

Light Brings Salt

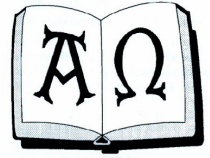
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"Sanctify them in the truth: Your word is truth."



Evangelical Mysticism?

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I find myself increasingly grieved these days by what I see taking place among those who profess to be evangelicals. I know the term "evangelical" has undergone radical changes regarding its meaning and practice. Yet when I use the term, I'm going by a very simple definition: I'm referring to those who claim to accept the Bible alone as their authority for knowing and receiving God's way of salvation and for living their lives in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Thirty years ago, it was young adult evangelicals who were used wonderfully by the Lord to help open my eyes to the fact that I was eternally separated from God and that the religious system I was depending on to get me to heaven was a false hope. That wasn't easy for me to accept at the time. Although my commitment to the Roman Catholic Church had weakened during my late twenties, the attitude "I was born a Catholic, I'll die a Catholic" was woven into the fabric of my mind.

As I think back on those days, I recognize that I was a young man in bondage. Certainly, I was in bondage to sin, as is everyone who is not born again. But there was another bondage that also gripped me: the bondage of Roman Catholic tradition, with its sacraments, liturgies, rituals, and sacramentals. Not only were such things unbiblical—they were works of the flesh and devices of demons. In my own life, as well as throughout the history of the Church of Rome, they were soul-gripping superstitions advanced under the guise of spirituality.

I trusted in relics of dead so-called Saints; holy water; making the sign of the cross; votive candles; baptism for salvation (infant or otherwise); a "transubstantiated" piece of bread alleged to be Christ; apparitions of Mary; a scapular; a "miraculous medal"; statues and images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints; endless Rosaries, Novenas, the Stations of the Cross; abstaining from meat on Friday; Lenten abstinences; the Last Rites to get me into Purgatory and indulgences to get me out of Purgatory; Mass cards; graces dispensed from Mary; the confessional, with absolution of my sins by a priest; penance and personal suffering to purify me of my sin; worshiping a piece of bread at the Eucharistic Holy Hour; the Holy Father as the Vicar of Christ on earth, etc., etc. Therein lies a bondage that few evangelicals understand.

Many brush these things aside as non-essentials of the Christian faith or minor theological aberrations unique to Catholicism. Not true. They are essential to the gospel that Rome declares—a gospel of meritorious works that the Bible condemns (see Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, et al.) as a rejection of the completed substitutionary atonement of Christ our Savior. Catholicism's Tradition, which is declared to be equal in authority to Scripture, is made up of those things (such as cited above) that are necessary for, or supportive of, a Catholic's entrance into heaven.

According to the Word of God, anything that is added to Christ's finished work on the cross is a denial of the gospel: that Christ paid the full penalty for the sins of humanity.

The Roman Catholic Church, which claims infallibility in its Councils and theological teachings, clearly and emphatically denies the biblical gospel. The Council of Trent declares:

6th Session, Canon 9: If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification...let him be anathema.

6th Session, Canon 12: If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema.

6th Session, Canon 30: If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged either in this world or in purgatory before the gates of heaven can be opened, let him be anathema.

7th Session, Canon 4: If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law [canons and decrees of the Church] are not necessary for salvation but...without them...men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification...let him be anathema.

"Anathema," in these decrees (which are still in force), damns to hell anyone who rejects the Roman Catholic Church's false gospel of works.

Starting with the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, where only superficial changes were made (because infallible dogmas cannot be changed!), Rome launched an ecumenical program aimed at seducing Protestants worldwide and, specifically, evangelicals in the United States. The goal was and is to bring all of Christendom under the rule of the Roman Catholic Church with the pope as its spiritual head. Predictable progress has been made in Europe and the U.S. among liberal denominations that have long abandoned the Scriptures. Astonishing, however, is the success the scheme has had among American evangelicals.

Billy Graham was the first and most notable evangelical to support Catholicism's ecumenical efforts. Others followed, including Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, J. I. Packer, Timothy George, Robert Schuller, Hank Hanegraaff, Benny Hinn, and Jack Van Impe. Evangelicals and Catholics Together,

under the leadership of Chuck Colson and Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus, declared Catholics and evangelicals to be "brothers and sisters in Christ" and exhorted them to work together in spreading the gospel. Obviously, and conveniently, that gospel was never defined.

