairly long annotated bibliography at the end of the book in the "Further Reading" section. Many of those books have material in them that can be researched for further defenses of Christian mysticism. **If you want to experience God, that is good—but you will be persecuted for it!** This is why it is important that you "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15).

CHAPTER 5
CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE VERSES

A lot of the time strict Evangelicals challenge mystics by asserting that divine contemplation or soaking prayer is un-Biblical. In fact, they go on to state that the only kind of prayer that is acceptable for Christians is either petition or intercession, which both involve asking God for help in various situations. To assert that meditation and divine contemplation are Biblical practices is contradictory to them, for they know of no Scriptural evidence whatsoever. In order to provide some evidence of **contemplative spirituality in the Bible**, I will present certain Bible verses from special key words that I have pulled out of a *Strong's Concordance* KJV word study. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all of the contemplative Scriptures in the Bible, but only the ones that have stood out to me the most. I have placed them under topical headings:

MEDITATION

Psalm 1:2: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night."

Psalm 91:1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Psalm 119:11: "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

Psalm 119:97: “O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”

John 15:4-5, NKJV: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Colossians 3:16: “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.”

VISUALIZATION

1 Chronicles 16:11: “Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face continually.”

Psalm 16:8: “I have set the Lord always before me: because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”

SOLITUDE

Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Mark 1:35: “In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”

SILENCE

Job 4:16: “There was silence, and I heard a voice.”

Psalms 62:1, RSV: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation.”

Isaiah 30:15: “Thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”

Isaiah 41:1: “Keep silence before Me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak.”

Lamentations 3:25-29: “The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because He hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.”

Habakkuk 2:20: “The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the Earth keep silence before Him.”

STILLNESS

Psalm 4:4: “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.”

1 Kings 19:12: “After the fire a still small voice.”

Psalm 23:2: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

Numbers 9:8: “Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you.”

Job 37:14: “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.”

Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

Isaiah 30:7: “Their strength is to sit still.”

SITTING

2 Samuel 7:18: “Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?”

Lamentations 3:28: “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because He hath borne it upon him.”

Acts 2:2: “Suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”

PROSTRATING

Leviticus 9:24: “There came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.”

Lamentations 3:29: “He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.”

WAITING ON THE LORD (TARRYING)

Isaiah 40:31: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Luke 24:49: “Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

CONCENTRATION ON GOD

Isaiah 26:3: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee.”

RESTING IN THE SPIRIT

Psalm 37:7: “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

Isaiah 63:14: “The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest.”

Matthew 11:28-29: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

Acts 9:31: “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

Hebrews 4:9-11: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

LISTENING TO GOD

Isaiah 55:3, NCV: “Come to Me and listen; listen to Me so you may live.”

VISIONS

Matthew 5:8: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

2 Corinthians 12:1-4, NIV: “I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the Third Heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”

VOICES

1 Kings 19:12: “After the fire a still small voice.”

Job 4:16: “There was silence, and I heard a voice.”

John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

CHAPTER 6
**ALVAREZ'S DEFENSE OF
CONTEMPLATION**

Whenever the topics of soaking prayer, contemplative prayer, or meditation are brought up in an Evangelical conversation, they are usually faced with hostility. There is fear that it is a grand deception. Because there is lack of understanding about the differences between the contemplative spirituality of the Biblical prophets and the monks of church history, and the contemplative spirituality of Eastern gurus and Hindu mystics—immediately most Evangelicals think that Christian contemplation is some deviant form of prayer. They think that it is borrowing from Eastern religions, and that it is a New Age/occult practice. However, this is not the case. When we speak of soaking or contemplative prayer, we are *not* referring to Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, Zen, or any other form of Eastern occult practice. As far as I know, there are five sources that you can look into for defense of Christian contemplative prayer against the occult counterfeit:

1. *The Triads* (1338) by Gregory Palamas
2. *Holy Wisdom* (1657) by Augustine Baker
3. *Listening Prayer* (1994) by Leanne Payne
4. *Wasted on Jesus* (2000)—Ch. 3 by Jim Goll
5. *How to Hear God's Voice* (2006) by Mark and Patti Virkler

I'm sure that there is more material in other contemplative literature, but these are all of the defenses of

Christian contemplation that I know of for now. What I am going to quote below is a famous defense of contemplation by a Jesuit priest named **Balthazar Alvarez**, who was a close friend of St. Teresa of Avila. As a devout Jesuit priest of the Society of Jesus, he like his brother monks, lived a disciplined life in the way of *The Spiritual Exercises* (1548) of St. Ignatius of Loyola. He practiced the meditative visualizations of St. Ignatius for 15 years diligently and didn't get much out of them. Then he was led of the Holy Spirit to practice the simple contemplation of God. As a result, the superiors of his Jesuit order became suspicious of this contemplative prayer, and wondered why he didn't practice the spiritual exercises anymore like all the other monks.

They demanded that he defend contemplative prayer, because it seemed to them to be a "prayer of inactivity" and a "waste of time." So then, he presented his gospel of contemplative prayer by defending himself logically and coherently. It is an argument that has stood the test of time in the Catholic Church, and is taken from Treatise 3, Section 1, Chapter 7 of Augustine Baker's *Holy Wisdom* (1657). The first paragraph presents 5 reasons why the contemplation of God is the greatest of all forms of prayer. After this, he presents answers to 7 objections that people have against contemplative prayer. This extract is not the writing of Alvarez himself, but is Baker's overview of Alvarez's argument. Since Baker's English is old and outdated, I modernized it with my own translation:

14. He goes on to explain his reasons why this restful prayer of the will is the best of all forms of prayer: **1.** Although there is no reasoning of the mind—the soul—silently bringing itself before God with a firm faith that God understands what it wants, succeeds in telling God what it wants; also, the soul exercises all of the moral virtues, by humbling itself before Him, loving Him only, and believing that it is leaving its own ways and attaching itself to God's ways—through this, all kinds of spiritual goodness will come into the soul. **2.** In contemplation the soul has a far more sublime and worthy notion of God. **3.** The still and quiet practice of contemplation may be far more “wordy” and continual than the tiring practice of discursive meditation (in fact, it may even come to be practiced continually without any interruption).

4. All the good fruits of discursive meditation, such as humility, obedience to God, etc., are far more perfectly produced through contemplation than by that which is brought about by mental exercises. **5.** It is true that St. Ignatius of Loyola's spiritual exercises were designed for souls that are not inclined to practice contemplation, but contemplation should be thought of as a good thing for those whom God has called and prepared for it; also, **St. Ignatius** himself practiced contemplation after he purified the imperfect spiritual exercises that he practiced in his earlier years. **After he stopped practicing his own spiritual exercises, and was exalted by God to the sublime practice of contemplation, he came to experience divine things.** So then, nobody should practice contemplation until God has led them to do so; and after some-

one is called to practice contemplation, they should not be forbidden to practice it (as is taught in Francisco de Osuna's *The Third Spiritual Alphabet*); and whoever forbids people from practicing divine contemplation will give a strict account to God for such a great sin—and even, as one spiritual writer says, God will shorten the lives of those spiritual leaders who presume to discourage and make people afraid of practicing contemplation, unless they stop from doing it.

15. This is what Balthazar Alvarez had to say in favor of contemplation, after a retreat of 15 days; and he presented this to his superior with a very humble confession of his personal defects and sins, and he magnified God's grace to him.

16. In addition to all of this, he also wrote a short discourse in which he went into greater depth about the nature of this restful and silent practice of contemplation. He gave answers to seven objections which certain of his brother monks had made and spread rumors against contemplation. The sum of these objections, with their answers, I will now present to you.

17. The first objection to contemplation. People who practice contemplation, who don't use discursive meditation or the intellect, seem to be wasting their time doing nothing—time which could far better be spent doing good deeds.

18. Alvarez's Answer: Although the intellect is in a way suspended from activity, the soul is far from being idle; on the contrary, the soul does what St. Bernard of Clairvaux calls "the business of all businesses." By contemplating God, a stream of **holy feelings** can freely flow through loving, admiring, adoring, congratulating, resigning, and offering the soul to God who is contemplated with the eye of faith. All of this is done through a few words and sometimes in silence. In other words, the soul behaves itself according to a variety of feelings that the unction of the Holy Spirit, who is the principle master of it, teaches and moves the soul to—just like St. Dionysius the Areopagite said to Timotheus, "Turn yourself to the beam of divine light." Divine contemplation leads to **union with God**, which the same saint calls, "The union of the unknown with the Unknown," which is the supreme height of all mystical theology, and without experience of it, cannot be understood by anyone.

19. The second objection to contemplation. If one gives up the practice of discursive meditation, out of an expectation to receive divine revelations, then that seems to be tempting God, and favoring the error of the heretics called the Alumbrados.

20. Alvarez's Answer: Contemplation, which is practiced with holy feelings and not mental exercises, cannot be practiced by those who have been practicing discursive meditation for a long time—except when God's Spirit draws these people to contemplate Him. **Those**

who do ascend from meditation to this quiet prayer of contemplation, do so by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And once they have been brought into this contemplative state, they do not expect revelations, but are simply aware of the presence of God in the soul, which produces holy feelings for Him. This Spirit-led practice has no agreement with the practices of the Alumbrados, who without any call from God's Spirit, and without any preparation, arrogantly presumed to contemplate like they did—remaining in a distracted idleness, and misusing their time in expectation of supernatural visitations from God. Also, they did not focus on growing in holiness or putting to death their sinful feelings. So then, if a carnal man should presume to practice divine contemplation, he will be forced to quit, because no man can be at peace in God's presence if he deliberately resists the Holy Spirit; and the fruit of the Spirit is purity, holiness, humility, and obedience to God's will.

21. The third objection to contemplation. There is no way to discern when God's Spirit is leading someone to practice contemplation, or if someone is practicing contemplation presumptuously out of a desire to experience spiritual gifts—which nourish self love.

22. Alvarez's Answer: This can be known by the effects that contemplation has on the contemplator, just as **a tree is known by its fruits**. The effects of contemplation, when it is practiced by the leading of the Holy Spirit, are softness and flexibility of the heart to God's will; a yield-

ing acceptance of all things from His hand; a confidence of receiving all good from Him to whom the soul has entirely given itself; an imitation of the perfect ways of our Lord Jesus; a renunciation of self will, etc. Surely the contemplation that teaches these things is without a doubt from God.

23. The fourth objection to contemplation. People who practice contemplation are opinionated, adhering to their own selfish ways; and out of spiritual pride, they look down on others, and refuse to submit themselves to the judgment of their spiritual leaders.

24. Alvarez's Answer: Errors and misuses such as these should not be blamed on contemplation itself (which teaches the opposite), but on the imperfections and sinful natures of those who do not practice contemplation as they ought to; so then, **this is not a good enough reason to condemn contemplation itself, no more than meditation should be condemned because of those meditators who commit these same errors of pride**; and, I think that prideful meditators can be even more obnoxious and vain, because they can brag about all of the visualizations they have invented. The sacraments that we see are abused, but they are never forbidden; so then, no spiritual leader should ever forbid other people from praying to God as His Spirit leads, unless the person is going through a very hard time.

And if spiritual leaders should absolutely forbid people from practicing Spirit-led prayer and contempla-

tion, then they should expect that God will require an account of them. However, in general it is wrong for Christians to disobey the advice of their spiritual leaders; but until their leaders forbid them from practicing contemplation, all Christians ought to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit to contemplate God. Also, Christian mystics are not presumptuous if they think of themselves as more capable to judge such mystical issues better than those who have no mystical experiences; and neither is it prideful to acknowledge the gifts that are given to us from God, as the apostle says.

25. The fifth objection to contemplation. Some mystics are so given over to contemplation, that they are always in a kind of ecstasy; they are so delighted with the impulses which they experience, that they forget their obligations of charity, obedience to God, and practice of holiness; so then, these mystics give up on the practices of social holiness, so that they can immerse themselves in contemplation—which gives them no truths that can be reasonably communicated to their neighbors for their encouragement. All of this is contradictory to the Society of Jesus that was instituted by St. Ignatius; also, many monks who practice contemplation become sick, which makes them incapable to live the kind of life that they have vowed to live.

26. Alvarez's Answer: It is no wonder that some imperfections are found in these mystics, because nobody is perfect; however, **the imperfections that you mentioned**

should not be blamed on contemplation itself, but on the misuse of it; because contemplation itself urges people to practice charity whenever it is needed (but not when it isn't needed). This is what St. Augustine meant when he said, "Our free time should not be spent in doing nothing, but should be spent in a loving search for holy truths" (*The City of God* 19.19). Charity needs good works in order to be shown to others, but if there are no good works to do for the time being, then people should remain in contemplation of truth—this agrees with the teachings of St. Gregory the Great (*Morals on the Book of Job* 7.18) and St. Bernard of Clairvaux (*On the Song of Songs* 57.9).

In addition to that, through meditation a person may be able to develop different forms of spiritual pride, but through contemplation the will and feelings are strengthened in righteousness; and it is righteousness alone that makes a person acceptable to God. As for sicknesses—they come only from the abuse of contemplation; because if contemplation is practiced correctly in stillness and relaxation, then it is far less dangerous to the head and health than the exhausting visualizations of meditation—and that is why the holy mystics who regularly practiced contemplation were able to continue in it for much longer than other forms of prayer.

27. The sixth objection to contemplation. Contemplation has a way of drawing people to be so entirely absorbed into it, that they neglect all devotion to the saints and praying for common needs.

28. Alvarez's Answer: Vocal prayers and religious exercises are only different ways to bring people into a state of quiet contemplation, as was taught by St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* 2-2, Question 83, Article 13). People should stop praying when they find themselves full of excited feelings. This doesn't mean that Christians should disregard vocal prayers, petitions, intercessions, and the like—but that they should be used for contemplative experience. It is said that St. Ignatius of Loyola, by practicing vocal prayers for a long time, came into such an intimate experience of God, that he couldn't preach because he received so many revelations and emotional experiences from the Holy Spirit! When this happened, his friends had to ask his superior to allow him to rest from his daily ministry for a period of time, because he was receiving so many divine experiences.

We shouldn't think that Spirit-filled contemplation automatically rejects petitions for general or special prayers. All prayer requests are already known to God, because He sees the hearts of His people. Sometimes Christians do not pray very much for themselves even though they have needs; they would rather spend their energy on prayers that are less self-centered; but at the same token, their unspoken prayers for themselves are eventually answered, because their hearts were in the right place. And lastly, concerning devotions to the saints—they consider it to be their highest honor if *God* is honored the most.

29. The seventh objection to contemplation. Contemplation calls people away from the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Alvarez's Answer: Alvarez gave his response to this at the top of this discourse, before the first objection (14.1-5). This was the response that he gave to his superior after a retreat of 15 days. But in addition to this initial objection, something else was added: **If monks practice different kinds of prayer, then it is bound to cause divisions in the Society of Jesus.** To that objection, Alvarez responded that spiritually strong people should be allowed to practice contemplation if they want to, without any fear of divisions, or any intention of looking down on others that don't contemplate God.

