CHAPTER 10

UNDERSTANDING AND RESISTING

THE OCCULT

A Cessationist Challenges Me About the Prophetic

It wasn't until I entered into a challenging discussion with a Cessationist friend (or ex-friend), that I started thinking about writing this chapter. He was attending Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He was a good Southern Baptist, because he tried to convince me that the Bible was good enough for him and that I was wrong for being guided by dreams and visions. He was a devout Biblicist. He did not believe that today the Holy Spirit and the angels give dreams, visions, words of knowledge, or any kind of prophetic revelations.

I am not quite ready to present a comprehensive defense against Cessationist theology, as that is not my purpose here. If you want to study some good arguments against Cessationism, then I recommend reading Jon Ruthven's On the Cessation of the Charismata (1993) and Jack Deere's Surprised by the Power of the Spirit (1993). Both of these men have been theology professors at distinguished colleges.

Cessationists Think Charismatics Are Into the Occult

The occult is my concern in this chapter. Dark, evil, demonic, and deceptive though it is, it really needs to be addressed in-depth. Especially in a book like this. The reason being, is because Cessationist Evangelicals tend to believe that Pentecostal and Charismatic gifts are really occultic powers at work! That's right. In their minds, George Fox, William Seymour, John G. Lake, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Oral Roberts, William Branham, Kathryn Kuhlman, John Wimber, and virtually every anointed Pentecostal or Charismatic Christian in history was really a sorcerer or witch in disguise! (Of course, this also applies to all of the Catholic saints that ever worked miracles in Jesus' Name.)

Isn't that terrible? Even though there is an abundance of evidence for miracles in church history in the lives of the saints, and so forth, the Cessationist still maintains that these were all the workings of witchcraft! Or, if a Christian miracle story doesn't sound believable, then they will dismiss it as a mere superstition. Or they will say it was the result of a magic trick or fraud. They will follow up their rationalistic argument with something about how the Bible is good enough for them, and how they prefer to put their faith in the Scriptures only, and decidedly not in subjective spiritual experiences.

Then what they will say, if they are audacious enough, (as was in the case of my Cessationist friend) is if you experience dreams and visions, or work miracles of any kind then that is bad. They might glance at you with a wary look, and give you a good fair warning, and then tell you to stop in whatever it is you have opened yourself up to. At this point, it doesn't matter what you say. They have officially demonized you. You have suddenly become the victim of a witch hunt. It doesn't matter if you have exhibited the fruit of the Spirit, or godly character that they have recognized in you (Gal. 5:22-23). Godliness doesn't really matter in this discussion (at least to the Cessationist).

To him, it's about upholding the authority of Scripture. Extra-Biblical revelations are intensely resisted by them. It doesn't matter if you have emphatically insisted that you are not a New Ager, occultist, or psychic. It doesn't matter if you prophesy or work miracles in Jesus' Name or to Jesus' glory. Every slip-up or sin that you have committed will be highlighted and pointed out. Every doctrinal inaccuracy that you hold will
be blown up into a heresy. You will be viewed as a Christian witch, a heretic, and will be disfellowshipped. But you don’t have to be ashamed of this, because the Pharisees treated Jesus and the apostles in the exact same way. Christ said, it is enough for the student to be like his Teacher, and the servant like his Master. If the Head of the House has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of His household! (Matt. 10:25).

Charismatics Can Rest Assured in the Holy Spirit

In fact, you should rejoice and be glad that God has given you the grace to dabble in the miraculous gifts and open yourself to the baptism in the Holy Spirit! Even though you will have many accusers, saying that all of your tongue speaking and prophesying and miracle working is demonic or of the occult, you can rest assured that you are being led by the Spirit and not under law! (That is, their church’s rules.) But how can you know for sure that you’re not deceived by the devil or being empowered by demonic occult spirits as they say? The same way the apostles knew. Jesus said, Watch out for false prophets…by their fruit you will recognize them. Paul elaborated on this: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is the good fruit of a true prophet of God. But the bad fruit of a false prophet are: Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. And these are the things that mark the occult all throughout. To put it plainly, a false prophet is not simply a Christian who misinterprets his dreams sometimes and makes mistakes at prophesying. (This is what the Cessationists say.) A false prophet is a witch, an occultist, a sorcerer, who indulges in sin, sexual orgies, and resists the will of God and His Word. The true prophet preaches faith in the cross of Christ, obedience to God’s Word (the Bible), and confirms the Word with signs following. Not only that, the true prophet is a godly man, and tries all he can with the Spirit’s help to be loving, and humble, and peaceable.

