
Editorials

THE MADNESS AND MUDDLE OF MYSTICISM

No one can deny that we are living in an age of feelings. Perhaps it could be said that the new "11th Commandment" is "Thou shalt feel good at all times."

And that feeling orientation — at least within the Church — can easily become mysticism. René Descartes, the 17th-century French philosopher, said, "I think, therefore I am." But today's mystics might well say, "I feel, therefore I am."

The contemporary emblem for the average Christian could be the roller coaster: up one instance, down the next. Churches today have adopted the method of the Athenians (found in Acts 17:21), constantly hearing of and telling about new fads to generate new feelings.

This mind-set often draws charlatans who impose old gags with new twists on naive thrill-seekers. Instead of really praying, the flock is preyed upon. Discernment is exchanged for tingles.

Truth to a mystic is not objective. It is rather what is happening to me now. What happens now is the only thing that matters and the only thing that is true. Mysticism is sensual, rather than cognitive. It is emotional, rather than thoughtful. It wants emotions, not biblical precision. It wants a spiritual Disney World, not doctrine. It cares little for biblical truth and feelings that

may follow from truth, but wants feelings written large and leading out in front — truth aside.

Truth is no longer the judge of feelings in mysticism, but the reverse. And so there are multitudes of conflicting private revelations abounding in the Church today longing to be the latest fad or book trend. Mystics mistake imagination for revelation and an individual's feelings become God to them. We hear the constant banter of people saying, "God told me," or "God led me," or "God spoke to me," all because something made them feel good. Their delusions are often mistaken for the voice of God. They confuse impressions for divine insight.

There are no parameters or limits for mysticism, so in the Middle Ages mystical pursuits degenerated into madness and in the practice of passion — or suffering — mysticism. This was the belief that feeling pain, and not pleasure, was the highest goal. The mystics believed one could achieve spirituality through starvation and the worst forms of self-torture and mutilation. Inflicting pain and hurting oneself was seen as the epitome of spirituality. "Feel" was still the operative word at that time, but feeling bad was good!

This period of passion mysticism is well documented by church historians such as Philip Schaff. (See, for example, Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 6, and *The Desert a City* by Derwas Chitty. Chitty, a

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Roman Catholic historian, objectively details early Catholic monasticism.)

Feelings, after all, are affected by the fall just like every other part of man. Feelings are tainted and twisted by sin and need the guidance and correction of Scripture. Feelings can be tossed around by conflicting emotions and so make a terrible guide. The first couple — even in their perfect, sinless condition — was deceived by their feelings.

There is no limit to the creativity and corruption of human feelings. There were times in the Dark Ages that things spiraled down into sensual and erotic mysticism with those like Teresa of Avila claiming a marriage to Jesus along with details too weird and tasteless to mention. (See, for example, *Teresa of Avila* by Cathleen Medwick.) In her imagination, Teresa constructed seven chambers of intimacy with Jesus with the seventh being the most intimate. The intimacies were often described not sparing any sensual details. However, even being “married to Christ” did not insulate Teresa from runaway feelings and she claimed to have had visions of seeing herself in hell.

While the secular version of the feel-good orientation happens to be alcohol and drugs, today’s Christian — who has an aversion to feeling bad — seeks the form of mindless mysticism to lift emotions — at least for awhile. They have no awareness as to where all this led in the past. Modern man is a “lover of pleasure” and too much into self-love and self-esteem to ever deny himself anything. Instant gratification is “in” and delayed gratification requires effort and therefore is “out.” As D.A. Carson warns us, we can be attracted to an individualism that “can easily become a factor that reinforces narcissism, self-indulgence, instant gratification, self-promotion, and greed” (*Gagging of God*, pg. 47). Mysticism is a broad avenue to such individualism.

The practitioner of mysticism tries to bypass the mind and any other means, including the Bible, to gain inner emotional intimacy with God. It is all in the realm of feelings, emotions, and imaginations. There is no direct support for this from Scripture.

John MacArthur explains what mysticism in today’s Church is all about:

“Mysticism is a system of belief that attempts to perceive spiritual reality apart from objective, verifiable facts. It seeks truth through feelings, intuition, and other internal senses. Objective data is usually discounted, so mysticism derives its authority from within. Spontaneous feeling becomes more significant than objective fact. Intuition outweighs reason. An internal awareness supersedes external reality.

As we shall see shortly, mysticism is at the heart of modern existentialism, humanism, and even many forms of paganism — most notably Hinduism and its close ally, New Age philosophy. ... There are only two basic approaches to biblical truth. One is the historical objective approach, which emphasizes God’s action toward men and women as taught in Scripture. The other is the personal, subjective approach, which emphasizes the human experience of God. How should we build our theology? Should we go to the Bible — or to the experiences of thousands of people? If we go to the people, we will have as many views as there are individuals” (*Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 31-32).

What is downright misleading and deceptive about modern mysticism and its proponents is that they hide it under buzz words and euphemisms such as “spiritual formation” and “meditation” or like-sounding spiritual words. What is passed off as a deeply spiritual, “still small voice” is in fact horribly shallow human imagination that lacks correspondence to the truth of Scripture.

