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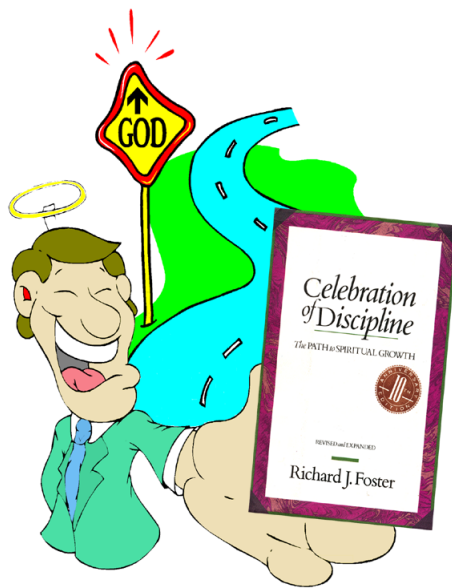
The Lure of Mysticism

A Path to Spiritual Growth or Road to Deception?

by Gary E. Gilley

While we ponder what will be evangelical Christianity's next major challenge, we would do well to consider trends that have changed its face in the last 20 years. The legacy of movements such as the market-driven church and "Purpose Driven Life" campaigns will not be the discovery of new methods of worship, but the undermining of scriptural authority. These movements did not instigate this lack of confidence in God's Word, but they have capitalized on it and advanced it. The authority for what the Church now believes has shifted from Scripture to psychological and sociological experts, public opinion, current fads, and pragmatism.

This shift has been subtle. This has made it all the more dangerous. Few have bothered to deny the Bible itself. They just misquote it, abuse its meaning, force their opinion on it, and, if necessary, mistranslate it to give the appearance that the Scriptures support their claims. The effect is to erode the authority of God's Word and to give the appearance that what Scripture has to say isn't important. It is a short step from here to a Church



that has little use for Scripture. If the trend of people coming to church

services without their Bibles, sermons being reduced to PowerPoint presentations, and sermon note-taking devolving into fill-in-the-blank outlines is any indication, we may be there now.

Such Christianity is devoid of the majesty of God and the wonder of His Word. True believers will grow tired of this insipid evangelicalism with its "seven-eleven" choruses, dramatizations, dumbed-down Bible teaching, fad theologies, and "me-centrism." Some will come back to the Word and to churches that faithfully proclaim it. Some will head to Roman Catholicism and the Orthodox churches for more liturgical, traditional, and authoritative expressions. Others will write off the faith and say it doesn't work.

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Editorials

THE PRAGMATIC THEOLOGY OF JOYCE MEYER

Life appears to be a series of ups and downs for televangelist Joyce Meyer — with the scale tipping to the “up” side. As Meyer recently said her life is “better.” On the negative, her hometown newspaper has dogged her for a number of months with unfavorable reports, exposing her own lifestyle and use of ministry funds to underwrite perks for herself and family members. On the positive, this same publication apologized for what it deemed was imprecision in some of its reports. (See accompanying news update in this issue.)

Additionally, Meyer was selected as one of “The 50 most influential Christians in America” by *The Church Report*, a magazine for church business administrators and parachurch executives. Meyer then gained even more prominence when, last February, she made it onto *Time* magazine’s cover story list of “The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America” (Feb. 7, 2005). That distinction, coupled with the release of a new book, *Approval Addiction*, garnered for Meyer guest appearances on a variety of broadcasts including *Good Morning America* and *Larry King Live*.

The irony, however, in *Time* bestowing such a lofty recognition upon Meyer is that by her own admission,

she’s uncertain as to exactly what an “evangelical” is. During the Larry King broadcast, King asked Meyer, “What by definition is evangelical?” Meyer chuckled as she responded, “Actually, I looked up the definition this morning because I thought you might ask me,” and then provided for King and his audience the dictionary’s definition. As King pressed her as to whether evangelicals are engaged in proselytizing, she hedged with, “You know what, I’m really not sure what everybody else thinks it means. You know, everybody is always wanting to know what you are, and what you are, and what you are, and I’m just somebody that’s had a rough life, [who’s] trying to help people.”

Despite her claim that she “believes the Bible,” Meyer’s admission to King is indicative of her pragmatic, rather than evangelical, theology.

One example of this, which for the most part has gone unnoticed, was the September 2003 change of the legal name of her ministry from “Life in the Word, Inc.,” to “Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc.” Previously, her ministry’s media endeavors bore the former ministry title, *Life in the Word*. More recently, these have been renamed to *Enjoying Everyday Life*. While this new identification is perhaps more in tune with her mission, it is a step backward in presenting an evangelical front. As one apologist said: “It looks like she’s outgrown, or is distancing herself from ‘the Word’ — in more ways than one. I guess this allows her to broaden her audience.

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TROUBLE FOR HINN AT HOME AND ABROAD

Benny Hinn, whose faith-healing operation seems unsinkable no matter how much bad press he gets, recently experienced a bit of misfortune — both in the United States and abroad.

In late April, Hinn and his entourage headed for a three-day healing crusade in Nigeria, Africa. “But things did not go well,” according to a news article by the *BBC News*.

Crowds estimated at 300,000 people attended Hinn’s crusade each evening. However, while the attendance figures may seem lofty, it was said to be low by Nigerian standards for such meetings. For example, monthly services of the Holy Ghost Congress, hosted by The Redeemed Christian Church of God, at the same location, are attended by nearly 1 million people. Hinn said he was told by the Nigerian officials helping to organize the event that at least 6 million would attend.

With crowds a fraction of what was expected, Hinn kept his composure during the first two days of the meetings, the *BBC News* reported. However, that turned to “anger on the final day.” “Four million dollars down the drain,” he shouted into the microphone from the huge rostrum,” the news service reported. Extensive sound equipment to serve the promised crowds had been flown in from the United States, but was not needed because of the nominal attendance.

The BBC also reported that Hinn “announced publicly that he would not provide any more funds, and that the local organisers should pay all outstanding bills from the collections they made on the first two days.”

Bishop Joseph Olanrewaju Obembe, who was in charge of the committee that brought Hinn to Nigeria, blamed other Pentecostal ministers in his country for undermining the crusade by discrediting Hinn through the spreading of false information about him. Obembe contended the ministers acted out of envy of Hinn.

Meanwhile, back on Hinn’s home turf, *The Dallas Morning News* has reported that the “Internal Revenue Service is looking into the operations and finances” of Hinn’s organization. While the IRS refused comment, a representative for Hinn’s ministry confirmed the investigation to the Dallas newspaper.

Both the Dallas-based Trinity Foundation and Wall Watchers of North Carolina, two ministries that monitor the fiscal activities of religious superstars, have urged the

IRS to investigate Hinn and his ministry. According to the Trinity Foundation, it retrieved a document listing the salaries of ministry officials outside a Hinn-related office. The recovered report is said to list Hinn’s “annual earnings as \$1.325 million.” Attorneys for Hinn told the *Morning News* that “the document was either a fake or had been stolen” — a paradoxical explanation in and of itself.

According to the Dallas newspaper, Hinn and his attorneys maintain that the ministry “uses proper accounting,” but declined an interview for the report. Hinn’s ministry’s annual income is estimated at more than \$100 million.

—MKG

SOME DEEM ST. LOUIS NEWSPAPER APOLOGY TO MEYER UNWARRANTED

Televangelist Joyce Meyer received a measure of relief from the St. Louis newspaper that had published articles about her ministry and lifestyle. On June 19, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* printed on page 2 of its Sunday edition a 577-word apology to its readers stating, “Stories that ran in the newspaper May 1 and April 18 about Joyce Meyer Ministries contained errors.” The editor’s note further said, “These two articles did not meet our standards for fairness and accuracy” and contained “journalistic transgressions.”

Meyer’s ministry had given the *Post-Dispatch* a list of 20 alleged errors. The newspaper’s editors conceded on eight of the complaints. Ministry officials said they were satisfied with the published correction and apology.

Arnie Robbins, the newspaper’s managing editor, said the factual errors were “isolated” to just the recent stories, and did not include any of the previous reports of Meyer’s financial exploits. “We stand by reporting done in a four-part series on the ministry published in November 2003,” the apology affirmed. Yet despite the fact that the “inaccuracies” were confined to the recent smaller, subsequent reports, the apology did say, “The *Post-Dispatch* is taking corrective action to address the professional failures that led to these errors.”

Carolyn Tuft, the reporter responsible for the two articles, was suspended for five days, according to an article by Joe Strupp which appeared in *Editor &*

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Blessed Among Women...

Examining the Mystique of Mary in Light of the Scriptures

by J. Greg Sheryl



While the issues of justification and authority are the key points of disagreement between Roman Catholicism and the evangelical/fundamentalist schools of Christianity, another clear doctrinal division lies in the person of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The biblical Mary and the Mary of Roman Catholicism are two entirely different characters.

Not every Roman Catholic embraces every Roman Catholic teaching and not every Catholic is aware of all the erroneous doctrines and dogmas the Roman Catholic Church officially teaches.¹ God loves Roman Catholics. They, too, either need Christ, or else already have Him as their Savior. By contrast, however, there is much in the system of Roman Catholicism that is offensive, abhorrent, and even hateful to God, because it is opposed to the Scriptures.