Charismatics Should Know and Resist the Occult

But it is still needed for Charismatic Christians to understand what the occult is, not only so they can resist it in all of its forms, but so they can possibly give a better answer to their Cessationist critics. Perhaps it would help Charismatics to know some basic facts about the occult, so that when Cessationists come down hard on them, they will be able to give a more ready defense.

Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned satan’s so-called deep secrets. This verse is quoted by some Evangelicals to support the idea that Christians are not allowed to study about the occult. Because the church at Thyatira had not learned these occult secrets, they were apparently commended by Christ. I don’t think that is the meaning of the passage. I believe Christ was referring to the church of Thyatira not learning the ways of the Gnostics, which was a secretive occult group. Christ was saying, Good job for not becoming Gnostics, or believing in their so-called deep secrets. So, I don’t believe that Revelation 2:24 prohibits Christians from studying about the occult for reasons of apologetics, demonology, and spiritual warfare.

And the fact that Paul refers to as a work of the flesh in Galatians 5:20, is more than enough evidence to me that Christians should know what witchcraft is, so they can recognize it, and resist it as sin. Still, I believe the devil would have Christians remain ignorant about the occult, so that he can continue to lure and deceive people through it. If more Christians knew about occultism, then they would be crying out against it wherever it is to be found. But the devil likes to do things in secret, and under the radar.

Evangelical Mystics Need to Defend Themselves
Even so, it especially becomes Evangelical mystics—who bear an "occultic" sounding name—to know what the occult is, so they can explain to their critics that they are contemplative, prophetic, Charismatic Christian mystics. Not occultists. They believe that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:6), practice contemplation (Ps. 46:10), and see dreams and visions (Num. 12:6) but believe that all of the occult practices of Deuteronomy 18:9-12 are most definitely sins.

In fact, in the spirit world, Evangelical mystics are the only direct opponents of occultists. Evangelical mystics are the only mystical group in the Earth that are found all throughout the Body of Christ in various denominations and churches that are the spiritual enemies of witchcraft and the occult. At least in terms of spiritual power. While Evangelical rationalists and Cessationists will always oppose the occult, they are limited to using the realm of reason and apologetics. However, Evangelical mystics have no limitations on how far they are willing to go with the Holy Spirit and His gifts. Classical Pentecostals will usually only go so far as speaking in tongues or shouting during worship. Charismatics might speak in tongues too, feel God's presence during worship, and might even pray for healing.

But Evangelical mystics are different; they are usually willing to go all the way with the Holy Spirit. (I'm trying to say this without sounding arrogant. In no means do I intend to speak down to my Pentecostal/Charismatic brothers and sisters.) An Evangelical mystic is not ashamed of practicing contemplation (soaking), prophesying, dreams and visions, words of knowledge, healing, deliverance, and working nature miracles. He is not even against very radical experiences like ecstasies, out of body experiences, the intoxication of love (spiritual drunkenness), holy laughter, stigmata, teleportation, and supernatural levitation. Union with God in His presence, and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, are eagerly desired and prayed for. All of the spiritual experiences and miracles of the Catholic saints are eagerly welcomed (except for visions of Mary), but in a markedly Protestant and Evangelical and Charismatic frame of mind. This is Evangelical mysticism in a nutshell.

But all of these supernatural experiences bear similarities to experiences found in the world of the occult. And this is where Cessationists, Evangelicals, and even traditional Pentecostal/Charismatics have a problem. They just can't see past the similarities with the occult. And what results is an anti-supernatural mentality—a mentality that the Bible is good enough for me mentality. They shake their heads, turn their backs, and say it's all demonic. All the while, they are clutching a Bible under their armpits, which was founded on such experiences thousands of years ago. They don't understand the folly of their ways. Are they guilty of blaspheming the Holy Spirit? I don't know. Only Christ can judge that. But Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34).

Understanding the Occult and Various Terms

Before we get into understanding the occult, in Jesus' Name, I pray that you would not become too fascinated with it, or feel like becoming a witch. The Word of God says, Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (1 Sam. 15:23, KJV). Resist it all in Jesus' Name!