In addition to Alvarez's defense, I add on my own here:

The eighth objection to contemplation. It seems that "contemplative prayer" is a Christianized form of Eastern meditation; it seems to be a non-Biblical practice that borrows from the New Age and Eastern mysticism.

My Answer: Contemplation is the mental practice of staring at something for a prolonged period of time. It can come in many forms. If you sit on the side of a lake and stare at it, then you are contemplating that lake. If you are staring at something under your fingernail, then you are contemplating that thing under your fingernail. Mystical

contemplation is when religious people use contemplation to get in touch with their gods. Pagans, Jews, and Christians have practiced this since the beginning of time. It is the practice of getting still, closing the eyes, quieting oneself, and concentrating on one's god for a long time. This practice, when it is faithfully done for long enough, will bring man into an awareness of the spirit world. But more than anything, it brings an awareness of the single object of contemplation. For the Sufis, it is Allah; for the yogis, it is Brahman; for the Buddhists, it is nothingness; for the Native American shamans, it is the Great Spirit; for the New Agers, it is the Higher Self; and for Christians, it is Jesus.

While it is true that Thomas Merton and the Centering Prayer group have merged Christian contemplation with Eastern meditation, this is a misuse and an abuse of contemplative prayer. The New Age movement of the 1960s and 70s brought Eastern meditation practices into the West. Since then, New Age Christians—which blend Christianity with Hinduism and Buddhism—are *not* following the way of Christ. Their misuses of contemplation should not discourage orthodox Christians from practicing contemplation on Jesus alone. The New Age Christians contemplate a god that includes “Jesus” in their pantheon of spirit guides. But Evangelical, theologically orthodox Christians know that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:6).

Christian contemplation predates New Age meditation by thousands of years. The Biblical prophets practiced contemplation from time immemorial; Jesus and the

apostles contemplated in the first century; the Montanists contemplated in the third century; the Desert Fathers contemplated in the third and fourth centuries; the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox monks have contemplated for over 1,700 years; the Discalced Carmelites renewed contemplation in the 16th century; the Quietists were persecuted for contemplating in the 17th century; the Quakers also contemplated in the 17th century; and the Pentecostals contemplated in the early 1900s during their “tarrying meetings.”

It wasn't until the 1960s that New Agers began to merge Christian contemplation with Eastern meditation—borrowing from practices like Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen. This **misuse** of contemplation should not make **true** contemplation to be looked on with contempt. True contemplation of the real God is Biblical, and highly noble: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10); “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee” (Isa. 26:3, KJV); and “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31, KJV)—this is only some of the evidence of contemplation in Bible times.

If strict Evangelicals want to demonize Christian mysticism simply because they think it's a “Catholic thing” or an “occult thing,” then they are free to do so. But they are misguided in doing this. Christian mysticism predates the Catholic Church and it also predates occultism. Adam, Noah, and Enoch all had direct experiences of God. While there were no doubt occultists in their times, there were also prophets. The Bible makes a clear

distinction between true prophets and false prophets. Both are mystical and in touch with the supernatural, but one is good and the other evil. Also, some Evangelicals arrogantly seem to think that they have “got it all together” theologically. This new movement towards Evangelical mysticism is a restorative move back to early Christian practices and experiences. What should matter is pleasing God by following His will the best we know how, like the first century Christians. The values of the “Evangelical tradition” should not matter as much as living in the fullness of Gospel truth, practice, and experience. In my opinion, the Evangelical tradition has no place for the supernatural, but early Christianity did. This is why contemplation is a good thing, because it is a practice of early mystical Christianity.

The ninth objection to contemplation. Contemplation and mysticism lead to a subjective existentialism, or the attitude that spiritual experiences are self-authenticating, without any need of confirmation or proof of validity. Because of this, mystics readily believe their visions and voices without checking the Bible to make sure that they are from God.

My Answer: It is true that some mystics do fall into this error: New Agers, New Age Christians, liberal Christians, and uncaredful Charismatics. But this is an irresponsible **misuse** of contemplation and spiritual experiences. The responsible mystic needs to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). This he does by

regarding the Bible as theologically superior to his own visions, voices, and revelations. Anything that he subjectively experiences needs to be some way objectively proven in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. The prophet Isaiah spoke critically of the psychics in his times, "To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa. 8:20). It doesn't matter how "gifted" a mystic may be; if his revelations cannot be backed up by the Bible, then they are not valid. But if someone ever receives a revelation about something that the Bible is silent about, then it should agree with the general flow of New Testament morals and theology.

The tenth objection to contemplation. This "Evangelical mysticism" is a postmodern emerging church thing; and the emerging church is heretical.

My Answer: The emerging church has no exclusive claim on contemplative prayer just as the New Age doesn't. I am not an emerging church person; I reject its relativism and liberalism as heretical. I believe in conservative Evangelical and Charismatic theology, but I also believe in practicing contemplation to attain spiritual experiences of God. And there are many others who believe like I do.

The eleventh objection to contemplation. Contemplation was perfected by the Catholic mystics. Why would

any good Evangelical want to practice something that was taught by deceived Catholics?

My Answer: As an Evangelical I understand why any spiritual practice coming from the Catholic Church should be looked on with suspicion. After all of the theological errors (that contradict the New Testament) in Catholic history—such as Mary worship, praying to saints, vows, perfectionism, works righteousness, penance, viewing the Eucharist as a repeating substitutionary atonement, the Rosary, the Crusades, indulgences, kissing statues, etc. It almost makes you think that anything from the Catholic Church could be demonic. But we have to remember that Christianity survived through the Catholic Church for 1,200 years. I don't believe that God only manifested Himself to the early church, went to Heaven for 1,200 years, and came back to be with the Protestants once the Reformation came around. But some Evangelicals seem to think this way. They seem to think that God left Christianity in total spiritual darkness for 1,200 years of church history! This idea was expressed in Martin Luther's *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520).

But to me it is simply unthinkable that no good thing could *ever* come out of the history of Catholic spirituality. That would mean that the Holy Spirit was completely inactive among the Catholic monks for most of church history until the Reformation. Sure there have been a lot of things wrong with Catholic spirituality, but is *everything* wrong? Everything? I don't think so! I think Evangelicals need to live up to their theology and show a

little *grace* in this area. Especially when it comes to contemplation, which is proven by the Bible in many ways. In addition to that, let me say that the teachings of Catholic mystical writers need to be authenticated by the Bible just as much as the teachings of Evangelical writers; but it is often the case that Catholic books are filled with Bible quotes (for example, Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* (1418)).

CHAPTER 7
**THE HISTORY OF
CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM**

or

*A Sketch of Charismatic Movements and
Supernatural Phenomena in Church History,
Marked by the Practice of Divine Contemplation,
Spiritual Experiences, and Miracles*

For the following historical sketch I am indebted to Eddie Hyatt's *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity* (2002), Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (1911), and Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* (1986). The first work, while actually unfavorable towards contemplation and Christian mysticism, does a great job at charting Charismatic groups that have emerged throughout church history. Though these groups were often undeniably mystical and contemplative, Hyatt only pays attention to the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and healing that were found among them. The second work, that done by Underhill, is only a noteworthy source because of its historical value. However, as far as Underhill's theological views were concerned, I would render her a "proto-New Ager." Her sketch charts pagan mystics alongside the Christian mystics, as if they were of the same stream of spirituality. To believe such would be of the utmost confusion, for as the Christian mystics are the prophets of God, the pagan mystics are the prophets of satan. They are both spiritual masters—the Christian mystics and the pagan mystics—but they are masters of two completely different spiritual armies. One of good, the other of evil. The third work,

that of Keating, is written by a New Age Christian. Since I am an Evangelical mystic, I also only turn to his book for its historical value. Here I will only be charting the Christian mystical tradition; that is, those Christians who practiced divine contemplation in some form or another, and were thus favored with spiritual experiences.

The precursors to Christian mysticism begin with the mysticism of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; of Moses and the prophets of his time; of Deborah, Samuel, and David; and of the **Old Testament prophetic movements** in the eighth century B.C., headed by Elijah and Elisha (see 1 Kings 12:25—2 Kings 17:41). This is not to say that Abraham was the first of the Lord's prophets, because it is more likely that Enoch and Noah should be counted among the first, but they were part of the pre-Flood world. Throughout the history of Israel, the prophets of the Lord were men (and sometimes women) of God that the Holy Spirit used to bring revelation and direction to the Israelites. It was through the prophet Moses that God regathered His people out of Egypt to form them into a nation of priests and prophets. Following Moses' death, a period followed in which the "judges" politically ruled over Israel—this was supposed to be a theocratic rule by prophets. But out of all 15 judges, it seems that only Deborah and Samuel were prophetic; all of the others were either corrupt or too politically or militarily minded.

The Lord's prophets almost always came into conflict with the political and religious authorities of Israel. Ironical isn't it? But this is what happened when human

nature and religious institutionalism came to relate with the Spirit of God and the Israelite mystics. The interests of the political and religious institutions that developed in Israel eventually clashed with the raw spirituality of the prophets and mystics of Israel. All too often the Israelites lapsed into religious ritualism, worldly-mindedness, and unbelief. They lost their connection with the Spirit of the Lord and just accepted whatever was religiously popular—usually the Canaanite religions of the Baal gods. Of course, they also “worshipped” the Lord; after all He was considered a good god too—but this greatly angered the Lord.

Although the Lord remained patient with them for a long time, His anger at the Israelites finally reached its breaking point when He stirred up King Nebuchadnezzar to deport them out of Canaan and into Babylonia. All of this happened gradually, but the process was complete by around 582 B.C. There were basically no more Israelites—or Jews we may call them at this point—in the lands of Israel or Judah (that is, Canaan). The Jewish temple was destroyed and they were all living in the foreign pagan country of Babylonia. During the Babylonian exile, synagogues and Jewish theology developed. In this time, there were not very many prophets that we know of other than Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Malachi. There were certainly mystics and prophets during the Babylonian exile, but we cannot say with clarity that there were any “prophetic movements” like in the times of Elijah and Elisha. For the most part, we may say that this was a

spiritually dry season, a time of testing and purification for the Jews.

Around 432 B.C. the Jews were almost completely restored back to their native land, with Malachi being the last of the prophets that they recognized. With the long time absence of the Levitical priesthood and the sacred rites of the temple, Judaism came under the influence of the theology of the rabbis that developed in the Babylonian exile. (Rabbi Judah haNasi's *The Mishnah* (A.D. 200) compiled many of their oral traditions and laws. This was later expanded into Rav Ashi and Ravina II's *The Babylonian Talmud* (A.D. 475)—which is considered to be the summation of the Jewish religious tradition up until that point in history.) Cessationism—the concept that spiritual gifts have ceased—eventually developed after the death of Malachi in 430 B.C.

The rabbis and scribes canonized the Old Testament as the official Jewish Scriptures with the Book of Malachi as the last book; although nobody knows for sure when this officially happened. It could have been anywhere between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200. Nevertheless, from the death of Malachi in 430 B.C. to the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist in A.D. 26, we have a period of 456 years when the official Jewish clergy—the priests and rabbis—did not accept any mystics, prophets, or private revelations as truly from God. This is not to say that there weren't any mystics or prophets during this **Intertestamental period**, but there were no prophetic revelations that were counted as true among the Jewish clergy. It was tradition!

The Old Testament canon was sealed with the Book of Malachi; and if not officially sealed, then at least solidified through rabbinic tradition. This began to change with the ministry of John the Baptist, as some of the rabbis among the Pharisees came to believe in him and Jesus—for whom John was the forerunner. During the Intertestamental period there was talk of a future Jewish messiah, a king of the Jews descended from David, who would come and bring freedom and righteousness to the Jewish people. Many people also anticipated the return of the prophet Elijah based on this prophecy: “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Mal. 4:5).

The beginning of Christian mysticism is found in **John the Baptist**, who stole away to the desert to spend time contemplating God in solitude and quietness, disciplining his body with fasting and austerities. It is here that John experienced profound dreams, visions, and voices from God; the most profound of these being the revelation that Jesus was the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world, and that he would know this Lamb by seeing a vision of the Holy Spirit descending upon Him. Christ later said that John the Baptist was the “Elijah” who was to come, as prophesied by Malachi (Matt. 11:14). John, like his mystic predecessor before him, spent a great amount of time and effort subduing his fleshly passions, and practicing stillness and contemplation to experience divine ecstasies, revelations, and favors from God’s presence. John was Christ’s forerunner and he pointed the Jews to Jesus as the awaited Messiah.

Jesus Christ was also a mystic—of course, the greatest of all mystics, the King of Mystics—for it was He from whom no spiritual mystery was hidden except the day of His return. The Gospels say that He knew all things; yet, we have come to assume that this is because He is the Second Person of the Trinity and therefore omniscient. But at the same token, He was fully human also, and He also had to ask certain people questions for His lack of knowledge concerning some things. Believing as I do that Christ had partial knowledge while on Earth, He had to receive divine revelation through dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs just as every fully human mystic has to. I believe it is probable that many of His parables were influenced by symbolic dreams and visions that He received from His Father.

Further, the Gospels say that just after He was baptized by John in the Jordan River, that the Spirit baptized Him with power, and He went into the desert for forty days where He was tempted by satan. He fasted while in the heat of the dry desert. No doubt, spending time subduing evil passions from His flesh and satan—with great ease as the Son of God—He spent time contemplating God in the silence and solitude of the desert. Satan tried to distract Him from concentrating on His Father at least three times, as he always tries to with God's mystics spending time in contemplation. Though the Gospels never use the word "contemplation," the fact that He was infused with spiritual power and vision in the desert, is evidence enough that He was simply spending time in pure consciousness of His Father's presence. No doubt

He also must have engaged in plenty of petitionary and intercessory prayers for the work of the ministry for which He was preparing, but even so, these kinds of intellectually driven prayers generally do not have the power to expand one's spiritual consciousness of God's presence, angels, and demons—all of which He was fully conscious of in the desert.

The early church, with its apostles and prophets, was directed by the revelations of mystics. After receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the early church at Jerusalem saw visions of fire and spoke in tongues as they were sitting still in a room waiting and contemplating God for the coming of the Holy Spirit. People in church history that were prophets—ecstatics and visionaries that received revelations on a fairly regular basis—always have been mystics that practiced divine contemplation. This is the one spiritual practice that opens up the spirit's consciousness of God's presence and revelation. Therefore, whenever we find a prophetic or Charismatic group in church history that experienced revelations, we may assume that they also practiced contemplation regularly (in some form or another).