Mike Gendron, who has a ministry to Roman Catholics, and who calls himself "a former devout Roman Catholic for 37 years," wrote in his tract *Roman Catholicism: Scripture vs. Tradition*:

"It is important to realize that most of the clergy and lay people that teach Roman Catholic doctrine are not deceiving people with malicious intent. They are simply passing on what has been taught to them, believing that it is the truth."²

Catholic author, apologist, and priest Peter Stravinskis has written:

"The relationship between Catholics and Mary mystifies so many non-Catholic Christians, and we are equally mystified by their strange silence about her — a silence that is awkward and uncomfortable, a silence that is broken only once a year at Christmastime because ancient carols force believers to acknowledge and sing of the Virgin who became the Mother of the Messiah."³

Stravinskis is not alone in noting non-Catholics' difficulties with Marian beliefs and devotions. Karl Keating, another Catholic apologist, wrote:

"The Marian doctrines are, for fundamentalists, among the most annoying of the doctrines people identify as peculiarly Catholic. ...they see these beliefs as interfering with, even canceling, the proper attitude toward Christ."⁴

At least one Catholic apologist has called a critique on Catholic beliefs and devotions related to Mary an attack on the Lord's mother herself, as can be seen from the title of his book written in response to that critique. The book is entitled *Refuting the Attack on Mary*.⁵

A more sympathetic view is expressed by Catholic apologist Scott

Hahn in relating his conversion to Roman Catholicism. Hahn wrote:

"Someone mailed me a plastic Rosary.⁶ As I looked at those beads, I felt I was confronting the toughest obstacle of all: Mary. (Catholics have no idea how hard Marian doctrines and devotions are for Bible Christians.)"⁷

Evangelical/fundamentalist Christians are not opposed to our Lord's earthly mother, whom the Scriptures call "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42). Certainly, this woman of unparalleled blessing, privilege, joy, and heartbreak, is indeed blessed of God, and worthy to be counted blessed throughout all generations, as she herself predicted would be done toward her (Luke 1:48).

And non-Catholics must admit that we have not all regarded her with as much honor and respect as is her due. And possibly some, in reaction to what they perceive as idolatry on the part of those who seem to bestow upon her undue honor, may have gone in the opposite direction, and considered Mary unworthy of *any* honor, charging those who honor her in any way with "Mariolatry."

However, there exists and flourishes within the ranks of Roman Catholicism a devotion to Mary that is factually unfounded, superstitious, and, in some cases, idolatrous.

Indeed, one author has probably spoken for many when he wrote:

“It is difficult to deal with this heresy of Rome without seeming to detract from that blessed woman who was chosen of God to be the mother of our Lord. Far be it from me to speak one derogatory word concerning her, but the excesses of adulation indulged in by the Roman church demand an answer from Scripture. We are jealous for our Lord, ‘that in all things he might have the preeminence,’ and when we see a system which professes to be Christian setting up a rival to share the honor and the glory due to Christ alone, we must protest, however beautiful in character, exalted in office, or blessed in ministry that rival may be.”⁸

ROMAN CATHOLIC BELIEFS ABOUT MARY

The Roman Catholic Church has declared as divinely revealed truth certain things regarding Mary that are not revealed in the Scriptures. These dogmas about Mary include the Immaculate Conception, which is the teaching that she was conceived without the stain of original sin, with which all other people except Jesus are born. They further teach that she lived her entire life without sin. The Scriptures teach no such doctrines explicitly, and the Immaculate Conception of Mary was only officially proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church to be a revealed truth of the faith in 1854 (by Pope Pius IX, under whose papacy the dogma of papal infallibility was proclaimed some 16 years later).

Another dogma recently proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church (by Pope Pius XII in 1950) is the Assumption of Mary. Rome teaches that after her life on earth, Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven.

In 1997, the news media reported the possibility that Mary would be declared “Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God.” The cover story of the Aug. 25, 1997, issue of *Newsweek*

magazine was devoted to the possibility of this future proclamation by Rome. The article described the implications of granting her such a title:

“If the drive succeeds, Catholics would be obliged as a matter of faith to accept three extraordinary doctrines: that Mary participates in the redemption achieved by her son, that all graces that flow from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ are granted only through Mary’s intercession with her son, and that all prayers and petitions from the faithful on earth must likewise flow through Mary, who then brings them to the attention of Jesus. This is what theologians call high Mariology, and it seems to contradict the basic New Testament belief that ‘there is one God and one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus’ (1 Timothy 2:5).”⁹

This story was also covered in the Religion section of *The Dallas Morning News*, which stated:

“Yet the repercussions of such a title for Mary would be felt well beyond the Catholic Church. Already, Protestant and Orthodox theologians have sounded ominous warnings that such a move by the pope would have dire consequences on ecumenical relations.”¹⁰

Roman Catholic priest and apologist Peter Stravinskis explains the church’s position on developing dogmas nowhere explicitly taught by the Scriptures:

“Simply because a teaching is not explicitly taught in the Bible does not mean it is untrue or that it is not there implicitly, waiting to be uncovered by the Church’s reflection on God’s Word. It is necessary to recall also that the [Roman Catholic] Church does not feel bound to the dictum of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), because we believe that God has revealed Himself to us through both Scripture and Tradition.”¹¹

Elliot Miller, of the Christian Research Institute, further explains:

“The actual basis for the doctrine of the assumption is a form of logic often employed in Catholic theology (it is also appealed to in support of the immaculate conception), and described thus: *Potuit, deuit, fecit*. God can do all things. It is proper that it should be so (e.g., that Mary should be assumed). Therefore God did it. This theological approach was illustrated by Pius XII when, in defense of his decision to define the belief as dogma, he affirmed: ‘Since it was within his [Christ’s] power to grant her this great honour, to preserve her from the corruption of the tomb, *we must believe, [sic]* that he really acted in this way.’”¹²

Miller then observes:

“While God certainly will do what is proper, theologians who take this approach to doctrine overlook the fact that they assume *a priori* that they know what is proper to God. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us that God’s thoughts and ways are not the thoughts and ways of man.”¹³

By employing theological methods such as these, Rome leaves the door open for many unbiblical doctrines and dogmas to infiltrate the Catholic Church, including the above-mentioned dogmas of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Assumption of Mary (body and soul) into heaven and, if so proclaimed, the Co-Redemptrix role of Mary.

Some evangelicals have charged Rome with borrowing their beliefs about Mary and their devotion to her from paganism, and trying to adapt them to the Christian faith. Theologian Karl Barth, however, discourages us from using this form of argument:

“It is not to be recommended that we should base our repudiation on the assertion that there has taken place here an irruption from the heathen sphere, an adoption of the idea, current in many non-Christian religions, of a more or less central and original female or mother deity. In dogmatics you can establish

everything and nothing with parallels from the history of religions."¹⁴

Barth continues:

"The assertion may be ever so correct in itself: but leave your Catholic opponent at peace in this respect. Such an assertion cannot possibly be a statement of Evangelical belief. It cannot, therefore, be a serious question for Catholicism. We reject Mariology, (1) because it is an arbitrary innovation in the face of Scripture and the early Church, and (2) because this innovation consists essentially in a falsification of Christian truth."¹⁵

Barth further suggests:

"Marian dogma is neither more nor less than the critical, central dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, the dogma from the standpoint of which all their important positions are to be regarded and by which they stand or fall."¹⁶

And:

"In the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest. The 'mother of God' of Roman Catholic Marian dogma is quite simply the principle, type and essence of the human creature co-operating servantlike (*ministerialiter*) in its own redemption on the basis of prevenient grace¹⁷, and to that extent the principle, type and essence of the Church."¹⁸

ROMAN CATHOLIC SOURCES

It is amazing to Bible-believing Christians that the Scriptures say so little about Mary, when the Catholic Church teaches so much about her and makes such extravagant claims for her. The sparse scriptural data on the Lord's mother stands in marked contrast to the amazingly detailed and larger-than-life Mary of Roman Catholicism, who seems to grow larger and more exalted as time goes on.

As one reads Catholic perspectives

on Mary and the praises and prayers offered to her, one almost imagines that they must be missing some pages or books from their own Bible. This is closer to the truth than one might think. Catholicism seems largely unconcerned by the contrast between its teachings about her and the restraint and paucity of the scriptural record.

Much of the Roman Catholic view of Mary is based on church tradition and legends found in books that were not included in the New Testament. Two such rejected books are *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary* and a book called *The Protevangelion*.¹⁹

In both *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary* and *The Protevangelion*, we learn the supposed names of Mary's mother and father, Anne and Joachim. Both of these works say Mary grew up in the Temple. Neither of these details comes from the New Testament.