What is the occult? In order to answer this question completely, first I want to define a few terms. The following are my own personal definitions:

Mysticism - A form of spirituality that maintains it is possible to experience an encounter with a god through the practice of contemplation on that god. Ecstasies, dreams, visions, voices, impressions, and miraculous power can result from this. Mysticism is found in many world religions, including Christianity.
Occultism (the occult) A form of spirituality found only in pagan religions, that emphasizes certain occult practices such as human or animal sacrifice, divination, sorcery, interpreting omens, practicing witchcraft, casting spells, or seeking a medium to contact the so-called dead (Deut. 18:9-12). Pagan mysticism (contemplation on a false god) would also fall into the occult category, particularly divination.

Rationalism A philosophy that originated in the 18th century, which emphasizes the role of manâ€™s reasoning and intellect, in determining what is true and false. It is usually anti-mystical and anti-supernatural, and was the primary cause of skepticism behind the so-called Enlightenment philosophers. Either knowingly or unknowingly, Evangelical theology became heavily influenced by rationalism. Many of Americaâ€™s founding fathers were also rationalistic.

Evangelicalism (Evangelical) A branch of Protestantism that has its origins in the â€œGreat Awakening,â€• or the Evangelical revivals of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Wesley. It emphasizes the importance of a personal â€œconversion experienceâ€• of salvation, through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. Growing in holiness is also important. Jesus is viewed as the only Way, Truth, and Life (John 14:6)â€”the only way to God. Among distinct Evangelical beliefs are:

Belief that the Bible is the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

Belief that there is one God, eternally existent in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Belief in the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Belief that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

Belief in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Belief 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 damnation.

Belief in the spiritual unity of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Evangelical Rationalism â€“ The tendency of many Evangelicals to rationalize and intellectualize their approach to the Bible and Christianity. There is a very strong sense of this found among Presbyterians, Baptists, Calvinists, Reformed, Cessationists, and non-Charismatics. Systematic theology and apologetics are very important to them, but more than anythingâ€”the Bible. That is, a rationalistic understanding of the Bible. Their rallying cry is: â€œCome now, let us reason together,â€• says the Lordâ€• (Isa. 1:18).

Evangelical Mysticism â€“ The practice of contemplative prayer in the context of Evangelical Christianity. This may or may not allow for dreams, visions, voices, and miracles. But at the very least, contemplation and the pursuit of Godâ€™s presence are allowed (Ps. 46:10). Some Protestants, Anabaptists, Quakers (especially), Anglicans, Moravians, Methodists, Pentecostals, and Charismatics have ventured to practice contemplation on
God and Jesus. False gods and non-Christian religions are resisted as demonic. The Bible is the supreme theological authority and is used to test spiritual experiences and revelations (Isa. 8:20; 1 John 4:1).

So, to return to the initial question: What is the occult? My answer at this point would be anything that is occultic beliefs and practices outlined in Deuteronomy 18:9-12, as well as any form of contemplation on a pagan god.

Why Evangelical Mysticism is Not of the Occult

Christian contemplation on the triune God through Jesus Christ is by no means an occult practice. Although it bears a similarity to Transcendental Meditation, Zen meditation, or even Yoga—it is completely different, because the God is completely different. This is not so much a matter of methods, as it is a matter of gods. If theologians wish to quibble and argue about the practice of concentrating intensely on God in prayer then they are free to. But to me, it is not the issue of concentration, stillness, quietness, restfulness, visions, or ecstatic experiences that matter. What really matters is what you are contemplating? Are you gazing at the God of the Bible through Jesus Christ? Are you contemplating the splendor and glory of the God of Israel, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords? Are you seeking union with God through Christ alone? (Gal. 2:20).

If you are doing these things, then you are on the perfect path of Christian righteousness. This is what Teresa of Avila called The Way of Perfection. It is not an easy path, but much grace from the Holy Spirit will be given to help you in this direction if you choose to follow it. This is the path of the Christian mystics. A holy and blessed path. A very narrow path. An ancient path. A persecuted path. But a very good path.

Evangelical Mystics Will Always Be Persecuted

It is a persecuted path. Christian mystics have always been persecuted throughout church history, and have often been confined to the cloister or marginalized as heretics. And so we are today. What of it? If this book ever attains to any level of notoriety, it already absolutely sure it will be branded as heretical by Cessationists. A stigma will be placed on How to Experience God, as well as anything else that I feel the Holy Spirit inspires me to write. I know this already, because I am writing in the same vein as the Christian mystics that preceded me (Thomas Müntzer, George Fox, Madame Guyon, Gene Edwards, Richard Foster, Mark Virkler, James Goll, John Crowder, etc).