Although the acceptance of things Roman Catholic among evangelicals grew steadily over the years after Vatican II, it increased exponentially with the popularity of ultra-conservative Catholic Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. His dramatization of one of Catholicism's most sacred rituals, The Stations of the Cross, so captured the hearts of evangelicals that their eagerness to purchase mass quantities of tickets accounted for the movie's great financial success. Following that achievement, Inside the Vatican made this insightful observation: "For evangelicals, the film has given them a glimpse inside the Catholic soul, even the traditional Catholic soul. Many evangelicals, reflecting on what they saw in the movie, say they are beginning to 'get' the whole Catholic thing: Lent...the ashes on the forehead...no meat on Friday...the sorrowful mysteries...the Stations of the Cross...the emphasis on the Eucharist...the devotion to Mary...the enormous crucifix hanging above every Catholic altar. They may not be rushing out to buy rosaries, necessarily, but some of the things no longer seem so strange, so alien."

What evangelicals also "got," which their leaders enthusiastically endorsed as "biblically accurate," were numerous scenes based upon the imagination of an 18th-century Catholic mystic, the portrayal of Mary as co-redemptrix in the salvation of mankind, and a very Catholic gospel that has Christ atoning for sin by suffering the unrelenting physical tortures of the Roman soldiers.

The Passion of the Christ had a stunning effect on evangelical youth and youth pastors. Not only did "[Catholic] things no longer seem so strange, so alien," but they were showing up in the youth ministries of evangelical churches. The Stations of the Cross ritual became popular, although it needed to be downsized from 14 stations to 11, eliminating some stations that were too foreign to Scripture (such as Saint Veronica capturing the image of Christ's bloodied face on her veil). Prayer altars were erected, featuring icons

illuminated by candles and fragranced by burning incense, and prayer labyrinths were painted on large tarps placed in church basements or cut into church lawns. For young evangelicals too often raised on empty, repetitive worship choruses little different from secular music, and religious instruction leaning heavily upon entertainment to keep them interested, the Catholic and Orthodox liturgies seemed far more spiritual.

This all became "spiritual" fodder for the Emerging Church Movement (ECM), much of it a reaction against the consumer-oriented marketing approach to church growth popularized by Robert Schuller, Bill Hybels, and Rick Warren. Many ECM leaders, most of whom have evangelical backgrounds, saw Catholic ritual and mysticism as a necessary spiritual ingredient that was lost for evangelicals at the Reformation. *Sola Scriptura* was a major rallying cry of the Reformers against the abuses stemming from Roman Catholic tradition; the Bible as one's only authority practically shut down the influence of the Catholic mystics known as the Desert Fathers.

Yet Catholic mysticism has returned with a vengeance. Its occult techniques can be found nearly everywhere, from Youth Specialties to Richard Foster's Renovaré organization to Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life. "Many Christian leaders started searching for a new approach under the banner of 'spiritual formation.' This new search has led many of them back to Catholic contemplative practices and medieval monastic disciplines," Brian McLaren writes approvingly.

Tony Jones, co-editor of *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* has written a manifesto of mysticism for emerging churches titled *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Jones's acknowledgement of those who supported his effort reads as a *Who's Who* of emergent leaders, not to mention the Catholic priests he thanks and the ancient Orthodox and Catholic mystics he quotes. What then is this mysticism they are promoting?

Catholic mysticism is thoroughly subjective and experiential. Like its parent, Eastern mysticism, it claims that God can neither be known nor understood through human reason but only *experienced* subjectively through various

techniques. It is the antithesis of what the Bible teaches: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 1:18); "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7); "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him" (2 Peter 1:3). Furthermore, the goal of mysticism is union with God, i.e., the merging of one's soul into God. This is an impossibility that reveals mysticism's pantheistic and *panentheistic* roots, that God is everything and is in everything. No. God is infinite and transcendent, absolutely separate from His finite creation.