In addition to an embellished account of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus that is included in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, former PFO director Edgar L. Havaich notes that these pseudo gospels contain all sorts of fantastic miraculous events associated with the life of Mary prior to her conception of Jesus. Havaich reveals:

"And *The Protevangelion* 8:2 says, 'But Mary continued in the temple..., and received her food from the hand of an angel.' There is little wonder why the Church rejected these two books."²⁰

Father Oscar Lukefahr, a Catholic priest, states regarding some of the works that were excluded from the New Testament:

"...others, like the *Protevangelium of James*,²¹ were a mixture of authentic traditions, legend, and popular piety. This last category contains a number of works which relate to Mary in one way or another. The *Protevangelium of James* was the first and most important. Written by an unknown author about A.D. 150, it relates many stories about Mary that have influenced art and literature ever since. According to

the *Protevangelium*, Mary was born to aged parents, Joachim and Ann, who were of David's family. She was presented in the Temple at three years of age. As a young woman, she was engaged to Joseph, an elderly widower with children (the 'brothers and sisters of Jesus'),²² after a miraculous sign indicated that he was favored by God. Jesus was born in a cave outside Bethlehem, and a midwife testified to Mary's virginity when she was accused of infidelity in giving birth to Jesus."²³

Lukefahr then writes:

"Many of the other apocryphal works about Mary and the hidden years at Nazareth depend on the *Protevangelium* as a source, ... Other apocryphal literature expands upon the information given about Mary after Jesus began his public ministry. The fourth-century work, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, adds details to Gospel accounts of the Passion of Jesus, including Mary's meeting Jesus as he carried the cross to Calvary and Veronica's wiping the face of Jesus. These accounts were the background for the fourth and sixth Stations of the Cross.²⁴ Several third- and fourth-century writings tell of the Assumption of Mary. They are not historical works, but they do show the belief of early Christians in the Assumption. Scattered through all the apocryphal writings are testimonies to the belief of early Christians in the intercessory power of Mary and in the importance of her role in God's plan for our salvation."²⁵

Thus, we see that the apparent source for certain Roman Catholic beliefs and traditions about Mary can be traced to these apocryphal works, which were excluded from the New Testament canon. Despite their exclusion from both Catholic and non-Catholic Bibles, some of the features in these books became part of Roman Catholic beliefs about her.

Regardless of the sources of Roman Catholic beliefs about Mary, sociology

professor Michael P. Carroll has noted:

"...there is little or no evidence that anything like the Mary cult existed during the first four centuries of the Christian Church."²⁶

Carroll further observes,

"Whatever the impetus, there is no doubt that popular devotion to Mary did increase in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries."²⁷

Noting "the relatively sudden appearance of a well documented Mary cult in the fifth century," he also states:

"Generally, it appears that from the latter part of the fifth century onward there was a steady increase in the development of the Mary cult that reached its apogee, in the opinion of most commentators, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries."²⁸

AN ILLUSTRATION: MARY AND POPE JOHN PAUL II

As an example of the attitude of Roman Catholicism toward Mary, consider these examples from the life of the late Pope John Paul II. On May 13, 1981, an attempt was made on his life. A year later, the pope went to Fatima, Portugal, and told a large crowd there:

"I come here today because on this very day last year, in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, the attempt on the Pope's life was made, in mysterious coincidence with the anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima, which occurred on May 13, 1917."²⁹

According to the pope, the plan to visit this site on the anniversary of the assassination attempt was "to place in the heart of the heavenly Mother my thanks for having saved me from danger. I saw in everything that was happening — I never tire of repeating it — a special motherly protection of our Lady."³⁰

Author and former Roman Catholic James G. McCarthy also writes that the pope went to Fatima on the one-year anniversary of the assassination attempt to consecrate to Mary the

entire human race. McCarthy records the pontiff's words:

"In entrusting to you, O Mother, the world, all individuals and peoples, we also entrust to you the consecration itself, for the world's sake, placing it in your motherly Heart. ... Accept, O Mother of Christ, this cry."³¹

Another source states that this same pope's "lifelong devotion to Mary is expressed by his blue and white shield bearing the letter *M*, and by his motto, *Totus Tuus sum Maria* (Latin for 'Mary, I am all yours')."³²

Additionally, an April 1996 article in *Christianity Today* reported this from Pope John Paul II while visiting Latin America:

"All those who have at some time prayed to the Most Holy Virgin, even though they may have strayed from the Catholic church, conserve in their hearts an ember of faith which can be revived," he said. "The Virgin awaits them with maternal arms open wide."³³

This same article also said:

"Virgilio Zapata, former president of the Latin American Evangelical Confraternity, says, 'He ended every speech by exalting Mary.'³⁴

The article added:

"The pope's two major activities in Guatemala involved a mass celebrating the 400-year jubilee of the Black Christ of Esquipulas and a ceremony in which he crowned an image of the Virgin of the Assumption, patron saint of Guatemala City."³⁵

A further illustration of Pope John Paul II's attitude toward Mary can be found in his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, delivered on March 25, 1995. He concludes this encyclical with a prayer to Mary, which begins:

"O Mary, bright dawn of the new world, Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the *cause of life*."³⁶

James McCarthy states:

"Pope John Paul II's devotion to Mary is representative of a growing worldwide movement among Roman Catholics. It began in 1830 with what has become the first of a series of alleged appearances of Mary in various parts of the world, most notably Europe."³⁷

AVOIDING CHARGES OF IDOLATRY

There appears to have arisen a heresy in the early Church associated with the mother of Jesus. For instance, Church historian J.N.D. Kelly writes:

"...Epiphanius, writing in the 370s, describes a sect, the Collyridians, who celebrated a form of worship in connection with her. He was at pains to refute such heretical practices, protesting like other orthodox writers that, while Mary was beautiful, holy and deserving of great honour, worship should be confined to Almighty God alone; but the existence of the sect, and the vehemence of his denunciation, suggest that this was no isolated phenomenon. Nestorius's remark, half a century later, that he had no objection to people calling the Blessed Virgin *Theotokos* [i.e., God-bearer] provided they did not treat her as a goddess can also be taken as implying a tendency in some circles to do precisely that."³⁸

Rome acknowledges that idolatry is sinful. Rome also denies that it explicitly teaches worship of Mary and the saints. Dr. Erwin Lutzer, senior pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, explains:

"To avoid the charge of idolatry, the Roman church has distinguished three kinds of honor or worship. *Latria* is the supreme worship that is given to God alone; *dulia* is a secondary kind of veneration given to saints and angels; and *hyperdulia* is a higher kind of veneration given to the Virgin Mary."³⁹

However, Lutzer explains the difficulties with this view:

“These distinctions, however, are not always recognized by the common worshiper. Since Mary is given praise, and is thought of as having the attributes of deity, it is difficult to keep these three forms of worship in proper perspective. The practice, if not the theory, fosters idolatry.”⁴⁰

Elliot Miller agrees, saying:

“While in theory these categories [of *latría*, *dulia*, and *hyperdulia*] are intended to prevent idolatrous worship of created beings, in practice they have little effect on the religious feelings of the masses. How could *feelings* be subject to such subtle rational distinctions? The fact is that Mary is, and for centuries has been, worshiped by millions all over the world, especially in the Latin countries, and the church has done very little to discourage it.”⁴¹

A second rationalization sometimes used in defense of Marian devotion is to point out that statues are erected to heroic historical figures. The comparison between statues of historical figures and statues and images of Mary quickly fades, however, once we see the excessive devotion and homage paid before statues of Mary, compared to the thoughtful yet impersonal admiration of a passerby towards, say, the Lincoln Memorial. In the latter case, we would think it strange if someone were to kneel and pray in front of a statue of President Lincoln, or even a statue of a famous religious figure, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, or Billy Graham, or even a pope.

In reply to the charge of “Catholics worship statues,” Lukefahr has responded:

“Catholics do not worship statues, and they do not worship saints. ... Catholics worship and adore God alone. Catholics do honor the saints as great followers of Jesus, and they do have statues of the saints.”⁴²

He also writes, “But we do not pray to statues but to the saints they

represent. Statues help us remember the saints.”⁴³

However, as Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul has said, “When you see people bowing down before statues, that is of the essence of worship; the very act of obeisance itself is an act of worship.”⁴⁴

There are also problems with the explanation sometimes offered that Catholics are not actually “worshiping the statue,” but that devotion rendered to the image passes to the person represented by the image.

A third way Rome seeks to avoid the charge of idolatry is by comparing prayers to Mary or the saints with asking a friend here on earth to pray for us. Some might also add that because Mary is Jesus’ mother, her prayers would have more influence on Him than our prayers would. There are several problems with these explanations, however.

First, nowhere in the Scriptures are we told to pray to those who have departed from this earthly life. Second, the Bible never says prayers ought to be offered to Mary or to any of the other saints. Third, offering prayers to Mary assumes that she is omnipresent and omniscient — she would have to be, if she were to hear all the prayers being offered to her throughout the world — although nowhere do the Scriptures even suggest such a thing.