All of these people have already been branded as heretics by either the Roman Catholic Church, Cessationists, or discernment ministries. Of course, I don’t believe any of these people are heretics, neither do I think of myself as a heretic. Because if I did, then I would have to change my mind about all of these contemplative issues. I really think the basic reason why the traditional church has usually branded Christian mystics as heretics, is because the mystics tend to make average churchgoers feel like their Christian experience is not good enough.

So, the traditional churchmen make up for this by persecuting the very prophets of God! The words of Christ are fitting: Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets! (Matt. 23:37, KJV). That spirit of Jerusalem has haunted the church throughout the ages, and continues to do so today. Primarily through Cessationists, Christians, and discernment ministries. These are the modern-day accusers of the Protestant church, and they will not refrain from accusing Christian mystics before God and men. By doing this, they actually think they are doing God a service (John 16:2). They believe that they are condemning Christian mysticism rather than as I have defined it.
Anti-Charismatic Protestant Witch Hunters

Now I want to define a little bit more clearly, which aspects of the occult, are of such concern to modern-day Protestant witch hunters. Firstly, I am going to name a few Evangelical witch hunter books that include Charismatic Christianity as a form of witchcraft (deluded as this thinking is). These witch hunters or heresy hunters actually believe that Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is a form of witchcraft! They are anti-Charismatic. I am so sorry that these people even believe this, but they are still forces to be reckoned with:

- Kurt Koch’s Occult ABC (1978)
- John MacArthur’s Charismatic Chaos (1992)
- Hank Hanegraaff’s Counterfeit Revival (1997)
- Dave Hunt’s Occult Invasion (1998)
- Ron Tyler’s The Spiritual Discernment Guide (2004)
- Rory Roybal’s Miracles or Magic? (2005)

These books are partially good and partially bad. They are good in that they expose true occult practices, so that faithful Christians might avoid them. But they are bad wherever they cross the line and essentially condemn Charismatic Christians as witches.

Confusion About Prophecy and Contemplation

What are the occultic things that Protestant witch hunters confuse with Charismatic Christians? Hopefully I can help to clarify any confusion here.

1. The Gift of Prophecy is Confused with Divination. You find this is one of their primary concerns. All Protestants and Evangelicals have traditionally placed a very high priority on the Bible. The traditional view of the Protestant Reformation was sola Scriptura (the Bible alone is good enough for faith and practice, and by implication—all spiritual experiences and revelations are to be rejected). You also find that they think the mystics of the church held their private revelations as equally authoritative as the Bible. This was not always the case. But to say so helps their Cessationist arguments. It is all done in the name of upholding the authority of the Word of God (the Bible only). All dreams, visions, and spiritual voices are laughed at, mocked, or condemned as demonic.

Sometimes I wonder if an ulterior motive may also be to uphold the authority of seminaries and Bible degrees! They might reason: “If the laypeople learn how to directly hear from God, then they might start to believe that they don’t need Bible scholars like us to teach them the Word of God. So let’s stamp out every kind of Christian mysticism and Charismatic group we can find. These make us look like we’re unqualified to teach the Bible! And if we can work miracles but we can’t, what does that say about us? Away with them! Brand them as demonic, or heretics, or witches, or something sinful.” The Pharisees treated Jesus and the apostles the same way. They were also accused of witchcraft and magic (Matt. 10:25; 12:24).

Not only is the mind of the Cessationist darkened because of his rationalism, but because he resists the Holy Spirit’s gifts, all he can see in the supernatural is occult. In his mind, supernatural = occult. For him, God no longer does supernatural things in the church. It’s just a reasonable faith in the Bible versus non-Christian religions with occultic powers. What a sad lot! Why would God ever leave His church without miraculous powers while the devil is allowed to give them to his witches? It doesn’t make sense at all in
light of spiritual battle. But this is really what Cessationists and most conservative Evangelicals believe in. The Bible is good enough for themâ€”and itâ€™s all they want. Itâ€™s very rationalistic.