There are rare occasions when non-mystics have received divine dreams and visions, but because they lack wisdom concerning divine contemplation, their revelations unfortunately became once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Those who regularly practice contemplation are prophetic people who have cultivated their spiritual senses to experience God's presence, hear God's voice, and see God's visions. No doubt, the apostle Paul spent

several years in the Arabian desert doing not much more than eating, sleeping, meditating, praying, and especially contemplating God. He reports later on that he apparently had an out-of-body visit to the Third Heaven. The apostle John, we very well know, wrote the entire Book of Revelation, which the first chapter indicates he received while in an ecstatic contemplative state of mind, as he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”

While it can be said that the “church fathers” Clement of Alexandria (150-215) and Origen (185-254) were mystics and practiced contemplation, I truly hesitate to call them church fathers, because of their heretical viewpoints. They were followers of the early “New Age Christian” sect called Christian Neoplatonism, which was a strange syncretism of Christian theology, Hinduism, and the philosophy of Plato. Though some modern Christians regard Clement and Origen among the first of the Christian mystics, they were not. They were not orthodox Christian mystics, but rather ancient New Age Christians with clouded spiritual vision. Arguably, the first *true* Christian mystics to emerge after the apostles were **the Montanists**. They were a prophetic movement in the second century that encouraged ecstatic prophesying, and were supported by the orthodox church father Tertullian (160-220). As house churches began to dissolve and the institutional church gained momentum, the movement was successfully stamped out by the clergy. When the New Testament was canonized it was understood by the clergy as the completion of all divine revelation (Cessationism again).

The second group of Christian mystics after the Montanists were **the Desert Fathers**. The most prominent leader of this group was St. Antony (251-356), whose supernatural lifestyle was written in Athanasius' *The Life of Antony* (360). In the third century, the Roman Empire was viciously persecuting Christians with tortures and martyrdoms. In reaction to this, a movement of young people fled to the Egyptian deserts to live in solitude—either in communities or alone as hermits—where they spent much of their time contemplating God and experiencing God's presence and revelations. These men grew to be old and experienced contemplatives who in turn trained other young people to practice divine contemplation. These now older mystics became the fathers of the desert, and the founders of Christian monasticism. In a sense, Christian mysticism began with the Desert Fathers. It is true that Christ, the apostles, and the early church were mystical and contemplative. But there is little material written by them on the contemplative life. Contemplative Christian literature began to surface among the Desert Fathers.

Fourth century texts such as *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* record proverbs and short biographies of prominent monks; Palladius' *The Lausiac History* is a source of more of the lives of the Desert Fathers; John Cassian's *The Institutes* discusses monastic clothing, spiritual discipline, and holiness; and his famous book *The Conferences* include conversations that he had with some of the monks on the topics of contemplation, holiness, and spiritual gifts. The

monastic movement of the Desert Fathers eventually lost its spiritual fire around 400, following the deaths of Saints Antony, Pachomius, and Basil.

Over a process of 750 years, from around 400 to the 1050s, not only had Europe undergone a tremendous political and religious transformation from paganism to Christianity, but spirituality had declined from the revival of the Desert Fathers. Monasteries became institutionalized and worldly. There were only a few mystical theologies here and there, such as Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* (500) who was not a Neoplatonist even though New Age Christians would say otherwise; John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (600); and Symeon the New Theologian's *The Discourses* (10th century). After these Dark Ages, a spiritual renewal began to move through monasticism again, and in reaction to the worldliness and politicization of the institutional church.

In France, **the Cistercians** formed in the late 1090s. Also in France, Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) headed **the Victorine movement**. It was a zealous return to Christian mysticism. The latter wrote three influential contemplative works in the 1190s: *The Twelve Patriarchs*, *The Mystical Ark*, and *Book Three of the Trinity*. In Italy, **the Franciscans** formed in the early 1200s. In France again, not long after the formation of the Franciscan brotherhood, **the Dominicans** formed around 1216. A Benedictine nun and mystic prophetess named Hildegard of Bingen published divine visions called *Scivias* (1151). Christian mysticism exploded in the middle of the 12th century. Other great

works of this period include Angela of Foligno's *Complete Works*, Hadewijch's *Complete Works*, Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, and Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend* (1260) which was a collection of miracle stories of various saints. Female visionary mystics known as **the Beguines** were also prolific writers in this time.

The Waldensians or Waldenses, were a non-institutional Charismatic group that lived in austerity, and formed in France in the late 1170s. Because they practiced open air preaching and sharing without "official permission" from the institutional church, they were persecuted. The Waldensians also emphasized divine healing. Gregory Palamas' *The Triads* (1338) defended the Eastern Orthodox method of hesychastic contemplation (which employed breath control). Walter Hilton's *The Scale of Perfection* (1494) was a great work on contemplation. More female visionary mystics published visions: St. Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue* (1370), Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love (Showings)* (1393), and Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1438).

Brother Ugolino's *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi* (1390) became a classic devotional reading from the life of St. Francis—and contains many miracle stories about the early Franciscans. An anonymous author wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the late 1300s which became a classic manual on the contemplative life. Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* (1418) was written with mystical material, however most of it deals with

practical everyday holiness, and has become a classic devotional book. In the Middle Ages, Christian mystics could be found all over Europe. There were monastic mystics and lay mystics. Everywhere from the 1190s to the mid 1400s experienced a proliferation of mystical literature: mystical theology, contemplative manuals, miracle stories, and private revelations of divine visions. Christian mysticism declined in popularity for a hundred years and eventually dropped off at a steep decline in the late 1500s.

The Protestant Reformation was largely to blame for this departure from Christian mysticism and contemplation as the Protestants focused on getting “back to the Bible.” The Catholic Counter-Reformation reacted to this anti-mystical attitude. **The Jesuits and the Discalced Carmelites** were two mystically oriented Catholic orders that tried to convert Protestants back to the Catholic faith by appealing to spiritual experiences and miracles. The Jesuits were inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola’s *The Spiritual Exercises* (1548). This book was a manual for miraculous visualization of Christ. The Discalced Carmelites were inspired by the works of Saints Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591). Their mission was to revive Christian mysticism; and their works are the first of their kind in that they catalog spiritual experiences with such precision. To this day, they have served as points of reference for Catholic mystical theologians. Especially St. Teresa’s *The Interior Castle* (1577) and St. John of the Cross’ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (1578).

There were some radical reformers among the Protestants that were fervently Charismatic. **The Anabaptists** were Charismatic, but there was a group that branched off of them called the Zwickau prophets that put a stronger emphasis on spiritual gifts—however they had a militaristic side to them. From the 1640s to the 1660s, **the Jansenists** were a Catholic Charismatic group that had Calvinistic beliefs about divine grace and free will. For this they were deemed heretics, but they did experience charismatic phenomena. Also in the late 1600s, a Catholic mystical group appeared in France that were known as **the Quietists**. They were very enthusiastic about holiness, contemplation, and spiritual experiences. They were branded as heretics by the Catholic Church primarily because they supposedly taught that contemplating God is okay without any active concentration. That is, empty-headed contemplation that resembles Zen and other forms of Eastern meditation. However, it is still a subject of debate that they taught this, based on various interpretations of their writings. They probably did not teach this, but were merely the victims of an anti-mystical suspicion that had been popular in France at the time because of witch hunting.

While rejected by the Catholic Church, some Protestant mystics have found inspiration from Quietist writings. Among these were the early Quakers, John Wesley, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Hudson Taylor, and Watchman Nee. Both books are still considered great works on contemplation, as they have stood the test of time: Madame Guyon's *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* also known

as *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (1685) and Miguel de Molinos' *The Spiritual Guide* (1675). Unfortunately, ever since the Quietist controversy in the seventeenth century, Christian mysticism and contemplation came to be regarded with very great suspicion by most of the church. The Protestant Reformation was anti-mystical enough, but the Quietist controversy made it even more of a challenge to be a Christian mystic (even for Catholics). For the past 300 years, most Christians have despised the idea of contemplation—except for the Quakers and a few others.

Inspired by the Quietist movement, **the Quakers** emerged in England under the lead of George Fox, who's *Journal* (1694) and *Book of Miracles* (1696) contain various miracle stories. To this day, the Evangelical Friends—their spiritual children—are one of the few Protestant groups that emphasize the need of contemplative prayer as an essential part of Christian practice. Quaker theologian Richard J. Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* (1978) teaches meditation and contemplative prayer. In the 1680s, a prophetic movement emerged in the Cevennes mountains known as **the French prophets** or the Camisards. This was the first orthodox Christian group since the Montanists to lay such a heavy emphasis on restoring the gift of prophecy. Their leader John Lacy argued that Montanism was an orthodox prophetic movement in the early church. He also taught on the need of taking dreams, visions, and voices seriously as modes of divine revelation. His book, like St. John of the Cross' *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (1578), is one of the first

prophetic manuals to appear in church history, but now in a Protestant context. It was called *The General Delusion of Christians, Touching the Ways of God's Revealing Himself to and by the Prophets* (1713).

The 1700s were the time of **the Great Awakening** in England and the American colonies. The Moravians and Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the Methodists and John Wesley, and the Congregationalists and Jonathan Edwards all experienced miracles in their meetings. Slayings in the Spirit, quakings, holy laughter, prophetic experiences, and even healings were occurring. However, there was a great hesitancy among the leaders of these movements to move too far in the direction of spiritual gifts. Zinzendorf, Wesley, and Edwards were all strong proponents of Christian perfection or sanctification, and they preached to the end that all would know the depths of God's love in the heart. However, John Wesley was more open to spiritual gifts than Edwards was. Wesley found inspiration from the writings of Thomas à Kempis, Madame Guyon, John Lacy, and other Christian mystics. Jonathan Edwards, though "liberal" with regards to physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit, still remained a Cessationist and continued to resist the notion that modern dreams and visions could have true revelations from God.

Into the 1800s, there was a **Second Great Awakening** among certain colleges in the American colonies. Also in Cane Ridge, Kentucky a revival happened among thousands of pioneers. Just like in the first awakening, there were slayings in the Spirit, quakings, holy laughter,

prophetic experiences, and healings. However, both of the great awakenings were holiness-oriented and did not emphasize spiritual gifts. But physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit did happen.

In 1827 a Charismatic group appeared called the Catholic Apostolic Church or **the Irvingites**, led by Edward Irving. They came out of the Church of Scotland and they held entire prayer meetings that were dedicated to receiving spiritual gifts. A summary of their beliefs appeared in Thomas Erskine's *The Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit* (1883). During this time in America, Phoebe Palmer and Charles Finney led **the Holiness movement** with their evangelistic meetings. They laid a strong emphasis on obeying God's commandments in everyday Christian life. Holiness was important to them and they taught that people could receive a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit that would help Christians to live holy lifestyles. This experience they called the baptism in the Holy Spirit (this was not a miraculous gifts, Charismatic view). Physical manifestations and miracles happened in their meetings, but again the emphasis of this movement was holiness, not spiritual gifts.

In the late 1800s, **the Faith Cure movement** emerged and was inspired by three books: A. J. Gordon's *The Ministry of Healing* (1882), A. B. Simpson's *The Gospel of Healing* (1885), and Andrew Murray's *Divine Healing* (1900). After so long a period of time since the Waldensians, divine healing through **praying for the sick** was emphasized again. Within the context of the Holiness and Faith Cure movements, a man by the name of

Charles Parham temporarily opened Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. Parham and his students emphasized personal holiness and held long **prayer meetings**. After an in-depth study of the Book of Acts, they came to conclude that the Biblical baptism in the Holy Spirit wasn't merely about inward holiness, but that it was associated with miracles and evidenced by speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4). In 1900 his students began to speak in tongues and eventually so did he. Then he turned into a tongues evangelist, teaching about the experience of tongues in Holiness churches and temporary Bible schools across America. One time when he was teaching in one of these schools in Houston, Texas, a black man named William Seymour believed his teaching. Later on, Seymour was called to minister in Los Angeles, California.

From 1906 to 1909, it is there that Seymour became the leader of **the Azusa Street revival** and **the Pentecostal movement**—which internationally spread to India, Chile, Norway, England, China, and other countries. Seymour published a newspaper called *The Apostolic Faith* that documented the miracles of this revival; and they have been republished as *The Azusa Street Papers* (1997).¹ When Pentecostalism spread to England, there was an explosion of theology on spiritual gifts; three books are highly notable: Donald Gee's *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (1928), Harold Horton's *The Gifts of the Spirit* (1934), and Howard Carter's *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation* (1968). At the same time, Parham went

¹ This is available from <http://www.stevehill.org>.

to Zion City, Illinois to teach about tongues to a community that knew all about divine healing. **The Zion City revival** occurred during this period. Tongues, healings, and other spiritual experiences were present. F. F. Bosworth's *Christ the Healer* (1924) was inspired by this revival.

Not long after the Zion City revival, **the Healing revival** appeared in the late 1940s and was broadcast on television. William Branham, Oral Roberts, Jack Coe, A. A. Allen, and other faith healers rose to stardom as television broadcasted them as "mighty men of faith and power." Many powerful healings took place among them, but most of them fell into moral error. The holiness emphasis of the Zion City days was no longer present. Gordon Lindsay, who had been influenced by the ministry of John G. Lake, was the organizer of the healing meetings; he also published the miracles in his magazine called *The Voice of Healing*. In the late 1950s, William Branham paid a visit to Sharon Bible College in North Battleford, Canada. Branham's word of knowledge gift greatly moved the students to seek God in prayer and fasting for the gift of prophecy. This became **the Latter Rain revival**. This was an authentic prophetic movement; the likes of which hadn't been seen since the days of the French prophets in the late 1600s. While the Irvingites of the early 1800s were also into prophecy, they were just as enthusiastic about the other spiritual gifts; and the Pentecostals were more so into tongues; but the Latter Rain revival emphasized the revival of the gift of prophecy.

In the early 1960s, **the Charismatic movement** spread throughout the Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, mainline, Baptist, and other traditionally non-Pentecostal denominations. It was a movement of general openness to spiritual gifts, but was especially marked by the gift of tongues like the Pentecostal movement. If there was any primary leader of this movement, then it was Dennis Bennett. He and his wife Rita published a book on spiritual gifts called *The Holy Spirit and You* (1971).

In the 1960s and 70s, America went through a dramatic cultural and spiritual transformation. Much of this involved **the hippie counterculture** that emerged out of San Francisco, California. The hippies were young students or non-students that rose up to resist what they saw as flaws in American society. They were anti-war, anti-establishment, pro-environment, and all about living in freedom from traditional social customs. They opposed traditional ideas about the organized church and religion in general. There was a mass interest in the supernatural, and for most, that meant Eastern occultism and mysticism.

This gave rise to the New Age movement which is still very alive today. As the hippies turned to Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen, they also turned to Hindu gurus and Buddhist monks for guidance. This led to pursuing psychic experiences and false spiritual gifts. The church felt threatened by this, so it fought back with countercult ministries like the Christian Research Institute headed by Walter Martin. In rare cases, Charismatic

ministries won over some New Age hippies through the demonstration of the Spirit's power.