Many modern mystics say they have seen Jesus or at least seek such visions and encourage others to seek them as well. Benny Hinn, over two decades ago, made the claim that the face of Jesus appeared on the wall of his Orlando church, and more recently offered assurances that Jesus would personally and physically appear on the platform at one of his healing crusades. Documentation or verification should be easy in a day of video cameras, but none was ever presented. Hinn seems to have missed a verse that many modern mystics either do not know or ignore. That verse is 1 Peter 1:8 which says of Jesus: “whom having not seen you love. Though *now you do not see Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (emphasis added). Those of us who expect to see Jesus, at either death or the Rapture, are not second-class citizens, but have obtained the “like precious faith” or literally, faith of the same value, as Peter (2 Peter 1:1).

Another verse which is ignored by mystics is found in the Gospel of John: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (20:29). Modern mystics are more like doubting Thomas than solid Christians. Paul’s exhortation, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7), appears extinct. We could also add, “For we walk by faith and not by feelings.”

MacArthur tells of one individual who was constantly bouncing from one experience to another. It illustrates the dead end of living in mysticism rather than the rock solid foundation of Scripture. The man, in frustration, confessed to MacArthur: “You spend the rest of your life trying to find another experience” (ibid., pg. 36). In the end many experience seekers burn out or flat out quit in discouragement feeling something is wrong with them. They need to get back to 1 Peter 1:8, John 20:29, and 2 Corinthians 5:7 and begin to rest in their riches in Christ which are described in so many portions of God’s

Word. A re-reading of 2 Corinthians would cure thrill seekers with the reality of the ups and downs of life. We all have to decide whether it will be for us madness and muddle, fantasy and fads, or the never-changing assurance of biblical promises.

The old hymn says it well: "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

—GRF

WHERE'S WALDO?

Most people are familiar with the "Where's Waldo?" cartoons. They are expansive pictures which are a hoarder's delight. And somewhere within the panorama is Waldo, a tall thin character dressed in a red-striped shirt. Usually the drawings are cluttered with objects and people; some red and white to throw off the observer who must search the picture to try to find Waldo.

Finding truth today is something like that. We have to constantly ask, "Where's Truth?"

Walk into a bookstore that is advertised as being a "Christian bookstore" and what do you find? There will be a jumble of books and publications that run the gamut from New Age to hyper-Charismatic, and from heretical to semi-evangelical.

There are the self-help publications stacked among the books on pop psychology. There are claimed visitations to heaven, trips to hell, angelic appearances, UFO abductions, dated predictions for the rapture, and a surfeit of purported Holy Ghost-given revelations. There are instruction manuals on "breaking strongholds" and ancestral bondage. There are books about signs and wonders, including people rising from the dead and end-time revival reports.

Then there are all the books on sowing your financial seed and multiplying money a hundredfold by sending the author a "seed faith" offering. One wonders why he does not send money to his readers so that his seed can be multiplied.

There will also be books on Jesus' teenage trips to India. Or was it Mongolia, or Egypt, or maybe somewhere else where He learned ancient wisdom? And, oh yes, the section on dream interpretation and the book on "What Would Jesus Eat," along with other biblical diet books.

Then there are books by Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Miles Munroe, T.D. Jakes, and a flock of other "Major League Charismatic Players," all vying for the book buyer's cash. And on and on it goes and where it stops nobody knows. As you stagger out of the bookstore in a daze, a question occurs to you — "Where's truth?"

One of the more recent charlatans on the minor league parade of extremist Charismatics is John Crowder.

Crowder knows that there is a hard-core audience that has been so jaded by past emotional "revivals" (slaying in the Spirit, laughing revivals, animal noises, violent head shaking, and even being kicked and wrestled to the ground) that experience seekers will put up with anything — the wilder and freakier the better. Insanity and total loss of control is now one of the premier marks of the Holy Spirit which you know if you watch the Trinity Broadcasting Network or read *Charisma* magazine.

On Crowder's Sons of Thunder Web site and on the myriad of "sermons" and reports posted all over YouTube, he claims to smoke the Holy Spirit like pot and get wasted. He claims people have weight loss in his meetings. (Of course, Crowder provides no documented evidence for the biggest loser.) He boasts of levitations and spirit travel. In the occult world spirit travel is called astral travel, but to his followers who cares. There are things that Crowder speaks about that are too inappropriate and vile to mention. Crowder arrogantly goes to places others like him have feared to tread. He not only pushes the envelope, he shreds it. Anyone with any discernment wants to scream — "Where's truth?" It is certainly not with John Crowder.

Despite all of the above, the Berean is neither discouraged nor does he lose heart. It is interesting that once you spot Waldo in a picture you know exactly where to look next time. Bereans have to become adept at knowing truth as it is found in Scripture. Truth, in fact, is not hard to spot. It is where it has always been, which is in the Bible. God is truth and His Word is truth. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Truth is actually in plain sight and not hard to find at all. Go to the Word, and stay safe by listening to preachers who are trustworthy and faithful to the truth. It is also important to commit to a church where truth is honored and proclaimed, and error is exposed and false teachers named (as Paul did). Above all, get grounded in doctrinal truth.

Next time you happen to see a "Where's Waldo?" cartoon, remember where you must look to find truth. Don't be misled by the religious clutter and heretical diversions that are everywhere.

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

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Years after Bakker's publicly exposed moral failure, financial improprieties, and downfall, Joyner and his ministry began purchasing the portion of PTL network property known as Heritage USA. In 2005, MorningStar acquired the failed hotel tower building with the intent to renovate the facility and then sell what it termed as "life leases" of age-restricted apartments. In the fall of 2008, it was announced that a \$40 million redevelopment of the structure, yielding 215 units, would begin the