So in the heat of all this, since they have a tendency to view all modern-day supernatural manifestations as occultic, they attack the prophetic as if it were divination and magic. They stylistically use all sorts of rhetoric and choice words: â€œdonâ€™t know all about what you are â€œdabblingâ€ in or what you have apparently â€œopened yourself upâ€ to. But you really need to pray to God and repent of this mysticism and prophecy stuff. The Book of Acts was transitional and spiritual experiences were only for the Twelve Apostles. Now that we have the Bible, thatâ€™s what we should believe in. Not in any of your funny dreams and visions that you think are from God. You know, a lot of what youâ€™re experiencing sounds like the New Age or the occult. Itâ€™s no small coincidence. ESP, psychics, fortunetellers, Ouija boards, Edgar Cayce, Jeane Dixonâ€”I know all about that kind of stuff. Stay away from that stuff man. Just believe the Bible! You donâ€™t need to prove to anybody that you are super-spiritual. You donâ€™t need to be talking about your encounters with angels all the time, because Colossians 2:16 says not to worship angels.â€

If you are a prophetic Christian and have gotten into a discussion or debate with a Cessationist, you know all about this kind of anti-Charismatic rhetoric. They might not slam all of this down on you if one fell swoop, but they might in bits and pieces. I just provided this composite Cessationist objection to the prophetic for the sake of simplicity. Two of the major aspects of real divination are: (1) Attempting to contact the so-called dead through a medium. (2) Using occultic devices such as crystal balls, magic mirrors, palm reading, Ouija boards, Tarot cards, horoscopes, etc, in order to receive â€œrevelationsâ€ from the dead81 or pagan gods. In the Charismatic Christian prophetic ministry, none of these divinations are presentâ€”because they are condemned by Scripture (Deut. 18:9-12). But because many Cessationists donâ€™t really understand how the gift of prophecy operates through dreams, visions, and words of knowledge (Num. 12:6)â€”they naturally think of divination, and ascribe it to any Charismatic that claims special revelations from God.

2. Contemplative Prayer is Confused with Eastern Meditation. There are two sides of the coin in Christian mysticism. On the one side you have miraculous gifts, which have their summation in the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12-14). On the other side, you have contemplative prayer, which â€œopens you upâ€ to hear from God more clearly (Ps. 46:10). Satan has counterfeited Christian contemplation in the past century through what has popularly come to be called â€œEastern meditation.â€ This is a catch-phrase that basically encompasses the three most popular meditative techniques of the Far East: Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen meditation. I will attempt to provide my definitions of these occult practices based on what Josh McDowell and Don Stewartâ€™s Handbook of Todayâ€™s Religions (1983) says about them.

Transcendental Meditation â€” This reached its height of popularity in the mid-1960s, with the hippie counterculture, and the full support of the Beatles rock band. Developed by a Hindu guru named Maharishi Mahesh Yogiâ€”the goal of Transcendental Meditation is to â€œopen upâ€ the meditator to experience Hindu gods such as Vashishta and Shakti, and ultimately lead to union with the Hindu creator god named Brahman. Discursive meditation (repetitive thinking) on Hindu gods and gurus plays an important roleâ€”this is known as chanting a â€œmantra.â€ Eventually this leads to a demonic ecstasy, or a contemplative awareness of the presence of Brahman, within you and supposedly within all things.

Yoga â€” This may or may not be used in addition to Transcendental Meditation. Yoga is a variety of physical and meditative exercises that have been developed by Hindu gurus over the course of centuries. In the West, most people seem to use Yoga only for physical exercise, kind of like aerobics. But this is a dangerous occult practice that may result in demon possession and mental illness. All forms of Yogaâ€”whether they are physical, mental, or spiritualâ€”are occultic techniques, specially designed by Hindu mystics, to â€œopen upâ€ your mind to experience Hindu gods, as well as â€œgod-realizationâ€ for yourself. In the Hindu worldview, if one attains â€œgod-realizationâ€ (the revelation that man is â€œgodâ€ or Brahman) through Yoga practicesâ€”then he will be supposedly freed from the torturous cycle of reincarnation.

Zen Meditation (Zazen and Koans) â€” A form of sitting meditation that may last for as long as one week straight. Chanting and sitting in some kind of â€œlotus positionâ€ on a cushion is involved. The eyes are often left open to stare in a blank gaze at the wall. There is a Zen master or spiritual guide who assists the monks in
their meditations. He will often give them a "koan" or riddle to think about. These are often some of the most stupid and meaningless questions: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"; "A cow passes by a window. Its head, horns, and the four legs all pass by. Why did not the tail pass by?"; "What was the appearance of your face before your ancestors were born?" Apparently the purpose of meditating on these riddles is to lead the meditator to realize that everything is meaningless, the world is meaningless, those stupid koans are meaningless, and he should just blank his mind out. By doing this, he will attain a state of perfect emotional and mental detachment from all things—the state of satori or "nirvana."