The Jesus movement was an example of Christian hippies that wanted to follow a Jesus that was divorced from a hypocritical institutional church system which they saw as evil. It was partially a Charismatic movement, because it happened at the same time as the Charismatic movement in the mainline churches. But the focus of the Jesus movement was not spiritual gifts, but rather simply living as a community, getting back to the words of Christ, and preaching the Gospel. Ironically, the Jesus movement produced an institutional church called Calvary Chapel, headed by Chuck Smith.

In 1982, a Calvary Chapel pastor with a Quaker background named John Wimber started another denomination called **the Vineyard**. This church split was over Wimber's emphasis on ministering in the miraculous gifts. Lonnie Frisbee, a hippie evangelist from the early days of the Jesus movement, had a gift of healing. Although he lapsed into moral error on several occasions, he accompanied Wimber on healing crusades and was instrumental in establishing the Vineyard churches. The emphasis of the Vineyard churches became divine healing, and using healing prayer as a means of evangelism—what Wimber called “power evangelism.” Two significant works that John Wimber wrote are *Power Evangelism* (1986) and *Power Healing* (1987).

Also in the 1980s, a Charismatic church named Kansas City Fellowship in Kansas City, Missouri started to experience a prophetic movement. The pastor's name

was Mike Bickle and there were a few men in his church with the gift of prophecy. These men came to be called **the Kansas City prophets**: Bob Jones, Paul Cain, John Paul Jackson, James Goll, Larry Randolph, and others. Eventually the church merged with the Vineyard denomination. Then Bob Jones and Paul Cain fell into moral error and were disciplined by John Wimber and Mike Bickle. There were other mistakes taken in the misinterpretation of revelations that caused the church to fall into disrepute with Evangelical and Charismatic churches. Eventually John Wimber disbanded Kansas City Fellowship from the Vineyard and returned back to healing ministry as an emphasis. Mike Bickle's *Growing in the Prophetic* (1996) charts his victories and mistakes in trying to restore the prophetic ministry back to the modern church setting. Since the prophetic movement in Kansas City occurred in the 1980s, Mike Bickle's ministry has come to be known as the International House of Prayer; and he advocates the practice of contemplative prayer.

Never in church history has there been such an explosion of Christian (and mostly Protestant) writers of books about private revelations and spiritual experiences. Michael Sullivant, James Goll, John Paul Jackson, and Larry Randolph—from the original Kansas City prophets. Stacey Campbell, Bobby Conner, Francis Frangipane, Rick Joyner, and Steve Thompson—affiliated with the Kansas City prophets. Bill Hamon, Leanne Payne, John and Paula Sandford, and R. Loren Sandford—from a prophetic stream that predated the Kansas City prophetic movement. Doctors Jack Deere and Wayne Grudem—

two conservative Evangelical theologians in support of the prophetic ministry. Dr. David Aune—Catholic theologian of the gift of prophecy.

Benedict Groeschel—Charismatic Franciscan priest. Graham Cooke from the UK and Kim Clement from South Africa. Dr. Mark Virkler—Charismatic theologian that teaches people all over the world how to hear God's voice. Kris Vallotton—who leads the oversight of the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry in Redding, California. Patricia King—who has a TV program called Extreme Prophetic. Steve Schultz—who has a website called ElijahList.com which publishes prophetic revelations every week from internationally recognized prophets. Then there is everyone else: Chuck Pierce, Cindy Jacobs, Gary Oates, Julia Loren, Ira Milligan, Jonathan Welton, Paula Price, Eileen Fisher—and lots of others. All of these modern day people have written at least one book about the gift of prophecy or prophetic ministry.

In 1994, a minister named Randy Clark went to a Rodney Howard-Browne revival meeting to receive an impartation of the power of God—and he did! Soon after this, Clark was invited by John Arnott to speak at his Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. While he was there, the power of God flowed out of him so mightily that many people were slain in the Spirit and began to experience physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit—such as holy laughter, rolling, and shaking. This came to be known as **the Toronto Blessing**. Just like the case of Mike Bickle's prophetic church, the Vineyard also disbanded John Arnott's new manifestation church. The Vineyard focused

on healing, Kansas City Fellowship focused on prophecy, and the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church focused on physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Now Arnott's ministry is called Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (Catch The Fire Toronto)—and is the head church of Catch The Fire Ministries. John Arnott's *The Father's Blessing* (1995) is his theological defense of the physical manifestations. Divine contemplation, or soaking prayer as they prefer to call it, has been revived among Charismatics through the influence of this revivalist ministry.

In 1995, **the Brownsville revival** broke out in Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida. This was led by evangelist Steve Hill and continued until around the year 2000. Steve Hill had received the anointing from Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, who in turn had received it from the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. Thousands of people attended the meetings to be touched by God's supernatural presence and power. The revival was marked by healings, deliverances, tears of repentance, and physical manifestations like in Toronto. Out of his experiences on the leadership team of the Brownsville revival, Dr. Michael Brown's *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire* (1996) argues in favor for physical manifestations, holiness, and openness to revival phenomena.

Also in 1995, Bill Johnson, then the pastor of an Assemblies of God church in Weaverville, California called Mountain Chapel, went to one of the Toronto Blessing meetings. Nothing dramatic happened to him, but he left with the impression that he needed to devote

his ministry to the cultivation of spiritual experiences like he was seeing in Toronto. In 1996, Johnson was invited to become the senior pastor of an Assemblies of God church called **Bethel Church** in Redding, California. In 1998, Johnson started the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry where **healing and prophecy** are cultivated among the youth and students of every age. In 2006, Bethel Church willingly broke off their affiliation with the Assemblies of God because of conflicts of interest concerning the Charismatic emphasis. Bill Johnson's *When Heaven Invades Earth* (2005) discusses his healing experiences at his church and defends the need for healing and prophetic ministry to be in the modern-day church. Today, Bethel Church, Catch The Fire Toronto, and the International House of Prayer Missions Base are the leading churches of what is now called **the Neocharismatic movement (the Third Wave of the Holy Spirit)**.

A last word should be said here about the itinerant ministry of **John Crowder** and the New Mystics. Crowder has a radical personality, a scholarly intellect, and has written two books: *Miracle Workers, Reformers, and the New Mystics* (2006) and *The Ecstasy of Loving God* (2009). They are, like this book, modern-day works of mystical theology from a Charismatic perspective. Miracles have occurred in Crowder's ministry, but he has laid a stronger emphasis on the manifestation of spiritual drunkenness more than anything else. He also teaches that the doctrine of entire sanctification is the heart of all Christian mystical teaching. Although he doesn't readily use the phrases "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctifi-

cation,” he essentially teaches what Charles Finney and the Holiness movement taught about holiness: that it removes the sinful nature from man. This contradicts several passages of Scripture (Mark 7:21; Rom. 7; 1 Pet. 2:12). Crowder, like the Christian mystics that have preceded him in church history, loves God and sincerely wants all that Jesus Christ has to offer in this life. But unfortunately, I feel that he like many other Christian mystics, although led of the Spirit in many ways, is wrong in this teaching of removing the sin nature. If we seek theological orthodoxy, I believe we need to base our beliefs on the New Testament, personal experience, and Evangelical and Charismatic theology.

CHAPTER 8
**50 OF THE GREATEST MYSTICAL TEXTS
IN CHURCH HISTORY**

1. 360 – St. Athanasius' *The Life of Antony*
2. 395 – Anonymous' *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*
3. **419 – The New Testament (fully compiled)**
4. 429 – St. John Cassian's *The Conferences*
5. 600 – St. John Climacus' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*
6. 1151 – Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*
7. **1260 – Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend***
8. 1338 – St. Gregory Palamas' *The Triads*
9. 1370 – St. Catherine of Siena's *Dialogue*
10. 1375 – Anonymous' *The Cloud of Unknowing*
11. **1390 – Brother Ugolino's *The Little Flowers of St. Francis***
12. 1393 – Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*
13. 1418 – Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*
14. 1548 – St. Ignatius of Loyola's *The Spiritual Exercises*
15. **1577 – St. Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle***
16. **1578 – St. John of the Cross' *The Ascent of Mount Carmel***
17. **1657 – Augustine Baker's *Holy Wisdom***
18. **1675 – Miguel de Molinos' *The Spiritual Guide***
19. **1685 – Madame Guyon's *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer***
20. **1694 – George Fox's *Journal***
21. **1713 – John Lacy's *The General Delusion of Christians***
22. **1714 – Francois Fénelon's *Spiritual Letters***
23. **1754 – G. B. Scaramelli's *A Handbook of Mystical Theology***
24. **1757 – Benedict XIV's *Heroic Virtue***
25. 1882 – A. J. Gordon's *The Ministry of Healing*
26. 1903 – Arthur Devine's *A Manual of Mystical Theology*
27. 1909 – William Seymour's *The Azusa Street Papers*
28. **1910 – Augustin Poulain's *The Graces of Interior Prayer***
29. 1923 – Friedrich Von Hugel's *The Mystical Element of Religion*
30. **1926 – Albert Farges' *Mystical Phenomena***

31. 1928 – Donald Gee’s *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*
32. 1930 – Adolphe Tanquerey’s *The Spiritual Life*
33. 1934 – Harold Horton’s *The Gifts of the Spirit*
34. 1938 – Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *The Three Ages...*
35. 1951 – John Arintero’s *The Mystical Evolution*
36. 1952 – Herbert Thurston’s *Physical Phenomena...*
37. 1953 – Joseph de Guibert’s *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*
38. 1968 – Howard Carter’s *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation*
39. 1971 – Dennis and Rita Bennett’s *The Holy Spirit and You*
40. 1976 – Vladimir Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology...*
41. 1982 – Jordan Aumann’s *Spiritual Theology*
42. 1986 – John Wimber’s *Power Evangelism*
43. 1987 – John Wimber’s *Power Healing*
44. 1989 – Thomas Dubay’s *Fire Within*
45. 1993 – Herman Riffel’s *Dream Interpretation*
46. 1993 – Benedict Groeschel’s *A Still, Small Voice*
47. 1995 – John Arnott’s *The Father’s Blessing*
48. 1996 – Mike Bickle’s *Growing in the Prophetic*
49. 1996 – Jack Deere’s *Surprised by the Voice of God*
50. 2005 – Jim Goll’s *The Seer*

Question 1: In my opinion, which are the top five most outstanding works of Catholic mystical theology?

Answer 1: G. B. Scaramelli’s *A Handbook of Mystical Theology* (1754), Benedict XIV’s *Heroic Virtue* (1757), Augustin Poulain’s *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (1910), Albert Farges’ *Mystical Phenomena Compared with Their Human and Diabolical Counterfeits* (1926), and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (1938).

Question 2: In my opinion, which are the top five most outstanding Protestant works on the gift of prophecy?

Answer 2: John Lacy's *The General Delusion of Christians* (1713), Donald Gee's *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (1928), Harold Horton's *The Gifts of the Spirit* (1934), Mike Bickle's *Growing in the Prophetic* (1996), and Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Voice of God* (1996).

CHAPTER 9
**IS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER
A PAGAN PRACTICE?**

Christian mysticism is not a popularly discussed topic, because it deals with the mysteries of spiritual experience. But whenever it is discussed, you almost always read or hear someone say something like, “*You know, the Christian mystics borrowed contemplative prayer from the Neoplatonists.*” When such a comment is made, it carries an air of intelligence about it. Anyone who knows what a Neoplatonist is must know what they are talking about—so the thinking goes—because they were a 3rd century pagan sect from the Greco-Roman world. However, usually all the person knows about Neoplatonism is just that—they were a pagan group in the ancient world. They also thrived at the same time as the early church fathers, and not long before Christianity was approved of by Constantine.

**Neoplatonism:
A False Stigma Attributed to Christian Mystics**

If an Evangelical Christian hears such a statement made about contemplative prayer, they usually assume that the statement is true, and that contemplative prayer is only for pagans—and should *not* be practiced by Christians. It seems to justify all of the fears they had about it in the first place: “*I knew that was just Eastern meditation turned Christian!*” If the Christian mystics were so deceived as to borrow contemplative prayer from a group

of pagan Neoplatonists, then why should Christians follow their example? My gosh! All of the Christian mystics must have been deceived by the devil! (Of course—they *were* Catholics!) Contemplation is of the devil! Why? Because it's a pagan practice that was borrowed from the Neoplatonists! (So the thinking goes.) This circular reasoning becomes enough to keep such folks from pressing into God through the practice of contemplation. They look around at the New Agers and Eastern practices like Transcendental Meditation, and think to themselves, "Contemplative prayer looks very similar to that; I should have known it was borrowed from a pagan group. Now at least I have a name for it: *Neoplatonism*." It keeps them from experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ. And sadly, it's all based on faulty assumptions made by uninformed scholars and semi-academics who have never really done any in-depth research to investigate the claim of Christian mystics borrowing from Neoplatonism.

The Influence of Neoplatonism on Christianity Must Be Researched

To clarify this accusation made against contemplative prayer, we need to know what Neoplatonism was, who its teachers were, what their teachings were, and what texts they followed. Then we need to trace the intellectual influence of their teachings—if they are found at all—in the writings of the early church. Then we can confirm how far—and not so far—the proposition goes that "the Christian mystics borrowed contemplative

prayer from the Neoplatonists.” Is this a statement without basis? Or is there any truth to it? Does it make any sense that for 2,000 years of church history, Christian mystics would uncritically engage in a “pagan” practice of contemplative prayer? Let’s get to the bottom of this. **For if contemplative prayer truly is an exclusively pagan practice, then Christians should have no business contemplating Jesus at all.** Only New Agers and occultists should contemplate their false gods. But if it is *not* true that the Christian mystics borrowed contemplative prayer from Neoplatonism, then Christian contemplation is justified—and it is wrong to say that the practice originated in Neoplatonism.

The Teachers and Teachings of Neoplatonism

Neoplatonism was a mystical, pagan, philosophical sect that emerged out of Alexandria, Egypt in the 3rd century A.D.—then one of the greatest educational centers of the world. It should also be noted that in Alexandria and the Roman world in general, there were several religious groups that practiced their own form of contemplation—the Jewish Therapeutae, Gnostics, witches, Manichaeans, Christian Platonists, Neoplatonists, saintly orthodox bishops, and the Desert Fathers. But the reason why we are focusing on the Neoplatonists is because they had an impact on some of the Christian mystical theologians. The first Neoplatonic teacher was a man named **Ammonius Saccas**. *This man had Christian parents, but when he learned about Greek philosophy, he became a pagan. His*

paganism was syncretistic—very similar to the New Age movement of today—and he was heavily influenced by Hindu ideas. Exactly what this Ammonius believed was a controversial issue in the early church. But that he had New Age ideas was probably true, because this was said by Porphyry, an ardent Neoplatonist teacher only two times removed from Saccas. The reason why this was a controversy is because there was *another man* named Ammonius of Alexandria who was a Christian philosopher—this man was probably confused with the Neoplatonic Ammonius by early Christian writers. But it should also be noted that Porphyry was an intellectual opponent of the early church fathers, such as Eusebius, and should be remembered as a mark of the early disagreement between orthodox Christianity and Neoplatonism.