Additionally, the words that some Catholics address to Mary go far beyond a simple request to pray for us, as some of the above examples demonstrate. Some prayers to Mary seem appropriately addressed only to God, for example, the excerpts from the prayers cited above offered by Pope John Paul II to Mary (specifically, “We... entrust to you the consecration itself for the world’s sake, placing it in your motherly Heart. ... Accept, O Mother of Christ, this cry,” or “Mother of the living, to you do we entrust the cause of life.”). If any further examples of idolatrous Catholic devotion to Mary are needed, here are two additional ones. The first is taken from a Catholic-approved booklet describing a Catholic lay group

called the Legion of Mary. In describing the ideal toward which a member of this group should aspire, the author states:

“He is never satisfied that he has studied her sufficiently, never content that in his prayer he has penetrated to the farthest recess of her perfect soul. No prayer or work of the spiritual life is bereft of some little thought of Her: all is done in the spirit of dependence on Her. He is so filled with the idea and the spirit of Mary that complete union exists between his soul and Hers. They are, in practice, but one soul. The Legionary strives to lose himself in Mary.”⁴⁵

A final example of this idolatrous devotion is exemplified by an optional practice by some individual Catholics, known as a “consecration to Mary.” The late eminent Jesuit theologian and scholar Dr. John Hardon defines this practice as:

“An act of devotion, ... that consists of the entire gift of self to Jesus through Mary. It is, moreover, a habitual attitude of complete dependence on Mary in one’s whole life and activity. In making the act of consecration, a person gives himself or herself to Mary and through her to Jesus as her slave.”⁴⁶

The act of consecration reads:

“I, [Name], faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in your hands the vows of my baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works; and I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have ever been before. In the presence of all the heavenly court I choose you this day for my mother and queen. I deliver and consecrate to you, as your slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present, and future; leaving to you the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that belongs to me,

without exception, according to your good pleasure, for the greater glory of God, in time and in eternity. Amen."⁴⁷

These kinds of Catholic citations about (and to) Mary could be greatly multiplied.⁴⁸

A fourth way that some Catholics seek to escape the charge of idolatry in relation to their devotion to and "veneration" of Mary is to make the countercharge that conservative, evangelical Christians are guilty of bibliolatry (i.e., making the Scriptures themselves an idol). While some evangelicals may at times be guilty of such a charge, probably most do not offer prayers or worship to the Scriptures themselves, as some Catholics do toward the mother of Jesus. However, even if the countercharge against evangelicals were true, it would not thereby excuse their own idolatry.

BLASPHEMY?

A scholarly Catholic apologist once suggested that *devotional language* used toward or about Mary should not be confused with Catholic *doctrine* about Mary; he went on to say that, if someone were to find a person's love letters and read them, he might think that the person was insane!⁴⁹

Although he makes a good point regarding a person's love letters, we must also say that, according to Catholic teaching, Mary is the *mother* of Christians, not their *sweetheart*. In light of that, it is difficult to imagine that a person would use the sort of devotional language toward their earthly mother as that which has been addressed to Mary.

Similarly, Catholicism views and speaks of Mary as "the new Eve." Even though Scripture nowhere makes an analogy between Mary and Eve, there are some similarities and contrasts between Eve in the Old Testament and Mary in the New Testament: They were both women in the Bible who played very critical roles. Eve was related to the first man (Adam), and Mary gave birth to the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). The Roman Catholic Church would also claim that both women were created sinless; but that Eve, of course,

sinned; whereas Mary, they say, never sinned. By way of contrast, Eve committed the first sin; whereas Mary gave birth to the One Who took away sin, and so forth.

So we see that there are, indeed, some analogies that can be drawn between Eve and Mary. However, this analogy should not be pressed as far as the Catholic Church has done. For instance, Eve was Adam's *wife*, while Mary was Jesus' *mother*. While the difference should be obvious to all, this author has never seen it discussed by Catholic authors. At times, Catholic authors have portrayed Christ's role with Mary almost like a spousal relationship.

Some of the language the Catholic Church has used concerning Mary seems blasphemous. Consider the 16th-17th century St. Louis Marie de Montfort. Pope Pius XII, an ardent devotee of Mary, canonized Louis Marie de Montfort (i.e., declared him a saint) in July 1947. Louis Marie de Montfort even has a feast day in the Catholic Church (April 28th). And de Montfort's book, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*,⁵⁰ contains a *Nihil obstat*, an *Imprimatur*, and an *Imprimi Potest*, indications that the Catholic Church has reviewed this book, found nothing in it contrary to Catholic faith or morals, and has approved its publication. Yet in this book, de Montfort repeatedly refers to Mary as "the spouse of the Holy Spirit" or the "faithful spouse" of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹ He is certainly not alone among Catholics in referring to her in this way.⁵² Whether this is poetic, devotional language or not, one cannot but regard this as blasphemy.

Dallas Seminary professor of theology Dr. John Scott Horrell has written:

"The Roman Catholic Cathedral at JFK Airport in NYC has a massive mosaic of Mary with a symbol of the Trinity in her hands."⁵³

Theologian R.C. Sproul stated:

"We would go to the Vatican, and we would see a very outstanding fresco there that features the Madonna high and

exalted on the wall with Christ and the Father seated on either side of the Madonna."⁵⁴

Also, in some Catholic sources, it has been stated that as Christ is the head of His Body (the Church), Mary is the neck. Lutzer, citing a Catholic author, writes:

"Pope Leo the XIII decreed that 'nothing according to the will of God, comes to us except through Mary, so that, as nobody can approach the Supreme Father except through the Son, similarly nobody can approach Christ except through the Mother.'"⁵⁵

Nowhere do the Scriptures support such a statement. Jesus never suggested that a person could only approach Him through Mary. He never even referred anyone who sought Him to go through His mother instead. This in itself should demonstrate the fallacy of Rome's beliefs about Mary. In fact, there are only a relatively few clear passages in the New Testament mentioning or referring to the mother of Jesus, and some of these references are parallel accounts in the Gospels of the same incident. Douglas Connelly writes:

"If Mary was to be such a key part of the liturgy and devotion of [the] Christian, why are the Scriptures silent about it? Apart from the historical references in the Gospels and Acts, the New Testament is silent about Mary. In all the letters of Paul instructing the church on doctrine and obedience to God, Mary is referred to only once and never by name. In Galatians 4:4 Paul says that Jesus was 'born of a woman, born under law.'"⁵⁶

Similarly, sociology professor Michael Carroll notes:

"Mary, after all, is mentioned in only about a dozen passages, and usually only in passing. The Gospel of Mark, for instance, which is generally taken to be the earliest of the four Gospels, mentions her only once (Mark 6:3), and the Acts of the Apostles, our earliest record of the early Church, also

mentions her only once (Acts 1:14).⁵⁷

The Scriptures do not exhort us to look to Mary as we run the race of life; rather, they exhort us to look to “Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2) and to “consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself” (v. 3).

Our primary focus is to be Jesus, not Mary. And when Jesus taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, He said, “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name’” (Matthew 6:9; cf. Luke 11:1-2).

Jesus taught us to address our prayers to the Father; He never suggested that we should pray to Mary or to one of the saints, as Catholicism teaches.

The challenge to Catholicism is this: Look at how Christ treated Mary in the relatively few accounts of their interactions in the Gospels and then compare His treatment of her with Roman Catholic devotion toward her.

THE WOMAN OF REVELATION 12?

Roman Catholicism, at times, identifies “the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” in Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17 as Mary. While the reader of this passage will note some similarities between Mary and the woman in Revelation 12 (such as the child given birth to by the woman in Revelation 12, doubtless being the Lord Jesus), there are also some significant differences between some of what is ascribed to that woman and what is known about Mary, as a reader of the passage will note.

In fact, a study note in a contemporary Catholic translation of the Bible, the *New American Bible*, disagrees with this popular interpretation, stating instead:

“The woman adorned with the sun, the moon, and the stars (images taken from Gn 37, 9-10) symbolizes God’s people in the Old and the New Testament. The Israel of old gave birth to the

Messiah ([vs.] 5) and then became the new Israel, the church, which suffers persecution by the dragon.”⁵⁸

Likewise, a study note on Revelation 12:1-6 in the Ignatius Press Catholic Edition of the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible states:

“The *child* brought forth is the Messiah; the *dragon* is the devil; the *woman* who gave birth to the Messiah is Israel, and then becomes the Christian church, which continually gives birth to the faithful.”⁵⁹

Roman Catholicism clearly teaches that Mary is the Queen of Heaven. But when the mother of Christ’s disciples, James and John, came to the Lord, and knelt before Him, requesting, “Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom” (Matthew 20:21), Jesus did not respond to her request by stating that He was unable to grant this request, because the place next to Him would be occupied by His mother Mary, the queen; rather, in His reply, Jesus said, “to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those [*note the plural!*] for whom it has been prepared by my Father” (Matthew 20:23).

DOES ROMAN CATHOLICISM FOSTER WORSHIP OF MARY?