Christian contemplation is none of these things. It is simply quieting oneself, closing the eyes, and concentrating on God through Jesus. It is fixing our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2). There is nothing Far Eastern about it. There are no "influences" coming from India, China, or Japan. There is no Hinduism or Buddhism involved in Christian contemplation. Christian contemplation originated in the Near East, not the Far East. It originated in Israel, not in India. It was developed in Catholic monasteries, not in Buddhist monasteries. The great founders of Christian contemplation were the Desert Fathers, not Buddha and Hindu gurus. Am I making myself clear? There are two contemplative streams—one of God, the other of the devil. God’s way of contemplation has come through the church, but satan’s way of contemplation has come through Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Popes’ Rejection of Eastern Meditation

The Roman Catholic Church addressed these issues in a 14 page document called the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation (1989). It was actually written up by Joseph Ratzinger, who is the current Pope Benedict XVI. The letter rejects Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and Zen as erroneous ways of praying. Ratzinger notes the crisis of modern Christians borrowing from Eastern meditation practices for their prayer lives:

Christians, caught up in the movement towards openness and exchanges between various religions and cultures, are of the opinion that their prayer has much to gain from these methods. Observing that in recent times many traditional methods of meditation, especially Christian ones, have fallen into disuse, they wonder whether it might not now be possible, by a new training in prayer, to enrich our heritage by incorporating what has until now been foreign to it.

That is, Christian meditative and contemplative practices—those espoused by the Desert Fathers, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross—have over the course of time, fallen into disuse. Probably due to the influence of rationalism, the church stopped practicing Christian contemplation, and largely stopped believing that God could be encountered through spiritual experiences. So, when the 1960s and 70s came around, many spiritually hungry Christians turned to Far Eastern meditation practices, in order to get in touch with God. This is extremely wrong and spiritually dangerous, as it opens up the believer to demonic attack, or even possession and mental illness.

Not only that, but Ratzinger said the Eastern methods of meditation should be critically shunned, as to avoid the danger of falling into syncretism (mixing religions). The practice of mixing Catholic meditation with Eastern meditation, was brought into the church through the heretical Catholic monks Thomas Merton, M. Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, and William Meninger. They were the leaders of the centering prayer movement. To this day, Thomas Keating has a ministry called Contemplative Outreach. Pope John Paul II felt the same way that Ratzinger felt about borrowing from Eastern meditation. John Paul II said:

It is not inappropriate to caution those Christians who enthusiastically welcome certain ideas originating in the religious traditions of the Far East—for example, techniques and methods of meditation and ascetical
practice. In some quarters these have become fashionable, and are accepted rather uncritically. First one should know one’s own spiritual heritage well and consider whether it is right to set it aside lightly. Here we need to recall, if only in passing, the brief but important document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith On Certain Aspects of Christian Meditation.

What About “Harmless Things” from the Far East?

But the question still remains: What about the seemingly harmless things that don’t contradict the Bible or Christianity? Some Christians still wonder if some of the harmless physical aspects, of Eastern meditative practices, might be of practical use in the Christian contemplative life. For example, in Zen Buddhism, after the meditators have been sitting still for a prolonged period of time—\(^8^5\) in order to give their bodies some relief, they go outside for a walk.\(^8^6\) I see nothing anti-Biblical or heretical in this. Take note that Paul quoted the pagan poet Epimenides (Acts 17:28), but never quoted anything anti-Biblical or contradictory to Christian theology. St. Augustine did the same with Plotinus.

Ratzinger concludes in his letter: “One can take from them what is useful so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic and requirements are never obscured.” But as a general rule of thumb, I would stay away from Far Eastern meditation techniques, because the Roman Catholic Church has provided way more Christian contemplative guidance throughout the centuries (i.e., the Desert Fathers, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Augustin Poulain). I think it would do us all very well to interpret Catholic mystical theology through the theological lens of Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity. Then we can arrive at a much more powerful, and much more orthodox conception, of what it means to experience God in the contemplative life. There is really no need to turn to Far Eastern religions for spiritual advice.

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


Meditation


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.


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.


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

The following is a collection of Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Charismatic books that deal with spiritual experiences in general. Dreams, visions, voices, signs from God, impressions, words of knowledge, miraculous gifts, the presence of God, ecstatic states, and the history of Christian mysticism is all found together in this collection. Sometimes, works of mystical theology are mentioned.


“A€””A€””A€”. Spiritual Theology. London: Continuum, 2006. A modern work of Catholic mystical theology, considered by some to be the best since Vatican II.


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 “sainthood” 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.


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.


â€”â€”â€”â€”. 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.


Pentecostal works on the gifts of the Spirit.