The primary teacher of Neoplatonism came to be **Plotinus**, who sat under Saccas' teaching, beginning when he was 27 years of age in 232, and he learned philosophy until 243. After he graduated from the academy at Alexandria, he joined the Roman army as they marched to Persia. The army suffered defeat, and *since Plotinus happened to be in the Far East, he became curious to hear from the Persian and Indian philosophers. After satisfying his curiosity about Eastern mysticism, he returned to Rome in A.D. 245 and gathered many disciples around himself.* This was the official beginning of the Neoplatonic movement. Plotinus was not much of a writer, but his teachings were later compiled by his disciple Porphyry in *The Enneads* (270). In this book, Plotinus' "systematic theology" of Neoplatonism was spelled

out; and it is a monistic, mystical interpretation of the works of the philosopher Plato. He taught the monistic Hindu view of God, which he called “the One.” The concept that “all is divine”—the universe, man, animals, plants, the Earth—all is one, all is god.

And because he was a contemplative of the Indian sort, he believed that **salvation is acquired through contemplation**—the exact same thing as in the New Age movement. It’s not the breaking of God’s law that is sin to Plotinus (for evil is just “imperfection”), but the fact that people are so fragmented in their thoughts that they are often unable to bring themselves into a one-pointed focus on the One Source of All Life (Plotinus’ God-Force, which he called the Monad). This is **monism or pantheism**. In order to be “saved” from this fragmentary and distracted existence, which is perpetuated by **reincarnation**—you must practice contemplation on the One. The mystic prepares himself for this contemplative experience by practicing a virtuous, self-denying, ascetic lifestyle. **Through attaining ecstasy in the contemplation of the One, the Neoplatonist believes that he has merged with the Monad, and will not be reincarnated, but that his soul will be annihilated and dispersed into different parts of the universe** (e.g., plants, animals, grass, air, rocks, trees, stars, etc). This is the same teaching of the Hindu gurus of the 1960s counterculture and the New Age movement.

And like the Hindu gurus which profess a faith in their “spirit guides” and the “universal energy”—their god—the Neoplatonists also believed that the gods of

Greek mythology were real beings that functioned under the authority of the One (like angels and demons). In Christianity, angels and demons are spiritual beings separately created by God. But Hindus and Neoplatonists viewed their gods as extensions of the One—they're all the same Being, manifestations of the One. Just like the Christians view the Trinity—one true God, three persons. That is how the monistic Hindus and the Neoplatonists viewed their gods.

But here is an enormous difference between early orthodox Christianity and Neoplatonism. Jesus said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). And to the Samaritan woman, He said, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, the first commandment was, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod. 20:3).

The Desert Fathers vs. The Neoplatonists, Etc.

The Desert Fathers of the third century were the first completely documented Christian mystics, complete with teachings and experiences about contemplative prayer. Athanasius' *The Life of Antony* (362) is the first place to look into this. These were men (and women) who fled into the North Egyptian deserts to live either as hermits or in monastic communities. Their ascetic lifestyles were all about attaining to spiritual experiences of God

through contemplation; and to live undisturbed, undistracted lives in which it would be easier to concentrate on Jesus. Many of them, if not most of them, fled to the deserts to escape the persecution of Christians in society—persecution that had long plagued Christians for refusing to sacrifice to the Roman gods. (Gods that Neoplatonists worshiped, by the way!) By seeing their fellow Christians martyred and tortured to death, the Desert Fathers, not willing to renounce Christ for pagan gods—and at the same time, not quite ready to be martyrs, fled to the deserts to live mystical lives with Jesus, and to a limited extent with each other. Another reason for the desert movement was that once the emperor Constantine institutionalized the Christian churches in A.D. 313, these churches became political and worldly, and the desert mystics were searching for a more spiritual approach to Christian life.

Different Religious Ideas of Contemplation in the Third Century

While it should be noted that the ideals of monasticism and contemplation did *not* originate with the Desert Fathers, the ideals did *not* necessarily originate with pagans either. **The Desert Fathers lived in a time and a place where asceticism, mysticism, and contemplation were practiced by several religions.** This was not a new thing. Although it is true that the Desert Fathers were contemporaries of heretical mystic cults, such as the Neoplatonists and Gnostics, it would be wrong to assume

that the Desert Fathers were *themselves* Neoplatonists or Gnostics! **All that these different groups of mystics had in common was their practice of *contemplation*—but what these groups did not have in common was EVERYTHING ELSE, their gods, their theology, their ethics, etc.** The Desert Fathers believed salvation is acquired through faith in Jesus, and *holiness is developed through contemplation*. Unlike the Neoplatonists, who believed that salvation is acquired through contemplation, and is a means of breaking the cycle of reincarnation. Both the Desert Fathers and the Neoplatonists practiced contemplation, but they had completely different beliefs about it. The Desert Fathers believed in one life, Heaven, and Hell. The Neoplatonists believed in reincarnation and pagan gods. Totally different.

The Desert Fathers vs. The “Christian” Neoplatonists

It would be the height of absurdity to say that the Desert Fathers were “Christian” Neoplatonists, because they believed Jesus was the only Way, Truth, and Life—and they believed the Roman gods were demons. The Desert Fathers were orthodox Christian mystics. However, there *were* also **Christian Neoplatonists** in those times, such as Origen (who was a student of Ammonius Saccas) and Clement of Alexandria—truly liberal, heretical, “Christian mystics”—the Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating of their day. *The Desert Fathers were not at all like those men. The Desert Fathers were Evangelical mystics that clung only to Jesus, but the Christian Neo-*

platonists were New Age Christians. These two mystical streams have always existed throughout church history—the one is orthodox, while the other borrows from Hindu mysticism. **There is no evidence that the Desert Fathers borrowed their beliefs or practices from Hinduism, Buddhism, Neoplatonism, or Gnosticism.** On the contrary, much of what they taught was countercultural and resistant to the pagan religions of their day. That is why they escaped into the deserts! Although their miraculous gifts were often mistaken as sorcery by their contemporaries, they received their gifts from the Holy Spirit, and from spending their lives in contemplation of Jesus.

From Whom Did the Desert Fathers Get Contemplative Prayer?

The question is: **Where did the Desert Fathers get their idea of fleeing to the desert to contemplate Jesus in solitude?** There must have been some historical example that they looked back to. The historian Helen Waddell believed that the Desert Fathers were influenced by the examples of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, the Essenes, John the Baptist in the desert, and Jesus in the desert.¹ There is nothing of Neoplatonism here whatsoever. When one reads the Bible, it appears that the Biblical prophets “prayed” in the desert wilderness. But still

¹ Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998), pp. xxv-xxvi.

the question remains: **Where does the Christian teaching on contemplative prayer come from?** Truth be told, there is not very much evidence in the Bible for contemplative prayer. But I believe there is enough: “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Ps. 46:10)—the Old Testament prophets would have been acquainted with this verse. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee*” (Isa. 26:3, KJV). And David again, “*For God alone my soul waits in silence*” (Ps. 62:1, RSV). All of these Scriptures would have been known to the Old Testament prophets as well as to the Essenes, John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostolic fathers, and the Desert Fathers. I believe the writer of Hebrews continues the contemplative tradition when he says, “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*” (Heb. 12:2).

We find traces of contemplative prayer in the Bible, but no systematic teaching about it. Why is that? I don’t know for sure, but my best guess is that the Bible was not compiled for ascetics, mystics, and the spiritual elite. It was compiled for “normal” people to be instructed in the ways of God. Contemplation is a practice that most people cannot, will not, and have no desire to aspire to. I think that is reason enough why there is no entire book or chapter in the Bible about contemplative prayer. The Judeo-Christian religion has primarily been preoccupied with faith in God and ethical obedience to His commandments in the daily stuff of life. The Bible is not a manual for mystics, but was partially written by some of

them—which is why we might find fleeting references to contemplative prayer within its pages.

**The Hindu Gurus:
Eastern Masters of Contemplation—Yet Pagans**

It has always been a fact that India is a land of contemplation. The whole Hindu belief system is based on the idea that contemplation is the path of liberation from reincarnation. While people from other religions have always practiced contemplation in one way or another, it is the Hindu ascetics that have always put the strongest emphasis on the practice. This is because they think it is how to be “saved.” For this reason, they have lengthy writings and teachings about contemplation. For example, in the famous Hindu scripture, *The Bhagavad Gita* (2nd century B.C.), the entire Chapter 6 is devoted to “The Yoga of Meditation.”

Also around the same time period, Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* came out, which was an entire Hindu book about practicing contemplation. With such a wealth of information compiled into written form by the second century B.C., we can know that the Hindu ascetics have always mastered the ways of conquering the body and ascending the heights of contemplation—through oral tradition, experience, and mentoring underneath Hindu gurus and saints. **But for orthodox Christians, these Hindu teachings on contemplation and meditation should be unacceptable because they are pagan.** Yet as you can assume, some people in church history—some semi-

orthodox and some heretical—have turned to the Hindus for advice about contemplative practice because of the apparent lack of contemplative literature in the church. Namely, the Christian Neoplatonists, various Gnostic heretics in church history, and the Centering Prayer movement.

The Indirect Influence of Plotinus on Some Christians

As we have already seen, Plotinus was the Greco-Roman mystic that borrowed from Hinduism. His teachings on contemplation were compiled into his book *The Enneads* (270) by Porphyry. This book was a “bestseller” of religious literature in the third century—coincidentally, not long after this book was completed, the Desert Fathers movement began. While there is no direct literary evidence that the Desert Fathers were influenced by *The Enneads*, it is probable that they were at least influenced by the “contemplative revival” that was spreading across Alexandria and the Roman Empire. Just like the hippie counterculture brought a revival of interest in meditation to America—albeit pagan and from India—Charismatics in the 1960s and 70s also started to rediscover Christian contemplation. This is how it was with the Desert Fathers. In the climate of Neoplatonism, the Desert Fathers rediscovered Judeo-Christian contemplation.

Plotinus did not have a direct influence on the Christian mystics, but we might say that he “influenced” the Desert Fathers in the same way that Maharishi Mahesh Yogi “influenced” the Charismatic movement. *It*

was an indirect influence. Both the third century and the 1960s saw spiritual movements towards mysticism and meditation, both Christian and pagan. Christian mystics have emerged out of both of these spiritual climates. Whenever the topic of contemplation is brought to people's awareness on a mass scale, each religion will find their own way to figure out how to practice it—and to some, that means borrowing advice from other religions like Hinduism.

Quoting From Pagan Philosophers: An Early Church Controversy

There was division among the early church fathers about whether or not it was appropriate to quote pagans in Christian theology books and sermons. Theologians like Tertullian protested, “*What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem!?*”² That is, what does Greek philosophy have to contribute to our understanding of the Bible—nothing! Tertullian went on to say that all of the Gnostic heretics borrowed their teachings from the Greek philosophers. On the contrary, theologians like Augustine argued that God has given light to some of the non-Christian philosophers, and so it is not always wrong to quote from them in order to make a theological point. Augustine said, “*If those who are called philosophers, particularly the Platonists, have said anything which is*

² Alister McGrath, ed. *The Christian Theology Reader*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 6.

true and consistent with our faith, we must not reject it, but claim it for our own use.”³ Augustine goes on to quote Acts 7:22 for proof: “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.”

How the Bible is Filled with Quotes of Pagans

I think that Augustine’s position is more Biblical. It is true that Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians before he became a Hebrew prophet. The ancient Greek historian Strabo goes so far to say that Moses was actually a pagan priest in Egypt before he was called to be God’s prophet: “An Egyptian priest named Moses, who possessed a portion of the country called the Lower Egypt, being dissatisfied with the established institutions there, left it and came to Judaea with a large body of people who worshipped the Divinity.”⁴ The whole Bible is filled with quotations from non-Jewish and non-Christian people; and this in no way defiles the Scripture. For evidence of this in the Old Testament, see *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (1969) edited by J. B. Pritchard. For evidence of the pagans quoted in the New Testament, see the *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (1995) edited by M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe.

³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴ Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, 3 vols., trans. H. C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (London: George Bell and Sons, 1906), p. 177; XVI:35.

There is more than enough evidence to prove that both the Old and New Testament Scriptures are filled with quotes from non-Jewish and non-Christian people (that is, pagans). To provide a famous sampling of this, Paul quoted the pagan Greek prophet Epimenides: “‘For in Him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are His offspring’” (Acts 17:28). Might I also bring to our attention that A. W. Tozer’s *The Pursuit of God* (1948) quotes Lao-tze one time, who was a pagan. So, Augustine’s position is much more in agreement with the prophets and the apostles of the Bible when he says, “If those who are called philosophers, particularly the Platonists, have said anything which is true and consistent with our faith, we must not reject it, but claim it for our own use.”

Turning to Pagans to Expound on Scriptural Topics: A Controversial Practice

This approach to theology—that of borrowing from pagan philosophers when necessary—is obviously a controversial thing and a great stumbling-block to conservative Christians. But this approach isn’t any more “liberal” than the writers of the Bible chose to be, for even the apostle Paul quoted from the pagan Epimenides. But the main point to make here is this: **it is only lawful and theologically orthodox to quote from pagan philosophers so long as that quotation does not contradict the Bible.** Just as any responsible Christian should not uncritically believe in a dream or a vision, but he tests it in

light of Scripture—so also should one test the words of pagan philosophers in light of Scripture (Isa. 8:20). But why turn to pagan philosophers at all? There are two reasons why a Christian might want to do this: (1) To establish common ground with the pagans who you are trying to evangelize. (2) To illuminate a topic that is found in Scripture, but which is more thoroughly explained by a pagan philosopher.

Why Plotinus' Insights into Contemplation Were Gleaned By Christians

This second reason is why some of the Christian mystics have turned to Plotinus' *The Enneads* for insight into the practice of contemplation—namely St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. It was not because they were in some way syncretistic New Agers or Neoplatonists themselves, but because they saw in the teachings of Plotinus things that were agreeable to Scripture and orthodox Christianity. **They didn't think of themselves as "borrowing" the practice of contemplative prayer from Neoplatonism; rather, they only chose to glean some advice about contemplation from Plotinus—without any contradiction to the Bible.** Besides, Christian contemplation was being practiced long before they started quoting from Plotinus. Because Scripture has but only fleeting references to contemplation, and no in-depth teaching, Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius thought of themselves as merely looking to Plotinus as an illuminated philosopher who could shine more light on the

topic. However, they did *not* believe in his teachings about the One, reincarnation, and salvation through contemplation. They remained orthodox in their beliefs. They merely “ate the meat and spit out the bones.” **They did not consider themselves as borrowing from an exclusively pagan practice, but as gleaning additional insight into a practice that was already shared by both Scriptural Christians and the pagan Neoplatonists.**

Christian Mysticism is Not a Christianized Form of Neoplatonism

Plotinus did not really influence Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and the history of Christian mysticism as much as liberals have made him out to. I think that New Agers like Evelyn Underhill, W. R. Inge, and other liberal scholars of Christian mysticism have really blown the whole “Neoplatonism” thing way out of proportion. Without ever really demonstrating the “pagan teachings” and so-called “religious borrowing” of the Christian mystics from Plotinus—they just make uninformed and misleading statements about Christian mysticism being a Christianized form of Neoplatonism. That is simply not true at all. However, it continues to be one of the most popular assumptions made about Christian mysticism. Sad too, because Christian mysticism holds the answers to the meaning of life—through direct experience of God. All people have to do is research the claim for themselves. But whenever the average Evangelical hears, “*You know, the Christian mystics borrowed contempla-*

tive prayer from the Neoplatonists”—it appears that’s good enough for him, and he replies, “Oh really? Yeah, it figures.” And he never researches to see whether these things are so; he just blindly accepts the statement. This prevents him from practicing contemplative prayer, and largely inhibits him from experiencing visions and voices from God. How tragic!

