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# Editorials

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## WITNESSING BY OSMOSIS?

The capacity of the fallen human imagination never ceases to amaze. The creative process can go in many directions, some of which are not so good.

Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling have written a book called *The God of Intimacy and Action*. Campolo formerly taught sociology at Eastern University, an American Baptist institution in Philadelphia. Darling is an associate professor at Spring Arbor University. Although Spring Arbor has a Methodist heritage, Darling's claim to fame is that she "has been trained in spiritual direction in the Jesuit tradition."

The book presents some new and bizarre teachings that go even beyond those of most Catholic and mystical materials.

Both Campolo and Darling claim that they — and we — can share the Gospel by means of some kind of psychic evangelism or telepathic witnessing. This is so far removed from the Bible and reasonable explanation that it sounds like science fiction. All through the book of Acts, neither Peter nor Paul used this method; they did it the hard way, with words and preaching that caused them persecution. It's a shame that Campolo does not take his own advice from the best two sentences in the whole book, "Discernment is crucial to mystical spirituality. Without it, anything goes" (pg. 11).

This book is Campolo and Darling's introduction to what they call mystical Christianity. It is what they label "authentic faith" and they view medieval mystics as "supersaints" (pg. xi). The book is largely an infomercial for Roman Catholic hagiography. It is replete with all the mystical mechanics and mystic rituals, such as the Prayer of Examen, *lectio divina*, meditation, centering prayer, and Renovaré. Pity Martin Luther and John Calvin; they must have had it all wrong.

Campolo wrote the book's first section (pages 1-56), Darling its second (pages 57-169), and they jointly wrote the third section (pages 170-210). In the introduction, it is easy to see where Campolo is going as he confesses that Francis of Assisi is his "model" and that he is "obsessed" with him (pg. xiii).

Francis is said to have bled from his hands and feet like Jesus on the cross and was, according to legend, the first stigmatic. Francis also claimed to hear from a talking crucifix. He believed that he could communicate with animals, or so the legend goes. Francis died in his early 40s, a victim to his self-imposed and unbiblical fasting and bodily mortifications. The neglect of the body for many of the mystics was a self-imposed death sentence of slow and painful suicide. Many of the females who imitated this behavior were anorexic and indulged in self-destructive cutting of themselves.

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Campolo speaks of “holistic Christianity” (pg. xiv), but it is hard to see how Catholic mystics could be seen as holistic because most of them spent their lives in cloisters or caves outside the realm of real life. Their lifestyles, at times, were so bizarre that they bore no similarity to real living. The Bible condemns the legalistic and destructive lifestyles of the radical mystics (Colossians 2:18-23, 1 Timothy 4:1-5).

Then Campolo’s obsession with Francis shades off into spiritism. He writes, “That insight about Saint Francis is what motivated me to partner with Mary Albert Darling in writing this book. She, too, had sensed Francis’s mystical presence in her own visit to Assisi” (pg. xiii). What Campolo describes here the Bible calls necromancy. Unfortunately, coming into contact with the presence of the dead is, in fact, coming into contact with what the Bible calls a familiar spirit or demonic entity.

Campolo starts on his rabbit trail departing from the Bible and expounding on the theories of Jewish Philosopher Martin Buber (pg. 5). Buber speculated that we can somehow mystically “feel a oneness of mind and heart” with humans and non-humans. As Jesus knew what was in everyone (John 2:25), so can we (pp. 5-6). The Bible does not support the idea that we can or should do this. The idea of mystically connecting with others, which Buber called an “I-thou” relationship, leads us toward Campolo’s wordless witnessing.

Campolo equates Bible characters such as Moses and Paul, who received direct revelation from God, with medieval mystics. This is the big lie. Many of the more crazed mystics, such as Madame Guyon and Anne Catherine Emmerich, believed they merged with God and became God or Jesus. None of the Bible greats ever believed they fused with God and co-mingled identities. Scripture strongly maintains the creature-Creator distinction.

Darling’s claim that her mother saw a “ball of light,” which she identified as “the light of Christ” (pg. 11), is not convincing. Satan himself can appear as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Campolo totally distorts the Scripture when he claims that the parable of the soils in Matthew 13 is all about mystical experiences (pg. 13). He does the same with Philippians 3:10-11 and claims we can really be “deeply connected to Christ through mystical experiences” (pp. 13-14). A better way would be to get to know Him through the pages of Scripture, because our feelings and emotions can be faulty and misleading.

Campolo’s strange ideas about “witnessing” are attributed to Frank Laubach. Very few probably have ever heard of Laubach, but he is known for his stint in the

Philippines where he labored doing literacy work in the 1920s. According to Campolo, Laubach suggested praying to a person and not just for them. He writes:

“Laubach proposes that a person who is resisting God might be open to the spiritual impact of a Christian concentrating God’s power on him or her. ... Call it a kind of mental telepathy, but what Laubach is suggesting is that the Holy Spirit flowing into a Christian, as a result of prayer, can stir up spiritual energy ... You focus all your psychic energies on her, nonverbally pleading with her to decide for Christ right there and then. Now consider what might happen if this psychic communication could be heightened” (pg. 35).

When we pray for someone, it is certainly a mystery as to what God does and how He does it. To try to explain it and reframe it in an occult fashion, as our psychic energy and mental telepathy, is way off the mark. There is nothing in the entire Bible to suggest Campolo’s view. The moving and changing of a heart is the domain of the Holy Spirit and not dependent on our psychic abilities. The way in which our compassion and prayer will be used of God is unknown to us and not delineated in Scripture. We are to pray as commanded, but the results and outcomes are up to God. Some sow and others water while God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

What Campolo is describing, a type of psychic witnessing or telepathic evangelism which creates responses in others, is actually a form of a paranormal and occultic technique called psychokinesis (PK).

Advocates of PK claim they can significantly affect everything by using their mind. It is “the apparent ability of a person (or other organism) to influence the environment without using any of the known conventional means such as muscular action. The term is compounded of the Greek roots *psyche* (‘mind’ or ‘soul’) and *kinesis* (‘movement’). Thus, it implies that the mind is acting directly on the external world; hence the popular phrase for PK — ‘mind over matter.’ ... PK has been offered as an explanation for many unusual experiences that are traditionally viewed as either miracles or the action of spirits” (Leonard George, *Alternative Realities*, pg. 234).

Campolo and Darling’s book might make it with adherents of the emerging church movement and possibly even among Roman Catholics. The expressed desire to crawl back into the Dark Ages to emulate so-called saints will not appeal to Bereans who take their Bible seriously. The appeal to occult techniques of witnessing and mystical legalistic rituals and practices is repugnant to those who know the liberty of Christ and grace. This book is really not about a deeper spirituality, but about retrogression into unbiblical bondage and untrustworthy emotions.

—GRF