Official Roman Catholic teaching forbids giving the kind of adoration to Mary and the saints that is due to God alone. But some Roman Catholics do worship Mary, thereby committing idolatry. It is apparent that the Roman Catholic Church circumvents its own rules by *renaming* the offensive activity. In this instance, they call worship of Mary “veneration” or “*hyperdulia*.” By the same token, they can claim that an annulment is not a divorce, when it has exactly the same practical effect on a couple.⁶⁰

While it is probably true that some Roman Catholics don’t intend to worship Mary, they do believe that they are pleasing the Lord with their devotion to her. Rome’s teachings and

the practices of some of her leaders set people up to worship Mary. Roman Catholicism is “in denial” about the idolatry involved in their excessive Marian devotion. These Catholics can’t admit their idolatry to themselves because they know that idolatry is sinful.⁶¹

In line with this, in his audio tape on the Roman Catholic view of Mary, R.C. Sproul stated, “I think, however, for all practical purposes, that I can say without fear of ever being proven wrong, that millions of Roman Catholic people in this world today worship Mary. And in doing so, believe that they are doing what the church is calling them to do.”⁶²

Erwin Lutzer makes these observations concerning the Catholic attitudes toward Mary:

“During the Middle Ages, when devotion to Mary reached its height, Christ was represented as a man of stern wrath, a strict judge who was waiting to sentence people to hell. Mary, on the other hand, was described as filled with love and mercy. As [Alphonsus] Ligouri [sic] says in his book [*The Glories of Mary*], if God is angry with a sinner and Mary takes him under her protection, ‘she withholds the avenging arm of her Son and saves him.’ Thus, in a pinch, Mary is preferred to Christ. After all, the reasoning goes, what son would refuse the request of his mother?”⁶³

Likewise, evangelical scholar Elliot Miller raises an interesting question when he says:

“Catholics have readily confessed that prayer to Mary, such as the rosary, is a great source of comfort to them. Why is it that so many Catholics feel more comfortable praying to Mary than to Christ?”⁶⁴

The late founder of the Christian Research Institute, Dr. Walter Martin, once wrote a book called *The Roman Catholic Church in History*, about which scholars Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon have this to say:

"In *The Roman Catholic Church in History*, Dr. Walter Martin outlined what he called the 'seven steps to deity' that, in the end, made Mary like a God. ... Dr. Martin refers to, 'Rome's systematic effort to raise Mary to Deity.' He also makes the following important comments: 'I have in my library hundreds of pamphlets, manuscripts and books all published with the official imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Church. In every one of them, language which is applied to God alone in Scripture is applied to the Virgin Mary. She is worshipped: she is given almost every title of Christ. Thus, they are subtly but systematically raising her to a place of equality with our Lord. ... Worship, prayers, shrines, and even altars in churches have been consecrated to her around the earth. The healing grottoes are seldom dedicated to Jesus of Nazareth, but to "Our Lady of Lourdes," "Our Lady St. Anne de Beaupre," "Our Lady of Fatima," etc. The statues which are seen in Roman Catholic homes are invariably of Mary. The largest niches in Roman Catholic churches are occupied by images of Mary. The preponderance of prayers are to Mary, and the "Hail, Mary" is repeated in the Rosary continually.'"⁶⁵

Ankerberg and Weldon then establish:

"Is it any surprise then that Martin concludes, 'This is indeed the elevation of a creature to Deity, and I plead with you to realize that we are dealing with one of the most dangerous teachings ever foisted upon the Christian church.'"⁶⁶

Roman Catholicism, whether it does so intentionally or not, exhibits a strong tendency to overshadow Christ with Mary. It contains within it a strong tendency to encourage people to both relate to, and also to seek from Mary a relationship with her that they should seek only from Jesus Christ; namely a relationship with Him Who is both Mary's and the believer's Lord.

The first devotee of Mary is found in the Scriptures themselves:

"...one of the women in the crowd raised her voice, and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed'" (Luke 11:27).

But note well our Lord's response to this adoration of His mother:

"On the contrary, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God, and observe it" (v. 28).

Would that we all, including Roman Catholics, heed these words of our Lord. As stated at the beginning of this article, the Virgin Mary of Roman Catholicism bears only surface resemblances to the Mary presented to us in the Bible. The Mary of Roman Catholicism is an embellished, divinized, and falsified distortion of the Mary presented to us in the pages of Holy Scripture.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM AS A SYSTEM

The Roman Catholic Church interposes Mary, the saints, and itself, between the individual and Christ. Rome, doubtless, would deny this charge. And while a person may certainly pray directly to Christ Himself in Roman Catholicism, within the system of Catholicism there is much distraction from the person of Christ, and so many diversions of the individual toward other things, such as the Catholic Church itself, the sacraments, indulgences, Mary, and the saints. Yet none of these things can save; Christ alone can save.

Christ said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

And again, "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. ... All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out'" (John 6:35, 37).

By distracting people from Christ personally and diverting their attention from the Savior, Rome misleads many by directing them from Him

who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-12) toward false hope and false light. People may find Christ through the work of various Christian churches, but Christ is certainly not limited to any church; and surely many have found Christ apart from any church or religious institution whatsoever. The Church, which is the Bride of Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-33), cannot save; Mary cannot save; it is Christ alone who saves. The Roman Catholic Church exalts itself as the dispenser of Christ and His salvation; by contrast, the Holy Spirit exalts the Savior (see John 16:14).

Finally, an important summary observation concerning Catholicism is made by Christian author James McCarthy:

"As you will see ... some of what Roman Catholicism teaches does have a sound biblical basis. Other Roman Catholic doctrines are clearly unscriptural."⁶⁷

Like many erroneous religious systems, not *everything* in Roman Catholicism is erroneous. Due largely to its Christian roots and its antiquity, it contains much true Christian doctrine and some elements of wisdom, which discerning students can profit and learn from.⁶⁸ The fact of its Christian roots and its antiquity partially helps to answer a question that McCarthy raises toward the end of his book, *The Gospel According to Rome* — a question that has been a great puzzle to me, as well, regarding Roman Catholicism:

"Yet, one might ask, how can so much error coexist alongside so much Christian truth?"⁶⁹

Could it not be argued that, like any person or sect who detours from the road of orthodoxy, it is because they have accepted as equally inspired and trustworthy other authorities in addition to the Scriptures? Sadly, the warning of the Apostle Paul to believers at Corinth might also accurately be applied to the contemporary Roman Catholic system: "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Endnotes:

1. R.C. Sproul writes, "At the grass roots

Rome is not as monolithic as she claims to be. Polls indicate, for example, that the majority of American Roman Catholic constituents disagree with the pope's ruling on artificial birth control. Individual clerics may be found, especially in the West, who unabashedly proffer belief in justification by faith alone." From "A Personal Word from R.C. Sproul," in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Protestants & Catholics: Do They Now Agree?* Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995, pg. 8.

2. Mike Gendron, *Roman Catholicism: Scripture vs. Tradition*. Plano, Texas: Proclaiming the Gospel, 1996, tract.

3. Peter M.J. Stravinskas, *The Catholic Response*. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2001, pg. 75.

4. Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians."* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, pg. 268.

5. Father Mateo, *Refuting the Attack on Mary: A Defense of Marian Doctrines*. San Diego: Catholic Answers, 1999. The back cover of the book states, "Father Mateo was the pen name of a Catholic priest who was an emeritus professor of New Testament Greek at a prominent university," and notes that he died in 1996.

6. A rosary is a form of Catholic devotion involving a string of beads, in which the person uses the beads, in part, to keep a count of the number of prayers they have recited.

7. Scott and Kimberly Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993, pg. 67.

8. J.C. Macaulay, *The Bible and the Roman Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1946, pg. 65.

9. Kenneth L. Woodward, "Hail, Mary," *Newsweek*, August 25, 1997, pg. 49.

10. Sean Horrigan, "Mary, Co-Redemptrix?," *The Dallas Morning News*, August 16, 1997, pg. 1G.

11. Peter M.J. Stravinskas, *The Catholic Church and the Bible*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996, pg. 114, italics in original.

12. Elliot Miller and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin: Catholic Mariology and the Apparitions of Mary*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992, pp. 38-39, italics in original.

13. *Ibid.*, pg. 39, italics in original. See also Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1995, pp. 306, 308-309. To see this Catholic theological principle of *potuit, decuit, fecit* in action, see, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, op. cit., pp. 274-275, 279.

14. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956, pg. 143.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Preventive grace is the grace that God must grant a person in order for the person to be able to turn to the Lord for salvation (i.e., justification). According to Catholic (and also at least some Arminian) theology, the person who receives God's preventive grace then makes a free choice to either accept or reject it.

18. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, op. cit., pg. 143, italic in original.

19. See further, Edgar L. Havaich, "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary: The Phenomenon of Bayside," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1990, pp. 1, 7-10. Note: *The Protevangelium* (or *The Protevangelion*) mentioned here should not be confused with a reference to Genesis 3:15 — which contains the first promise in the Bible of the Gospel which would later be more fully revealed — which is also called "the protevangelium" or "the proteo-evangelium," meaning literally, "first gospel."

20. *Ibid.*, pg. 8.

21. This appears to be the same work that Havaich cites above as *The Protevangelion*, despite the different spelling of the title.