Traces of Plotinus in Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius

Surprisingly, most of what Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius gleaned from Plotinus’ thought did not even have to do with the practice of contemplation! Would you believe that? The funny thing is, mostly they referred to some of his insights on the human soul. They did not heavily quote or refer to Plotinus! There are only seven references made to him in Augustine’s enormous book *The City of God* (426). Augustine was *not* heavily influenced by Plotinus or Neoplatonism, but because Neoplatonism was a religious force to be reckoned with in his day, and because Augustine was a prolific Christian writer, it was natural for him to make some references to their belief system.

Among some of the things Augustine agreed with Plotinus about were: (1) God has blessed men with mortal bodies so that they should not be forever confined to the miseries of earthly life (Bk. 9, Ch. 10); (2) What Plotinus and Porphyry thought purifying principles were intellect, soul, and mind—we Christians consider the purifying principles to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Bk. 10,

Ch. 23); (3) The beauty of nature, flowers, and plants proves that a Beautiful God is in control of all things (Bk. 10, Ch. 14); (4) The closer we are to God, the more like God we become (Bk. 9, Ch. 17); he starts to get more contemplative with: (5) Just as the moon is enlightened by the sun, so also is man enlightened by God when he contemplates Him (Bk. 10, Ch. 2); (6) He who has all worldly goods, but no vision of God, is supremely miserable (Bk. 10, Ch. 16); and finally, Augustine renounces the polytheism of Plotinus and his Neoplatonist friends: (7) Plotinus was right on point when he spoke of arguing for God's existence by observing the natural world, but he was wrong in that he believed in sacrificing to many gods (Bk. 8, Ch. 12).

Augustine gets the most contemplative in his *The Magnitude of the Soul* (388), in which he refers to Plotinus' ideas for illumination. He charts out the seven stages of spiritual growth in the contemplative life, which Augustine referred to as the "ascent of the soul": (1) The soul contemplates the body to sustain it. (2) The soul enables the body to sense physical things. (3) Contemplation is aimed at through discursive meditation. (4) Contemplation of moral virtues precedes divine contemplation. (5) Contemplation of truth precedes divine contemplation. (6) Contemplation of God is one pure thought. (7) To be *lost* in the contemplation of God, is the one thought of all pure truth.

Scholars of Pseudo-Dionysius are quick to point out how "obviously" his books are filled with Neoplatonic concepts. Yet, the only time you will find the word "Plot-

inus” in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius is in the editorial footnotes made by scholars and commentators. He never even uses the name Plotinus in any of his works! There are no quotations of any Neoplatonic writers in his works that I know of. Even so, the closest that Pseudo-Dionysius comes to borrowing a thought from Plotinus seems to be in Chapter 13 of *The Divine Names* (500), when he discusses the name of God as the One God—being a perfect representation of unity in the Trinity. This can easily be seen as a parallel in Plotinus, but even so, there is no direct evidence in the book that Pseudo-Dionysius was even thinking of Plotinus when he meditated about this thought. Regardless, the thought was not about contemplation, but about one of God’s names in relation to His oneness. And even if it is a thought that was influenced by Plotinus, it is completely **harmless**, and in complete agreement with the Biblical teaching on the Trinity.

The Desert Fathers and Neoplatonism: The Final Word

I’ve made a lot of references to the Desert Fathers in this chapter. The reason for this is because they were the people that founded the Christian mystical tradition. While it is true that Jesus, the apostles, and the apostolic fathers probably practiced contemplation—it was the Desert Fathers in the third century that really left behind a legacy of teaching and example on how to be a Christian mystic. The whole life of Christian mysticism is founded

on the example of the Desert Fathers. Their reputation must be upheld as noble and holy and orthodox—for if it is not, then the whole foundation upon which Christian mysticism stands would be destroyed. When people like Evelyn Underhill and W. R. Inge make misleading claims about Christian mysticism being founded on Neoplatonism, it leads individuals to make one of two conclusions: (1) Christian mysticism is pagan, but I will still practice it because I'm a New Ager. (2) Christian mysticism is pagan, so I will resist it because I'm an Evangelical.

But, as my research demonstrates, I hope that you would reach the third and true conclusion: (3) **Christian mysticism is *not* pagan, but is the purest and noblest form of orthodox Christianity, and it would do my soul well to contemplate Jesus on a regular basis—for if I do, I may attain the vision of God!** Finally, let me end this by noting that St. Antony, the “father” of the Desert Fathers, once got into an argument with some Neoplatonists. They mocked him for believing that God became a human in the form of Jesus. St. Antony responded by saying that nothing is impossible for God, but that it *is* rather absurd to believe in reincarnation like they did (Athanasius, *The Life of Antony* (362), Ch. 74). The Desert Fathers were orthodox Christian mystics in every sense of the word. They did not fall into the New Age errors of Plotinus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and the Gnostics. And even though Augustine borrowed from Plotinus' thought, he was careful to only refer to things agreeable with Scripture. These Christian mystics were

not New Agers, but believed in fixing their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of their faith (Heb. 12:2).

A FINAL WORD

Now that we have come nearly to the end of the book, I want to recap on some of the things I have been talking about. No matter how far we plunge into the secrets of the kingdom of God, the history and practice of Christian mysticism, and the enjoyment of spiritual experiences—we must always bear in mind that **Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life, and that no one comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6).** This is the Evangelical conviction that we must adhere to as Christian mystics in the last days. There are many so-called “Christian mystics” out there today that are really New Agers and believe that all religions lead to God. They practice things like Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen, but the Bible calls these “detestable practices” (Deut. 18:9-13).

As Evangelical mystics, we will follow the lead of the Desert Fathers, the Catholic saints (that did not adore Mary), St. Teresa of Avila, Madame Guyon, and other Christian mystics in church history that have taught on contemplative prayer or soaking prayer. We need not be seduced by New Age practices in order to try to experience God. Let us also not fall into the same error that many of the Catholic mystics did when they visualized Mary in their meditations. Let us visualize and experience God alone: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will resist the notion of contacting New Age “spirit guides,” and be content with contacting God alone and to feel after *His* presence.

Jesus referred to the one true Guide, **the Holy Spirit**: “When He, the **Spirit** of Truth, comes, He will **guide** you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13). The purpose of this relationship with the Holy Spirit through worship, meditation, and contemplation is to deepen our love and fear of the Lord. Come to the quiet, to the stillness, to the place of solitude where God’s Spirit is waiting for you to listen to His voice. Close your eyes. Concentrate on God for a while. Visualize Jesus. **Hebrews 12:2 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”** There are glorious spiritual experiences that are lying just ahead of you. But let us always remember to exalt Biblical revelation over our own private rhemas, to test all things with spiritual discernment (1 Thess. 5:21), and to distinguish divine experiences from their demonic counterfeits.

FURTHER READING

After having read this guide book on how to experience God and discern the spiritual counterfeits, you may be hungry to learn more about things that I have only touched on. The following is a list of books on topics for further research into contemplation, spiritual experiences, miracles, supernatural church history, and spiritual discernment.

Worship

Basden, Paul, ed. *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. This compares Charismatic worship with other kinds of worship.

Sorge, Bob. *Exploring Worship*. Lee's Summit, MO: Oasis House, 1987. Provides a thorough discussion of Charismatic worship.

Meditation

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. New York: HarperCollins, 1978. Chapter 2. This has had a widespread influence on Evangelical and Charismatic Christians. It shows the Biblical and historical basis for meditation, contemplation, and spiritual experiences. However, it contains quotes from New Age Christians.

———. *Prayer*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Chapter 13. A more thorough look at discursive meditation than in *Celebration of Discipline*. However, it contains quotes from New Age Christians.

St. Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Translated by George Ganss. St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992. Contains Biblical visualizations of the life of Christ as well as other imaginary meditations intended to bring the meditator into the infused contemplation of God. However, it also contains visualizations of the Virgin Mary.

Contemplation

In my opinion, these are “the cream of the crop”; for a list of more contemplative books, see the Introduction.

Anonymous. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Translated by Bernard Bangley. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006. An easy-to-read modern English translation.

Baker, Augustine. *Holy Wisdom; or Directions for the Prayer of Contemplation*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004. A very comprehensive Catholic work on the art of contemplation that has stood the test of time.

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. New York: HarperCollins, 1978. Chapter 2. This has had a widespread influence on Evangelical and Charismatic Christians. It shows the Biblical and historical basis for meditation, contemplation, and spiritual experiences. However, it contains quotes from New Age Christians.

———. *Prayer*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. Chapter 14. A more thorough look at contemplation than in *Celebration of Discipline*. However, it contains quotes from New Age Christians.

Guyon, Madame Jeanne. *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. Translated by Gene Edwards. Sargent, GA: SeedSowers, 1975. Although written by the so-called “apostle of the Quietists,” the book still advocates active concentration on God. Still at other times it seems to encourage extreme mental passivity. Read with sensitivity about these things. Although condemned by the Catholic Church, the book was endorsed by the early Quakers, John Wesley, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Hudson Taylor, and Watchman Nee.

Hilton, Walter. *The Scale of Perfection*. Translated by John Clark and Rosemary Dorward. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991.

Molinos, (Michael) Miguel de. *The Spiritual Guide*. Sargent, GA: Christian Books, 1982. A Quietist book on meditation and contemplation in modern English.

———. *Miguel de Molinos: The Spiritual Guide*. Edited and Translated by Robert Baird. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2010. An academic translation complete with scholarly commentary.

Payne, Leanne. *Listening Prayer: Learning to Hear God's Voice and Keep a Prayer Journal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Hamewith Books, 1994. A seasoned prophetess teaches on hearing God's voice during contemplation.

St. Teresa of Avila. *The Way of Perfection*. Translated by Henry Carrigan. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009. One of St. Teresa's most practical, easy-to-understand works. It is a manual for holiness, meditation, and contemplation. This is a modern easy-to-read English version. Arguably the best book on Christian meditation and contemplation ever written in the history of the Church.

Virkler, Mark and Patti. *How to Hear God's Voice*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005. Previously titled *Communion with God*, this book has had a profound influence on many Charismatic

Christians since it was first published. It is thorough, practical, and spiritual. It is a practical manual of contemplation that opens up the human spirit to receive supernatural communications from God. It has had a strong influence on James Goll, the prolific writer of the modern prophetic movement.

Spiritual Experiences

Arintero, John. *The Mystical Evolution in the Development and Vitality of the Church*. Translated by Jordan Aumann. Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1979. A comprehensive work of Catholic mystical theology that directly followed Garrigou-Lagrange's *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. Do not be misled by the title of the book; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the New Age teaching of "spiritual evolution." It is simply about spiritual growth.

Aumann, Jordan. *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1985. The history of Roman Catholic mysticism.

———. *Spiritual Theology*. London: Continuum, 2006. A modern work of Catholic mystical theology, considered by some to be the best since Vatican II.

Aune, David E. *Prophecy in Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. A scholarly book that takes an in-depth look at prophets and prophetic experience in the early centuries of church history.

Basham, Don. *A Handbook on Tongues, Interpretation, and Prophecy*. Springdale, PA: Whitaker Books, 1971.

———. *Spiritual Power*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1985. Explains the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and how to receive it with speaking in tongues.

Benedict XIV, Pope. *Heroic Virtue: A Portion of the Treatise of Benedict XIV on the Beatification and Canonization of the Servants of God*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009. This is a time-tested classic of mystical theology in the Catholic Church written in 1757. It deals with the high standards of Christian perfection and miraculous phenomena that are needed to accompany the lives of those individuals in church history who are considered “saints” in the Catholic Church. As an Evangelical Christian, I cannot agree with the “sainting” of Christians, because I believe all of us are saints. But this is still a helpful guidebook for understanding the marks of a true prophet, minus some of the Catholic theological distinctives.

Bennett, Dennis and Rita. *The Holy Spirit and You*. Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1994. An authoritative work on the gifts of the Spirit by some of the primary leaders of the Charismatic movement.

Bickle, Mike. *Growing in the Prophetic*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008. The magnum opus on the prophetic ministry by the pastor of the International House of Prayer, former pastor of the Kansas City prophets, and leader of the prophetic movement.

Bouyer, Louis, Francois Vandenbroucke, and Jean Leclercq. *A History of Christian Spirituality*. 3 vols. New York: Seabury, 1982.

Burgess, Stanley. *The Holy Spirit*. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984-1997. The history of pneumatology or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

——— and Eduard van der Maas. *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Campbell, Stacey. *Ecstatic Prophecy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008. Explains the history, nature, and personal development of ecstatic prophecy.

Carter, Howard. *Spiritual Gifts and Their Operation*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1968. A classical Pentecostal work on the gifts of the Spirit.

———. *Questions & Answers on Spiritual Gifts*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1991.

Clement, Kim. *Call Me Crazy, But I'm Hearing God: Secrets to Hearing the Voice of God*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. An internationally recognized prophet shares his insights into hearing God's voice.

———. *Secrets of the Prophetic*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005. How to hear God's voice with clarity and assurance.

Conner, Bobby. *God's Supernatural Power*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. A book on increasing the prophetic and healing anointings in your life, and informing us on the authority of the believer.

Cooke, Graham. *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003. Deals with discernment, character formation, and how to apply the prophetic ministry in a church setting.

Cramer, Dennis. *You Can All Prophecy*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Arrow Publications, 2003. Written by a highly gifted and experienced prophet. This book is a manual on receiving and delivering revelations in the appropriate way.

Crowder, John. *Miracle Workers, Reformers, and the New Mystics*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006. Readings on various mystics and miracle workers—kind of like a modern-day *Golden Legend*.

———. *The Ecstasy of Loving God: Trances, Raptures, and the Supernatural Pleasures of Jesus Christ*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009. The first work from the prophetic movement that borrows from Augustin Poulain, Herbert Thurston, and other Catholic mystical theologians.