The Sacred Way endorses numerous mystical techniques that are gaining acceptance among evangelicals today. An awareness and understanding of them is therefore critical for discernment. *Centering Prayer* utilizes a single word (e.g., "love" or "God") upon which one focuses to clear the mind of all other thoughts. The belief is that the so-called pray-er will hear directly from God in his silence before Him. Tony Campolo declares, "In my case intimacy with Christ has developed gradually over the years, primarily through what Catholic mystics call 'centering prayer.' Each morning, as soon as I wake up, I take time-sometimes as much as a half hour-to center myself on Jesus. I say his name over and over again to drive back the 101 things that begin to clutter up my mind the minute I open my eyes. Jesus is my mantra, as some would say."

The Jesus Prayer has the prayer repeat a sentence such as "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me" continuously, hundreds-even thousands-of times. The repetition supposedly fixates one's mind upon Jesus. Yet it blatantly rejects His command not to use vain repetition in prayer as the heathen do (Matthew 6:7). Moreover, its constant repetitions turn prayer as a form of communication with Jesus into an act of nonsense.

Lectio Divina, meaning "sacred reading," is a technique that is far removed from normal reading and studying of the Bible. Its methodology aims at going beyond the objective meaning of the words and the straightforward instructions to that which transcends normal awareness. Jones writes, "As you attend to those deeper meanings, begin to

meditate on the feelings and emotions conjured up in your inner self." He then summarizes this mystical contemplative technique: "True contemplation moves beyond words and intellect and into that 'thin space' where time and eternity almost touch. It's in moments like these that some of the greatest [Catholic] saints in the history of the [Catholic] church have had a 'mystical union' with Christ." It's clear from God's Word that the spirit with which they had a "mystical union" in their contemplative altered state of consciousness was not Jesus.

Ignatian Examen is an occult visualization technique taught by Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuits in the 16th century. His exercise teaches one to visualize oneself in the presence of Jesus and then interact with Him during his earthly events, e.g., "at the Last Supper and the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the cross, and laying Jesus' body in the tomb." This has one adding content to Scripture from his imagination and opens a person to demonic manipulation (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:8).

Prayer Labyrinths are concentric paths created by the Catholic Church in the 13th century to experience in one's imagination Christ's *Via Dolorosa*, or "walk of sorrows," when He carried His cross to Calvary's hill. Rather than subject themselves to the dangers of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during Holy Week, Roman Catholics in Europe could gain the same indulgences (to shorten their time in Purgatory) by walking labyrinths at certain cathedrals while prayerfully meditating upon Christ's crucifixion. Likewise, observing the "sacred" ritual of the Stations of the Cross became a substitute for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

As a former Catholic, it's hard for me to fathom the evangelical church buying into the religious occultism of Roman Catholicism. It makes no sense. Visit any country where that religion is taken seriously. What becomes obvious is a people who are in the bondage of superstition. On the other hand, I shouldn't be surprised. Apostasy is growing rapidly, the religion of the Antichrist is taking shape, and mysticism, whether it's the Catholic variety, the Sufism of Islam, yoga and the gurus of Eastern mysticism, the Shamanism of

native religions, or otherwise, is a common yet powerful magnet that draws all religions together.

We need to be watchmen on the wall as we see this evil invading the church, warning especially—should our Lord delay His return—our next generation of believers. They are the clear targets of this mystical seduction. 📖

Bird Brained

Ecclesiastes 10:20

Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice, and a bird in flight may tell the matter.

Mankind has been teaching birds to talk for thousands of years. Man has also been using birds to deliver messages for just as long. But new research on the intelligence of birds suggests that they might be more intelligent than we suspect.

Researchers studying pigeons have learned that they can read all of the letters of the alphabet and they read them in a way similar to people. Scientists became convinced that pigeons see the world in much the same way as we do when they discovered that pigeons tend to confuse the very same letters that people do. What's more, it took only four months for pigeons to learn to distinguish all the letters of the alphabet. For years pigeons have been used to spot and reject defective items on assembly lines, where they have better records than human beings.

Based on evolutionary theory, scientists naturally conclude that the recognition of abstract forms such as letters of the alphabet requires the larger brain. But this is an assumption and we might be reminded of the work of Harvard psychologist B. F. Skinner who made extensive use of learned behavior using pigeons. Brain size has little to do with intelligence. Real science and experience show this and disprove evolutionary views. The only alternative is that it is the Creator who gives His creatures their intelligence.

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