22. This is one Roman Catholic view of the identity of New Testament references to the brothers and sisters of Jesus; probably the more usual Catholic view is that the brothers and sisters of Jesus referred to in the New Testament were actually not His half-siblings at all, but rather His cousins. A study note on Luke 8:19 in *The NIV Study Bible* contains this information, concerning that verse's mention of Jesus' brothers, "Various interpretations concerning their relationship to Jesus arose in the early church: They were sons of Joseph by a previous marriage (according to Epiphanius) or were cousins (said Jerome). The most natural conclusion (suggested by Helvidius) is that they were the sons of Joseph and Mary, younger half brothers of Jesus."

23. Oscar Lukefahr, *Christ's Mother and Ours: A Catholic Guide to Mary*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1998, pg. 112. (Originally published as *Morning Star*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1995). I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to know what Roman Catholics believe about Mary and why. Father Lukefahr is a very knowledgeable and kind Catholic educator, whom I am privileged to know. This book contains both an *Imprimatur* and an *Imprimi Potest*, indications that the Catholic Church has reviewed this book and has approved of its being printed.

24. The Stations of the Cross are a form of Catholic devotion in which a person meditates on artistic depictions of 14 events in Christ's life on the day of His crucifixion, from Pontius Pilate sentencing Christ to death, through Christ's death and burial. (Some of the scenes depicted in the 14

Stations of the Cross are not found in the Bible, but are based upon apocryphal writings and Catholic tradition.)

25. *Christ's Mother and Ours: A Catholic Guide to Mary*, op. cit., pg. 113.

26. Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986, pg. 4.

27. *Ibid.*, pg. 5.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Pope John Paul II cited in James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995, pg. 199.

30. Pope John Paul II cited in *ibid.*

31. Pope John Paul II cited in *ibid.*, pg. 200.

32. *The Cult of the Virgin*, op. cit., pg. 14, italics in original. Also see, Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast: The Roman Catholic Church and the Last Days*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1995, pg. 459.

33. Stephen R. Sywulka, "John Paul Woos Straying Flock," *Christianity Today*, April 8, 1996, pg. 94.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life* (also known as *Evangelium Vitae*). New York: Random House, Inc., 1995, pg. 188, italics in original; additionally, see pp. 182-188.

37. *The Gospel According to Rome*, op. cit., pg. 184. For more on Marian apparitions, see pp. 184-185 of this book. Also Miller and Samples' *The Cult of the Virgin*. Part 2 of this book deals with the phenomenon of past and present-day apparitions of Mary, with special attention given to the contemporary Marian apparitions in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia. For a Roman Catholic viewpoint on Marian apparitions, see chapter 6, entitled, "Mary's Apparitions," in *Christ's Mother and Ours*, op. cit.

38. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978, pp. 497-498, italic in original.

39. Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines That Divide: A Fresh Look at the Historic Doctrines That Separate Christians*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998, pg. 59. For a Roman Catholic's statement of these distinctions, see Peter M.J. Stravinskas, *Mary and the Fundamentalist Challenge*. Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 1998, pg. 98.

40. *The Doctrines That Divide*, op. cit., pg. 59.

41. *The Cult of the Virgin*, op. cit., pg. 70, italics in original.

42. Oscar Lukefahr, *We Worship: A Guide to the Catholic Mass*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 2004, pg. 112.

43. *Ibid.*, pg. 113.

44. R.C. Sproul, "The Virgin Mary," tape #TH92.5, side 2. From the audio tape series *Roman Catholicism*. (Orlando, Fla:

Ligonier Ministries, 1999.)

45. Francis J. Ripley, *Holiness through Mary*. Glasgow, England: John S. Burns & Sons, 1959, pp. 49-50. Notice that the pronoun "her," referring to Mary is sometimes capitalized in this passage.

46. Article on "Consecration to Mary," John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary* ("Abridged edition of *Modern Catholic Dictionary*"). New York: Doubleday, 1980, pg. 90.

47. *Ibid.*

48. One well-known volume demonstrating Roman Catholic exaltation of Mary is St. Alphonsus Liguori, *The Glories of Mary*. Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1977.

49. Phone conversation between the author and Father Peter M.J. Stravinskis; spring or summer, 2001.

50. St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*. Bay Shore, N.Y.: Montfort Publications, 1996.

51. *Ibid.*, e.g., pp. 1, 2, 8, 9, 14, 15, 20.

52. For example, apologist Eric Svendsen notes that Pope Pius X referred to Mary this way in October 1904. (Eric D. Svendsen, *Who Is My Mother?: The Role and Status of the Mother of Jesus in the New Testament and Roman Catholicism*. Amityville, N.Y.: Calvary Press, 2001, from the Foreword by James White, pg. 17.) Additionally, Mary is referred to as the spouse of the Holy Spirit in the book by Gerard Weber and James Killgallon, *Life in Christ: A Catechism for Adult Catholics*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996, pg. 49.

53. John Scott Horrell, Spring 2000 semester class notes for 402B *Trinitarianism* course at Dallas Theological Seminary. From the section of the notes on "Mary, the Mother of Jesus," pg. 6. In a personal conversation with Dr. Horrell about this statement in his notes, he told me that this was the situation, at least, around 1971.

54. "The Virgin Mary," tape #TH92.5, side 1, op. cit.

55. Ludwig Ott cited in *The Doctrines That Divide*, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

56. Douglas Connelly, *Mary: What the Bible Really Says*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pg. 116.

57. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins*, op. cit., pg. 4.

58. *The New American Bible* with Revised New Testament, pg. 1438, study note on Revelation 12:1-6.

59. *The Holy Bible - Revised Standard Version*, Catholic Edition. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1966, Appendix 1, pg. 246, study note on The Revelation to John 12:1-6, italics in original.

60. My thanks to my former pastor and friend, Chris Davis, for these thoughts about Roman Catholicism renaming sinful practices to deceive themselves into believing that these offensive practices are acceptable.

61. To their credit, some Roman Catholics have had the courage to admit that some Catholics are, in fact, guilty of "Mariolatry." For example, see Brian Harrison, "Our silent heresy," *This Rock*, May 1994, pp. 9-12. I admire and appreciate the

candor of both Harrison, and also of the magazine's editor, Catholic apologist Karl Keating. I applaud their having the courage to admit the problem openly and forthrightly. Having said this, however, I wonder if they realize the actual extent of the problem, which I imagine to be rather massive.

62. "The Virgin Mary," tape #TH92.5, side 2, op. cit.

63. *The Doctrines That Divide*, op. cit., pg. 59.


64. *The Cult of the Virgin*, op. cit., pg. 73.

65. Walter Martin cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Protestants and Catholics: Do They Now Agree?* Chattanooga, Tenn.: The Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 1994, pg. 183, underlined emphasis in original. (This book is written by the same authors as another book with the same title, and does contain some of the same material as the other book; however, it also contains material not found in the latter volume and vice versa. See endnote #1 for information on the later edition.)

66. *Ibid.*

67. *The Gospel According to Rome*, op. cit., pg. 15.

68. For some of the good elements within Roman Catholicism, including Christian beliefs held in common by both Roman Catholicism and evangelicals, see Geisler and MacKenzie's book, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, op. cit.

69. *The Gospel According to Rome*, op. cit., pp. 314. 

THE LURE OF MYSTICISM

(continued from page 1)

Others will become infatuated with two other overlapping fads. One of these is ancient: mysticism. The other is new and considers itself postmodern: the emerging church. They share a disdain for modernity, a distortion of Scripture, and they reject much that conservative Christians hold dear.

While the market-driven church is not a direct conduit to mysticism and postmodernism, it certainly has opened the door. By hollowing out the core of biblical substance and replacing it with superficial theological fluff, the movement has created a hunger for true spirituality. One can only live so long on cotton candy before steak — or at least hamburger — is craved. As Christians tire of their

spiritual diet, they may turn to even less healthy alternatives.

Christian mysticism has its roots in medieval Roman Catholic monks and hermits (the "desert fathers"). It promises to bring us into contact with God in ways not experienced by most believers, and appeals to those tired of watered-down Christianity.

The first obstacle encountered when discussing mysticism is trying to define it. John MacArthur says, "The mystic disdains rational understanding and seeks truth instead through the feelings, the imagination, personal visions, inner voices, private illumination, or other purely subjective means."¹ This type of mysticism, which is a functional denial of *sola Scriptura*, is running rampant throughout the Christian community. But in the more technical, official sense,

MacArthur's definition could be broadened. Classical mysticism, which is now making a strong return to Christianity, goes far deeper. Someone has said mysticism "begins with a mist and always ends in schism," and that is not far from the truth. Mysticism is the search for "*unio mystica*, 'personal union with God.'"²

Georgia Harkness tells us in her book, *Mysticism*, that there are at least twenty-six definitions of mysticism by those who have studied it carefully.³ Winfried Corduan, in his *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?*, writes, "*The mystic believes that there is an absolute and that he or she can enjoy an unmediated link to this absolute in a superrational experience.*"⁴ But even here there are at least three distinct categories of mysticism: pan-en-henic, in which, as Carl Jung thought, a segment of the collective unconscious intrudes on the

conscious mind; monistic, such as found in Hinduism and Buddhism, whereby the individual is merged into the impersonal All, whatever that is called; and theistic, in which the absolute is God, although not necessarily the true God.⁵ The actual experience by these various types of mystics is very similar. But with whom the mystic believes they come into union is determined by the mystic's belief system, as William James' research demonstrated decades ago.⁶

THE ROAD TO MYSTICISM

The journey to mystical experience almost always involves three stages: purgation, illumination, and union.