Cruz, Joan Carroll. *Mysteries, Marvels, Miracles: In the Lives of the Saints*. Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1997. An awesome catalog of supernatural phenomena among the mystical saints of church history.

Deere, Jack. *The Beginner's Guide to the Gift of Prophecy*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008. Written by a scholarly Evangelical theologian and supporter of the prophetic movement. Deals with spiritual ex-

periences, rules for discernment, and applying the prophetic gift to ministry in the local church.

———. *Surprised by the Voice of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. A groundbreaking theological treatise on the varieties of divine revelation. Heavily Bible-based and church history-based.

Devine, Arthur. *A Manual of Mystical Theology*. London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1903. One of the great systematic works of Catholic mystical theology. Has very much to say about meditation, contemplation, and spiritual experiences.

De Voragine, Jacobus. *The Golden Legend*. 2 vols. Translated by William Ryan. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993. A collection of supernatural biographies of certain Christian mystics and saints. An important source for the history of the prophetic and miracles. Was heavily criticized by church historians as fraudulent, because several of the stories are very bizarre. Was popular in the Middle Ages until the Protestant Reformation. Read with caution; some stories worship Mary and the saints.

Doles, Jeff. *Miracles & Manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the History of the Church*. Seffner, FL: Walking Barefoot Ministries, 2008. Very com-

prehensive documentation of miracles from the lives of the saints throughout church history.

Dubay, Thomas. *Fire Within*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989. A modern work of mystical theology based solely on the works of Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

Farges, Albert. *Mystical Phenomena Compared with Their Human and Diabolical Counterfeits*. Translated by S. P. Jacques. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003. Contains an impressive catalog of spiritual experiences and distinguishes the divine from the demonic and soulish; has a section on discerning hallucinations.

Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*. 2 vols. Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2009. An extremely comprehensive systematic modern work of Catholic mystical theology. Highly recommended!

Gee, Donald. *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1972. One of the classical Pentecostal works on the gifts of the Spirit.

Ghezzi, Bert. *Mystics & Miracles*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2002. Outstanding supernatural stories about the saints of church history.

Goll, James (Jim) and Michal Ann Goll. *Dream Language: The Prophetic Power of Dreams*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006. Examines the revelatory potential of dreams. Deals with discernment and dream interpretation.

———. *Encounters with a Supernatural God*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1998. Personal testimonies of dreams and visions of God and His angels.

———. ***God Encounters*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005. A “prophetic primer” of sorts. A to-the-point manual on how to experience God, a catalog of spiritual experiences, and rules to judge them by.**

———. *The Beginner’s Guide to Hearing God*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008. Contains rules for the discernment of spirits, a catalog of spiritual experiences, and a call to prayer.

———. *The Beginner’s Guide to Signs, Wonders, and the Supernatural Life*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2010. Discusses faith, personal holiness, dreams, voices, and divine healing.

———. ***The Seer: The Prophetic Power of Visions, Dreams, and Open Heavens*. Shippensburg, PA:**

Destiny Image, 2004. Discusses dreams, visions, and cultivating the gifts of spiritual vision.

Goll, James (Jim) and Julia Loren. *Shifting Shadows of Supernatural Experiences*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. Discusses dreams, visions, out-of-body experiences, psychic counterfeits, and the need to discern.

Graybeal, Lynda, and Julia Roller. *Connecting with God*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006. Discusses dreams, visions, and contemplation in church history. Written by members of Richard Foster's Renovaré team.

Groeschel, Benedict. *A Still, Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993. A great modern Catholic work on spiritual experiences and discernment rules.

Grudem, Wayne. *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000. Like Jack Deere, Grudem is an able theologian and avid supporter of the modern day exercise of the gift of prophecy.

———. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. Contains sections on prophecy and spiritual gifts.

Guibert, Joseph de. *The Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1953. A Catholic mystical theology that discusses holiness, spiritual gifts, discernment of spirits, meditation, levels of spiritual growth, and infused contemplation.

Guyon, Madame Jeanne. *The Unabridged Collected Works of Jeanne Guyon*. Translated and Edited by Glenn James Kahley. Kahley House Publishing, 2006.

Hamon, Bill. *Prophets and Personal Prophecy*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1987. A classical Pentecostal manual on the prophetic ministry. The first in a three part series.

———. *Prophets and the Prophetic Movement*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1990. Looks at Charismatic movements and the nature of the prophetic ministry. The second in a three part series.

———. *Prophets, Pitfalls and Principals*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1991. How to discern prophecy from false prophecy and avoid common prophetic mistakes. The third in a three part series.

Hamon, Jane. *Dreams and Visions: Understanding Your Dreams and How God Can Use Them to Speak to*

You Today. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000. Discusses prophetic symbolism, dream interpretation, and spiritual discernment.

Harrell, Jr., David Edwin. *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979.

Heidler, Robert. *Experiencing the Spirit*. Ventura, CA: Renew Books, 1998. An excellent manual on how to experience the fruit and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Written by an Evangelical theologian/Charismatic minister.

Herzog, David. *Mysteries of the Glory Unveiled*. Hagerstown, MD: McDougal Publishing, 2000. A manual on miracle working by a powerful miracle worker! Discusses modern miracles such as instant weight loss, gold fillings, gold dust, supernatural money, supernatural rain, angelic visitations, teleportation, and other unusual phenomena. Chapter 3 on “Creative Miracles” is an excellent discussion on the “how-to” side of working miracles in response to prophetic words. Highly recommended!

Holt, Bradley. *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg For-

tress, 2005. The history of Christian mysticism, spirituality, and modern Evangelical spiritualities.

Horton, Harold. *The Gifts of the Spirit*. Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1975. The classical Pentecostal work on the gifts of the Spirit that seems to have stood the test of time more than any other book on the topic.

Howard-Browne, Rodney. *Flowing in the Holy Spirit: A Practical Handbook on the Gifts of the Spirit*. Shipensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2000. A great work on the gifts of the Spirit by the leading revivalist of holy laughter.

Hyatt, Eddie. *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002. A brief history of Charismatic movements throughout church history, however unfavorable towards Christian mysticism.

Jackson, Bill. *The Quest for the Radical Middle: A History of the Vineyard*. Cape Town, South Africa: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999. Contains a history of the Vineyard movement and the prophetic movement that branched off of it.

Jackson, John Paul. *Basics of Dreams, Visions, and Strange Events*. 2 CD Set. Colleyville, TX: Streams Ministries International, 2004. Along

with Herman Riffel, Ira Milligan, and James Goll—John Paul Jackson has shown himself to be one of the most seasoned, insightful, and experienced Christian dream interpreters.

———. *Developing Your Prophetic Gift*. 4 CD Set. Colleyville, TX: Streams Ministries International, 2003.

———. *The Biblical Model of Dream Interpretation: Avoiding the Pitfalls of Soulful Methodology*. 3 CD Set. Colleyville, TX: Streams Ministries International, 2006.

———. *Understanding Dreams & Visions*. 6 CD Set. Colleyville, TX: Streams Ministries International, 2003.

Jacobs, Cindy. *The Voice of God: How God Speaks Personally and Corporately to His People Today*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004. Discusses the prophetic ministry in the church setting, prophetic experiences, spiritual discernment through God's presence, and holy prophetic character.

Joyner, Rick. *The Prophetic Ministry*. Fort Mill, SC: MorningStar Publications, 2006. Discusses dreams, visions, dream interpretation, and prophetic ministry in a church setting.

King, Patricia. *Spiritual Revolution: Experience the Supernatural in Your Life*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006. Discusses spiritual experiences and visualization.

Lacy, John. *The General Delusion of Christians, Touching the Ways of God's Revealing Himself to and by the Prophets*. London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1832. Written by the leader of the 17th century French prophets. Discusses dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and signs; charts the history of the gift of prophecy from the early church until the 4th century; defends Montanism as an orthodox prophetic movement.

Lawson, James Gilchrist. *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*. Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1911. Chronicles stories of people experiencing the gift of divine love and the progressive holiness of the heart.

Loren, Julia, Bill Johnson, and Mahesh Chavda. *Shifting Shadows of Supernatural Power*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2006. The history of the modern prophetic movement. Discusses psychic counterfeits.

Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's

Seminary Press, 1976. A great modern work of Eastern Orthodox mystical theology.

Louismet, Savinien. *The Mystical Knowledge of God: An Essay in the Art of Knowing and Loving the Divine Majesty*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1997. In this Catholic mystical book, Louismet discusses the nature of private revelation, contemplation, and mystical meditation on the Lord's Prayer.

McGinn, Bernard. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. 4 vols. New York: Crossroad, 1991-2005. The definitive history of Christian mysticism. Very scholarly and academic.

———, John Meyendorff, Jean Leclercq, Jill Raitt, Louis Dupré, and Don Saliers, eds. *Christian Spirituality*. 3 vols. New York: Crossroad, 1987-1989. The history and principles of Christian mysticism and other Christian spiritualities. Very scholarly.

Milligan, Ira. *Understanding the Dreams You Dream*. Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 1997. A practical Bible-based handbook for interpreting dream symbols.

Molinos, Michael, and Francois Fenelon. *The Unabridged Collected Works of Michael Molinos and Francois Fenelon*. Translated and Edited by Glenn James Kahley. Kahley House Publishing, 2006.

Novakshonoff, Varlaam. *God's Fools: The Lives of the Holy "Fools for Christ."* Dewdney, Canada: Synaxis Press, 1997. A short history of the prophetic from the lives of the saints. An Eastern Orthodox writer.

Oates, Gary. *Open My Eyes, Lord: A Practical Guide to Angelic Visitations and Heavenly Experiences.* Dallas, GA: Open Heaven Publications, 2004. Testimony of entering into the realm of open visions and apparitions of angels.

Pierce, Chuck, and Rebecca Sytsema. *When God Speaks.* Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005. A catalog of spiritual experiences with rules for the discernment of spirits.

Poulain, Augustin. *The Graces of Interior Prayer.* Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1996. The most famous and authoritative work of Catholic mystical theology. Very systematic and comprehensive. Spiritual experiences and discernment rules are thoroughly discussed. Very highly recommended!

Price, Paula. *The Prophet's Dictionary: The Ultimate Guide to Supernatural Wisdom.* New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2006. For so long the New Agers and occultists have had their occult dictionar-

ies. Finally, Christian prophets have accessible in this volume a prophetic dictionary! Terms and articles on supernatural topics from Alpha to Omega!

———. *The Prophet's Handbook: A Guide to Prophecy and Its Operation*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2008. Discusses the history of the prophetic and guidelines for the prophetic ministry in a church setting.

Prince, Derek. *The Gifts of the Spirit*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2007. A good work on the gifts of the Spirit by a leading teacher from the Charismatic movement.

Pytches, David. *Spiritual Gifts in the Local Church: How to Integrate Them into the Ministry of the People of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 1987.

———. *Some Said It Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1991.

Rahner, Karl. *Visions and Prophecies*. London: Burns & Oates, 1965. While trying to discern almost to the point of skepticism, this is nevertheless valuable for its historical information on major visions in church history. This, of course, means that there are both visions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary included.

Randolph, Larry. *User Friendly Prophecy*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1998. A thorough prophetic ministry manual written with sensitivity to the fruit of the Spirit. Highly recommended.

———. *Spirit Talk: Hearing the Voice of God*. Fort Mill, SC: MorningStar Publications, 2005. A very thorough catalog of spiritual experiences. Highly recommended.

Riffel, Herman. *Dream Interpretation: A Biblical Understanding*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1993. One of the best Christian books on dream interpretation ever written.

Ryle, James. *Hippo in the Garden: A Non Religious Approach to Having a Conversation with God*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1993. Discusses hearing from God through dreams and visions.

———. *A Dream Come True: A Biblical Look at How God Speaks Through Dreams and Visions*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1995.

Sandford, John and Paula. *The Elijah Task: A Call to Today's Prophets and Intercessors*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006. Discusses the calling and training of prophets, dreams and visions, and the prophetic ministry.

Sandford, R. Loren. *Understanding Prophetic People: Blessings and Problems with the Prophetic Gift*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2007. Discusses the character of a prophet, prophetic ministry in the church, meditation, prophetic experiences, and the dark night of the soul.

———. *Purifying the Prophetic: Breaking Free From the Spirit of Self-Fulfillment*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2005. A rare book that challenges the Third Wave prophetic movement to abandon the prosperity gospel. Discusses that it is needful for prophets to also have personal holiness.

Saudreau, Auguste. *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life*. Translated by Dom Bede Camm. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009. A famous Catholic mystical theology from the early 20th century that covers the progress of holiness, methods of meditation, contemplation, spiritual experiences, and rules for the discernment of spirits.

Scaramelli, G. B. *A Handbook of Mystical Theology*. Translated by D. H. S. Nicholson. Berwick, ME: Ibis Press, 2005. Chapters 3 and 4; Before Poulain, there was Scaramelli. Deals with meditation, contemplation, spiritual experiences, visions and voices, purification, and discernment.

Sheldrake, Philip. *A Brief History of Spirituality*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. A brief history of Christian mysticism and Evangelical spiritualities.

Shultz, Steve. *Can't You Talk Louder, God?: Secrets to Hearing the Voice of God*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. A manual for prophetic experiences by the founder of ElijahList.com, the popular prophetic newsletter.

Spidlik, Tomas. *The Spirituality of the Christian East*. 2 vols. Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1986, 2005. A scholarly work on Eastern Orthodox mysticism.

St. John of the Cross. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. Translated by Henry Carrigan. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2002. Fountainhead # 1 from which springs all Catholic mystical theology. A modern English translation. Deals with spiritual experiences and discernment.

———. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991. The most scholarly collection of the works of St. John of the Cross.

St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. *The Philokalia*. 4 vols. Translated and ed-

ited by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware. London: Faber and Faber, 1995. An 18th century collection of Eastern Orthodox hesychastic writings.

Storms, Sam. *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002. A good work on the gifts of the Spirit by a Third Wave theologian.

St. Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2008. Fountainhead # 2 from which springs all Catholic mystical theology. A modern English translation. Deals with spiritual experiences and discernment.

———. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*. 3 vols. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976-1985. The most scholarly collection of the works of St. Teresa of Avila.

Sullivant, Michael. *Prophetic Etiquette: Your Complete Handbook on Giving and Receiving Prophecy*. Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000. Discusses revelatory experiences, discernment, and prophetic ministry in a church setting.

Summers, Montague. *Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003. Cata-

logs miracles and supernatural phenomena—both Christian and occultic.

Synan, Vinson. *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. The definitive history of the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements.

———, ed. *Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001.

Tanqueray, Adolphe. *The Spiritual Life*. Translated by Herman Branderis. Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000. First there was Scaramelli, then there was Poulain, and then there was Tanqueray.

Thompson, Steve. *You May All Prophesy*. Fort Mill, SC: MorningStar Publications, 2007. A short to-the-point work on the prophetic ministry. Deals with spiritual experiences and how to use them for the local church.