Purgation: Purgation is the cleansing stage that begins with self-examination and penitence and leads to a holy life. Sixteenth-century monk St. John of the Cross is best known for his description of this stage, which he called the "dark night of the soul." During this time, an individual feels abandoned by God, spiritually dry, and at the point of despair. John saw this as a way in which God purified the soul by suffering, for only when the soul has been purified can it experience a rapturous union with God. This purgation involved detachment from the things of the world, including material and physical desires; and mortification, the building of new paths to replace the old ones now rejected.

Illumination: At some point the purgation stage bleeds over into the illumination stage in which the mystic begins to experience inner voices and visions. The goal of illumination is to know genuine spiritual truth, but such truth cannot be found in conventional or even rational ways. This differs, at least in theory, from the "mystical" Christian as defined earlier by MacArthur. These still believe that truth is primarily found through rational means, but they feel that their thoughts and mental impressions can be explained as the inner voice of God.

The true mystic has come to the conclusion that the secret and "deep" things of God cannot be understood

rationally. They can only be understood through the experience of illumination. One of the earliest Christian mystics, who is known today as Pseudo-Dionysius, taught that to achieve the ultimate prize of union with God, "the soul must lose the inhibitions of the senses and of reason. God is beyond the intellect, beyond goodness itself, and it is through unknowing, and the discarding of human concepts, that the soul returns to God and is united with the 'ray of divine darkness.'"⁷

The means by which mystics achieved illumination was through fasting, long seasons of specialized prayers known as contemplative prayers, and by following various spiritual disciplines, of which the best known today were designed by the Catholic monk and founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola. As we will see later, it is upon Ignatius' "Spiritual Exercises" that Richard J. Foster patterns his book, *Celebration of Discipline*.

Union: The ultimate goal of the mystic is unmediated union with God. This point, at which the soul attains oneness with God, "was the mystical ecstasy in which, for a brief indescribable moment, all barriers seemed to be swept away and new insight supernaturally imparted as one gave himself over fully to the Infinite One."⁸

The ancient mystics would frame this experience in romantic, even sensual terms. John of the Cross "describes this union in terms of spiritual betrothal, where the soul, conceived of as feminine, is married to Christ as the bridegroom."⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux (12th-century), who managed to turn the Song of Solomon into an erotic love story between God and man, described this moment of union as the time when the believer is "kissed 'with the kisses of His mouth.'"¹⁰ Similar depictions are common in mystical literature.

Pseudo-Dionysius (so-called because he used the name of a convert of Paul in Acts 17:34) set the table for the need for this type of mysticism with his belief that God can never be

truly known through the intellect. Harkness describes it well:

"The author's position is that God is completely transcendent, beyond all human thought, reason, intellect, or any approaches of the mind. A term which occurs repeatedly in this writing [i.e., *Mystical Theology*] is 'the Divine Dark.' The human mind can only say what God is not, never what God is. There is nothing within the human self to give us any clue. But is there no way to penetrate this divine darkness? Yes, there is one. This is the *via negativa* by which the soul strips off its selfhood and, in ecstatic union with transcendent deity, both *feels* and *knows* its oneness with the Infinite. This was to become a classic pattern of Christian mysticism. ... To this there is often linked a disparagement of the human capacity to know God save by the mystical vision, and to this end the need of rigorous disciplines of prayer, fasting, prolonged meditation, and ascetic living."¹¹

In other words, the mystic has no confidence in human knowledge accessible through means such as Scripture.

Roman Catholic monk William Johnston describes the mystical process this way: "In the mystical life one passes from one layer to the next in an inner or downward journey to the core of the personality where dwells the great mystery called God."¹²

Other well-known mystics holding to these or similar views throughout Church history include: Meister Eckhart, Juliana of Norwich, Thomas á Kempis, Teresa of Ávila, Evelyn Underhill, St. Francis of Assisi, Madam Guyon, George Fox, Thomas Merton, and Agnes Sanford. Modern mystics of import include Dallas Willard, Brennan Manning, and, most importantly, Richard Foster.

Eugene Peterson writes on the back cover of special anniversary editions of *Celebration of Discipline* that, "Rich-

ard J. Foster has 'found' the spiritual disciplines that the modern world stored away and forgot, and has excitedly called us to celebrate them. For they are, as he shows us, the instruments of joy, the way into mature Christian spirituality and abundant life."

What Foster "found," many others are discovering as well. As a result, classic medieval Roman Catholic mysticism has been dusted off and offered as the newest and best thing in spirituality. But there is one problem: If God had wanted His followers to connect with Him in this way, He would have said so in His Word. God's Word is sufficient; all that we need for life and godliness is found there (1 Peter 1:4; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

THE MODERN FACE OF MYSTICISM

Medieval mysticism has managed to survive within small pockets of Roman Catholicism for centuries but has gone largely unnoticed by evangelicals. It is true that a few groups, such as the Quakers, have kept some aspect of mysticism within range of evangelical awareness, and elements of mystical practices have actually thrived in charismatic circles right down to the ranks of Fundamentalism. But classical mysticism was virtually unknown in evangelical circles until 1978 when Foster, a Quaker minister, published *Celebration of Discipline* (subtitled *The Path to Spiritual Growth*). Hailed by *Christianity Today* as one of the ten best books of the 20th century and voted by the readers of that magazine as the third most influential book after the Bible, *Celebration of Discipline* has blown the doors off evangelicals' understanding of spirituality.

What Foster has done, in essence, is reintroduce to the Church the so-called "masters of the interior life," as he likes to call the medieval mystics. He declares that they alone have discovered the key to true spiritual life, and over the last few years he has convinced many that he is right. New forces and new players have popularized Foster's ideas to a new set of

Christians and it seems to be rapidly taking hold. This is due to the efforts of organizations such as Youth Specialties, numerous Bible colleges, and a rash of books and speakers that introduce mystical practices and theology to our young people and young ministers. Many of these people, having grown up in churches that no longer major on the teaching of Scripture and are thus lacking biblical discernment, are easy prey for spiritual-sounding techniques, especially those that promise such life-changing encounters with God.

Celebration of Discipline is an encyclopedia of theological error. We would be hard-pressed to find in one so-called evangelical volume such a composite of false teaching. These include faulty views on the subjective leading of God;¹³ approval of New Age teachers (see Thomas Merton below); occultic use of imagination;¹⁴ open theism;¹⁵ misunderstanding of the will of God in prayer;¹⁶ promotion of visions, revelations, and charismatic gifts;¹⁷ endorsement of rosary and prayer wheel use;¹⁸ misunderstanding of the Old Testament Law for today;¹⁹ mystical journaling;²⁰ embracing pop-psychology;²¹ promoting Roman Catholic practices such as use of "spiritual directors," confession, and penance;²² and affirming of aberrant charismatic practices.²³

MYSTIC HEROES

Foster introduces his readers to dozens of mystics, some from the Christian tradition, some not. Many of these, he assures us, have traveled to depths of spiritual experience that we moderns cannot even imagine. Here are a few:

Meister Eckhart: Eckhart, a Dominican monk who lived in the 13th and 14th centuries, ranks among the great Roman Catholic mystics, along with Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Julian of Norwich. Toward the end of his life, Eckhart was charged with heresy (and found guilty after his death in 1327) for his mystical assertions, which the Catholic Church determined had bled over into pantheism. According to Harkness, "Eckhart's doctrine of the human soul

has lasted to the present, and is reaffirmed whenever one speaks of a Divine Spark within each of us. ...he believed that in every human soul there is something of the very nature of God. Here it is that the human soul meets God."²⁴

Eckhart made statements such as these: "Henceforth I shall not speak about the soul, for she has lost her name yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There she is no more called soul: she is called infinite being."²⁵ And: "She plunges into the bottomless well of the divine nature and becomes one with God that she herself would say that she is God."²⁶ Such statements not only bothered the medieval Church, but some more modern researchers have found agreements in Eckhart's philosophy with all the major points of Hindu mystics.

Other scholars are not so certain about Eckhart's pantheism, but his statements certainly leave the door open for such interpretations. Yet Eckhart is considered to be one of the most important Christian mystics of the Middle Ages, and both ancient and modern mysticism reflect his views. Eckhart's "divine spark" corresponds almost directly with the teachings of Eastern mysticism, with the difference being that the divine spark in Christian mysticism is defined as God, who resides in every human being.