Thurston, Herbert. *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*. Edited by J. H. Crehan. London: Burns and Oates, 1952. A catalog of physical supernatural experiences, such as supernatural smells, levitation, healing miracles, etc. A Catholic author.

Vallotton, Kris. *Basic Training for the Prophetic Ministry*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. A thorough manual for the prophetic ministry. Deals with spiritual experiences and prophetic evangelism.

———. *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007.

Welton, Jonathan. *The School of the Seers: A Practical Guide on How to See in the Unseen Realm*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2009. A manual that focuses on “prophetic activation” and cultivating visionary revelation.

Wigglesworth, Smith. *Smith Wigglesworth on Spiritual Gifts*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1998. A good collection of Wigglesworth’s teaching on the gifts of the Spirit.

Wyatt, Ryan. *School of the Supernatural: Becoming a Habitation of God*. 9 CD Set. Knoxville, TN: Abiding Glory Ministries, 2009. Over 15 hours of in-depth teaching on prophetic development! Discusses spiritual experiences, contemplation (soaking), prophetic exercises, and spiritual warfare. A study manual is also available.

The Psychology of Spiritual Experiences

The following books are predominantly from a secular New Age perspective, but are helpful because they scientifically examine spiritual experiences in light of brain activity. This can be helpful to study with regards to “fine tuning” our contemplative disciplines.

Beauregard, Mario, and Denyse O’Leary. *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist’s Case for the Existence of the Soul*. New York: HarperOne, 2007. A pro-supernatural study of the contemplative brain states of Carmelite nuns.

D’Aquili, Eugene, and Andrew Newberg. *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999. Although written from a New Age perspective, it is very thorough in its analysis of what goes on in the brain during spiritual experiences.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Mentor Books, 1958. The pioneering work of the psychology of religion, this proto-New Age book is still valuable today for understanding the groundwork of what it means to be a “mystic,” whether Christian or pagan. Can be helpful for discerning the counterfeit.

Newberg, Andrew, and Mark Waldman. *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2009. A thorough and updated work on the physiology of spiritual experiences.

Tart, Charles. *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1969. Although a New Age book, it takes a scientific look at the brain states of mystics in ecstasies. This can help the reader understand the important connection between mental relaxation and spiritual revelation.

Healing Prayer

Healing prayer is directed towards physical sicknesses brought about by natural causes. It can come in several forms, but usually involves the laying on of hands, and a “word of command” for the sickness to leave in Jesus’ Name.

Ahn, Che. *How to Pray for Healing*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2004. Teaching on healing prayer by one of today’s most recognized apostolic leaders.

Bosworth, F. F. *Christ the Healer*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008. A classic Pentecostal work on divine healing. Written by one of the influential figures of the Zion City healing revival.

Chavda, Mahesh. *The Hidden Power of Healing Prayer*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2005. Written by a renowned modern day prophet, healer, and miracle worker.

Clark, Randy. *Words of Knowledge*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Global Awakening, 2001. In contrast with healing prayer, a superior method of healing is what I call “prophetic healing,” which is based on receiving and giving words of knowledge about healing. This book is all about prophetic healing or “word of knowledge healing.” Discusses seven ways to receive words of knowledge about healing: sympathetic pains, open visions, mental images, mental voices, accidentally praying or saying a word of knowledge, dreams, and bizarre events. Clark admits that 95% of the healing words he receives are through sympathetic pains in his body.

Dedmon, Kevin. *The Ultimate Treasure Hunt*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2007. A one of a kind handbook for how to receive words of knowledge before going out into street evangelism, finding individuals geographically through prophetic revelation, praying for their sicknesses, and preaching the Gospel to them once they are found!

Gordon, A. J. *The Ministry of Healing: Miracles of Cure in All Ages*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007. Charts the history of the gift of healing from the early church until the 19th century; occult healing counterfeits opposed; Cessationism opposed; various topics touched on; excellent source. Written by a leader of the Faith Cure movement.

Healing Rooms Ministries. *How to Minister to Specific Diseases*. Spokane, WA: Healing Rooms Ministries, 2005. Dealing with the spiritual root causes of physical sicknesses, this is one of the most popular publications of the International Association of Healing Rooms.

Hunter, Charles and Frances. *How to Heal the Sick*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2000. A practical how-to manual on the various methods of healing the sick—from the laying on of hands, listening to God’s voice, and declaring in faith that which God says by revelation; various other methods are explained concisely. I highly recommend this one!

———. *Handbook for Healing*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2001. A companion volume for *How to Heal the Sick*.

Hunter, Joan. *Healing the Whole Man Handbook*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2006. A compre-

hensive handbook on divine healing by the daughter of Charles and Frances Hunter, powerful healing evangelists! Joan Hunter is also a powerful healer in her own right!

Kuhlman, Kathryn. *A Glimpse Into Glory*. Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1983. This powerful healing evangelist's teachings on divine healing are included, as well as other teachings.

Lake, John G. *John G. Lake on Healing*. Compiled by Roberts Liardon. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2009. Contains selections on healing from the complete collection; for those who want to cut right to the chase about what Lake taught about divine healing! Very good and practical.

MacNutt, Francis. *Healing*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1974. A scholarly work of healing theology written by one of the most influential healing ministers of the Catholic Charismatic renewal.

———. *The Power to Heal*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1977. The second work on divine healing by this leader of the Catholic Charismatic renewal.

———. *The Prayer That Heals*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1981. His third, most mature work on divine healing—very practical.

Murray, Andrew. *Divine Healing*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982. Written by a prolific Evangelical mystic in the 19th century. The book was endorsed by John G. Lake.

———. *Healing Secrets*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.

Osborn, T. L. *Healing the Sick*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1992. A thorough work on divine healing by one of the most powerful healers of the healing revival of the 1940s and 50s.

———. *One Hundred Divine Healing Facts*. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1983.

Pierce, Cal. *Healing in the Kingdom: How the Power of God and Your Faith Can Heal the Sick*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008. Written by the new founder of the International Association of Healing Rooms.

Simpson, A. B. *The Gospel of Healing*. Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 2008. Written by the founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance, this was one of the 19th century works on divine healing,

along with A. J. Gordon's *The Ministry of Healing* and Andrew Murray's *Divine Healing*.

Wigglesworth, Smith. *Smith Wigglesworth on Healing*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1999. Valuable insights on healing from one of the most powerful Pentecostal healers. However, I don't agree with his harsh methods of laying on of hands.

Wimber, John, and Kevin Springer. *Power Evangelism*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1986. One of the most influential Third Wave books on using divine healing as a means of evangelism.

———. *Power Healing*. New York: HarperCollins, 1987. A great work on healing theology. A modern Third Wave look at the operation of healing in relation to prayer, deliverance, and prophetic gifts.

Wright, Henry. *A More Excellent Way: Spiritual Roots of Disease, Pathways to Wholeness*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2009. In this unique book, largely based on private revelations, Wright reveals the spiritual roots of basically every kind of disease—physical sicknesses caused by disobedience to God, fear of man, self-hatred, and more.

Woodworth-Etter, Maria. *Maria Woodworth-Etter: The Complete Collection of Her Life Teachings*. Com-

piled by Roberts Liardon. Tulsa, OK: Albury Publishing, 2000. The healing ministry of this woman impacted John G. Lake and F. F. Bosworth!

Deliverance Ministry

Deliverance ministry is different than healing prayer in that it is not always about praying, but is still in the context of deliverance prayer (exorcism). A lot of the time, counseling is involved. Deliverance is about helping those oppressed by demons, using spiritual experiences to discover demonic entry points into people's bodies, casting the demons out of people by telling them to leave in Jesus' Name, and refilling the person with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. People who suffer from demons of fear, worry, and extreme cases like schizophrenia need to go through a long ongoing "deliverance process."

This can last for months or even a year. A group of deliverance ministers, and one leader, will pray and counsel the oppressed with regular "deliverance sessions" every week. Over a long, drawn out process, the person usually experiences a progressive deliverance from their mental or physical illness as demons are exposed and cast out one by one. Although there are different models for deliverance prayer, a good deliverance ministry requires much gentleness, love, and persevering prayer for the oppressed.

The following is a collection of manuals and books about demons and deliverance (exorcism). They are written either by experienced deliverance ministers or by

people that have testified to experiencing full deliverance. These deliverances have been from extreme sicknesses like demonic possession and schizophrenia to milder forms of demonic oppression.

Banks, Bill and Sue. *Breaking Unhealthy Soul Ties*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 2000. Deals with the art of breaking soul ties or ending relationships with controlling people in your life that can cause demonic oppression.

Burton, Mitsi. *Power to Tread: Deliverance and Exorcism Guidelines for Christians*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 2005.

Dickerman, Don. *When Pigs Move In*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2009. Based on the experiences of a deliverance minister.

Eckhardt, John. *Deliverance Thesaurus: Demon Hit List*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1995. Excellent handbook that lists the names of demons and their functions. A good reference for the sake of confirming the names of demons as they are revealed through deliverance prayer, divine revelations (dreams, visions, and voices), and demonic manifestations.

———. *Prayers That Rout Demons*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008. A prayer book of deliverance prayers (exorcisms).

Garrison, Mary. *How to Conduct Spiritual Warfare: As I See It!* Chelsea, AL: Christ Camp Ministries, 1989.

Hammond, Frank and Ida Mae. *Pigs in the Parlor: A Practical Guide to Deliverance*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1973. The number one classic manual on deliverance ministry. Chapter 21 is about deliverance from schizophrenia. Based on experience.

Hammond, Frank. *Demons and Deliverance*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1991. Discusses more issues about the theology of demons and deliverance. The sequel to *Pigs in the Parlor*.

———. *Overcoming Rejection*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1987.

Hinkle, Mary-Etta. *Out of the Valley of Darkness*. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1992. The encouraging and faith increasing testimony of a woman permanently delivered from schizophrenia through deliverance ministry with the Hammonds. Based on experience.

Hobson, Peter. *Christian Deliverance*. 4 vols. Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 1991-2003. A wealth of information based on experience. Includes "Make Yourselves Ready" (Vol. 1), "Engaging the Enemy" (Vol. 2), "Walking in Victory" (Vol. 3), and "We All Have Our Demons" (Vol. 4).

Holliday, Pat. *Deliverance Manual*. 3 vols. Jacksonville, FL: Pat Holliday, n.d.

———. *Deliverance/Schizophrenia/MPD*. Jacksonville, FL: Pat Holliday, n.d.

Horrobin, Peter. *Healing Through Deliverance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008.

Ing, Richard. *Spiritual Warfare*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1996. A comprehensive, general theology of demons and deliverance.

Lozano, Neal. *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2003.

MacNutt, Francis. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1995. A good Catholic theology of demons and exorcism.

Marzullo, Frank, and Tom Snyder. *A Manual for the Deliverance Worker*. Deland, FL: F. Marzullo and T. Snyder, 1990. Based on experience.

Moody, Gene. *Deliverance Manual*. Baton Rouge, LA: Deliverance Ministries, 2000. Has material on schizophrenia; and is largely based on experience.

Prince, Derek. *They Shall Expel Demons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998. Based on the experiences of a renowned teacher of the Charismatic and Deliverance movements.

Scanlan, Michael. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Weapon for Spiritual Warfare*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1980. A Catholic theology of deliverance ministry.

Stacey, James. *Schizophrenia Defeated*. Bromsgrove, UK: Crossbridge Books, 2004. The testimony of a man who was delivered after suffering from schizophrenia for 26 years.

Weller, Phillip, ed. *Roman Ritual: Christian Burial, Exorcisms, Reserved Blessings, Etc., Vol. 2*. Boonville, NY: Preserving Christian Publications, 2007. For centuries, the deliverance prayers (exorcisms) were used in standard Catholic exorcism, long before the

Deliverance movement of the 1970s in Charismatic Christianity.

Worley, Win. *Battling the Hosts of Hell: Diary of an Exorcist*. Highland, IN: Hegewisch Baptist Church, 1980. Many of the experiences of a renowned deliverance minister.

Discerning and Rejecting the Occult

While we should not seek to know about the occult to glorify satan (Rev. 2:24), we should understand that modern day Evangelical mystics are up against a whole culture infused with false teachings about spirituality. Today, **New Age spirituality** is the most influential kind of spirituality that is believed and practiced. Therefore, as Evangelical mystics who follow Jesus as the only Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:6), we need to keep sharp about the history, teachings, and practices of New Age spirituality, and learn to resist it and keep our distance from it. Also, learning about other forms of occultism that unknowingly creep into Christian practice is helpful for studying to sharpen our spiritual discernment.

It all comes down to this: the occult relies on free will and demon power to accomplish its supernatural ends, while **Evangelical mysticism** relies on free will and the power of God. We must know this difference, but it is often very subtle. I caution that some of the writers of these books are so committed to strict Evangelicalism, that they are anti-mystical altogether. Some are even

against true Christian mysticism—and are in favor of Biblical revelation only (*sola Scriptura*). Therefore, “Eat the meat and spit out the bones.”

Brown, Rebecca. *He Came to Set the Captives Free*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1992. A true story of a girl’s deliverance from devil worship.

———. *Prepare for War*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1992. An anti-occult treatise written by one experienced in this area.

———. *Becoming a Vessel of Honor*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1993. Distinguishes between prophets and psychics, between Spirit-filled Christianity and the New Age, and exposes occultic practices to safeguard ourselves from.

Godwin, Rick. *Exposing Witchcraft in the Church*. Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1997. An Evangelical work on the demonic spirit of control or manipulation (witchcraft), which can operate through both true and false Christians, even when no occultism is involved.

Groothuis, Douglas. *Unmasking the New Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986. An authoritative, Evangelical, overarching look at New Age spirituality and its impact on Western culture.

———. *The New Age Movement*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986. A short booklet on the history of this movement.

———. *Confronting the New Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988. A practical how-to manual on how to discern and resist New Age influences all around us in the Western world.

Gruss, Edmond. *Cults and the Occult*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002. A thorough Evangelical work on the occult.

Guazzo, Francesco Maria. *Compendium Maleficarum*. Translated by E. A. Ashwin. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1988. A great 17th century Catholic work on the occult.

Hunt, Dave, and T. A. McMahon. *The Seduction of Christianity: Spiritual Discernment in the Last Days*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985. This book is helpful, because it reveals how subtle occult teachings like New Age spirituality, human divinity, high self-esteem, and psychotherapy have infected the church—both liberal and Evangelical. But I don't agree with Hunt's insistence that faith commands are presumptuous attempts at controlling God, or that Christians shouldn't try to work miracles at will, or that

miraculous visualization of Christ for inner and outer healing is occultic simply because the Bible is supposedly silent about it.

Joyner, Rick. *Overcoming Evil in the Last Days*. Shippenburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2003. Written by a respected prophetic leader, Part 2 of this three part work contains a discussion on the various kinds of witchcraft, including its occultic manifestations.

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