Thomas Merton: Foster cites and/or quotes Merton on at least nine separate occasions in *Celebration of Discipline*, yet Merton was not a Christian, as far as we can tell. He was a 20th-century Roman Catholic who immersed himself in Buddhism, said he saw no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity, and intended to become as good a Buddhist as he could.²⁷ Despite his New Age leanings, Foster considers Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* as an enduring spiritual classic,²⁸ and says that Merton "has perhaps done more than any other twentieth-century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood."²⁹

Merton himself wrote, "If only [people] could all see themselves as

they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. ... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other."³⁰

Ignatius Loyola: We know Loyola today mainly due to his founding of the Society of Jesus, or the order of the Jesuits, in 1534. One of the missions of the Jesuits was to fight the battles of the Church against infidels and heretics in what is now termed the "Counter-Reformation." For our purposes, Ignatius' contribution lies in the creation of his *Spiritual Exercises*, which provided specifications for spiritual self-examination and the mental and spiritual conditioning of the Jesuits. Foster's disciplines seem to draw heavily upon Loyola.

St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila are also mystics of note, involved in the 16th-century Counter-Reformation. These mystics believed that through contemplation, a union with God could be obtained which would eradicate sinful actions and tendencies.

As worrisome as many of Richard Foster's teachings and mentors are, far more disturbing are the two main thrusts of his spiritual formation system. The first is his use of what he calls the "Spiritual Disciplines." The second, contemplative prayer, is closely related.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES AS A MEANS OF GRACE

Foster writes in *Celebration of Discipline* that, having come to the conclusion that there must be "more spiritual resources than I was experiencing," he prayed, "Lord, ... is there more you want to bring into my life? I want to be conquered and ruled by you. If there is anything blocking the flow of your power, reveal it to me."³¹ God seemed to answer this prayer through a growing impression that something in his past was impeding the flow of life; so he set aside time on three consecutive days to listen to God in absolute silence through the use of journaling, a process whereby

God is supposed to reveal His mind to the silent participant. After the third day Foster took his lists to a friend, who volunteered to serve as his confessor, and who prayed for healing for all the sorrows and hurts of Foster's past as presumably revealed by God. It was following this experience of journaling, an experience not taught in the Bible but common in the occultic world, that Foster claims, "I was released to explore what were for me new and uncharted regions of the Spirit. Following that event, I began to move into several of the Disciplines described in this book that I had never experienced before."³²

It is most disturbing that Foster's *magnum opus* stems from a questionable spiritual encounter. But it is also significant to realize that Foster's system for spiritual formation is not drawn from the Scriptures but from subjective experiences involving unbiblical methods and reinforced by Roman Catholic mystical practices. It must not be automatically assumed, as many seem to do, that Foster has rediscovered the missing jewels of spirituality. Or as Eugene Peterson describes it in the current editions of *Celebration of Discipline*:

"Like a child exploring the attic of an old house on a rainy day, discovering a trunk full of treasure and then calling all his brothers and sisters to share the find, Richard Foster has 'found' the spiritual disciplines that the modern world stored away and forgot, and has excitedly called us to celebrate them. For they are, as he shows us, the instruments of joy, the way into mature Christian spirituality and abundant life."³³

The dust jacket of the 25th Anniversary edition assures us, "that it is only by and through these practices that the true path to spiritual growth can be found."

We need to tread very carefully through this spiritual minefield. If this is one of the ten best books of the 20th century, we should be in no hurry to read the other nine.

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Foster breaks the spiritual disciplines into three categories: inward, outward, and corporate. His first two inward disciplines deal with prayer. Fasting is a third. Yet his instructions on fasting are purely extrabiblical. The purpose behind fasting, the value of it, and the methodology are interesting but purely subjective and unauthoritative. The final inward discipline is study. The new reader of Foster might expect that he would direct us to the study of Scripture as the primary means of spiritual growth. But Foster has broader ideas. Actually, there are two books to be studied: verbal and nonverbal.

Verbal books include any literature, and one of the important means of study is repetition. Here he sees the use of a rosary and/or Hindu type prayer wheel as being effective.³⁴ After a number of suggestions on reading books, Foster finally discusses the type of books to read to enhance spiritual growth. At last, we think he will turn to the Word, and he does — for two paragraphs — before recommending the medieval mystical classics.

The nonverbal book is mainly the "reading" of nature. Here, with St. Francis and the fabled Dr. Doolittle, he encourages his readers "to make friends with the flowers and the trees and the little creatures that creep upon the earth."³⁵ We should also be students of people and of ourselves. While there is undoubted value in this, many have spent a lifetime studying nature, people, and themselves, and have no clue about God. Repeatedly we find that Foster is just not that interested in the study of Scripture, except as it serves his purpose for contemplative meditation.

The outward disciplines begin with simplicity, starting with the simple life as modeled by the heretical cult known as the Shakers. Extreme mystic Thomas Kelly tells us that simplicity allows us to live out of "The Divine Center." He adds that existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard claimed it led to holiness. In trying to find a biblical base for his view,

Foster makes the Old Testament civil laws a pattern for New Testament Christianity and manages to misinterpret virtually every scriptural passage he uses, although he scores points on seeking the kingdom of God first. Next up is solitude. But what follows is not a nice chapter on the importance of breaking free from the noise and distractions of our world and focusing on God and His Word. Instead we enter into the mystical world of medieval Catholicism, Quakerism, and Eastern mystics.

Quotes flow from Merton, Teresa of Ávila, John Woolman, George Fox, and St. John of the Cross. Terms such as “the divine Center,” “the Divine opening,” and “the dark night of the soul” dominate. It is here that we are taught to keep a journal as we “listen to the thunder of God’s silence.”³⁶

The next discipline is “submission” and it is in the chapter, “The Discipline of Submission,” that we receive our heaviest dose of psychobabble, including “self-fulfillment,” “self-actualization,” “loving ourselves,” and mutual submission within marriage. To be fair, he also explores accurately some of what the Bible teaches on greatness and submission.

The final discipline is service and, as with the others, this one too is based more on writings of the mystics than on Scripture. For example, he writes, “True service comes from a relationship with the divine Other deep inside. We serve out of whispered promptings, divine urgings.”³⁷ But he does warn, “The *fact* that God speaks to us does not guarantee that we rightly understand the message. We often mix our word with God’s word.”³⁸

Not only does Foster consistently elevate these subjective experiences over the Scriptures, but in this chapter on service he recommends self-abasement: “The strictest daily discipline is necessary to hold these passions in check. The flesh must learn the painful lesson that it has no rights of its own. It is the work of hidden service that will accomplish this self-abasement.”³⁹ This contradicts Paul’s teaching in Colossians 2:20-23, which tells

us that self-abasement has no effect on the passions of the flesh.

The final category of disciplines is the corporate — and here Foster does no better. The first corporate discipline is that of confession. We are not surprised to discover that Foster supports the position of the Roman Catholic Church, complete with penance and absolution.⁴⁰ Foster cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer who tells us that, “When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God,”⁴¹ and Foster wants us to know, “The assurance of forgiveness is sealed in the Spirit when it is spoken by our brother or sister in the name of Christ.”⁴² He supports this view not from Scripture, but by citing his favorite mystics and personal experience.

As for the discipline of worship, we find that worship “is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God. ...we have not worshiped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit. ... It begins in us as we enter the Shekinah of the heart.”⁴³ This convoluted understanding of worship is augmented with a strong charismatic flavor:

“If Jesus is our Leader, miracles should be expected to occur in worship. Healings, both inward and outward, will be the rule, not the exception.”⁴⁴

Such services, Foster tells us, will have prophecies and words of knowledge⁴⁵ and that is because, “The mightiest stirring of praise in the twentieth century has been the charismatic movement. Through it God has breathed new life and vitality into millions.”⁴⁶

But even more disturbing is the idea that in the worship of God, “our rational faculties alone are inadequate. ... That is one reason for the spiritual gift of tongues. It helps us to move beyond mere rational worship into a more inward communion with the Father. Our outward mind may not know what is being said, but our inward spirit understands. Spirit touches spirit.”⁴⁷ Remember above how we have not worshiped until Spirit touches spirit — now we see the process. It is as we move beyond

the mind and into mystical, subjective experiences, that true worship takes place.

With all that Foster has already communicated, the discipline of guidance is predictable. “Many,” he tells us, “are having a deep and profound experience of an Emmanuel of the Spirit — God with us; a knowledge that in the power of the Spirit Jesus has come to guide his people himself; an experience of his leading that is as definite and as immediate as the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.”⁴⁸ The model, of course, of this kind of guidance is the mystic. We are also introduced at this point to the Catholic concept of spiritual directors,⁴⁹ something that Foster believes only Roman Catholic monastics know much about today.

Foster brings everything together with his last discipline, that of celebration. Here we are to express joy in all that we have learned thus far in the book, even participation in “holy laughter” on occasion.⁵⁰

Robert Webber, professor of theology at Wheaton College, sums up Foster’s impact well:

“Over the past two decades my own personal spiritual pilgrimage has taken me away from the propositional and rationalistic mind-set that proclaims an intellectualized proof-oriented faith toward a Christianity of practice and experience.”⁵¹

Webber is erecting a straw man. No one has called for a purely intellectualized faith devoid of practice and experience. What those who draw their cue from Scripture and not mystics are calling for is a Christian faith, experience, and practice that is rational, intellectual, makes sense, and, most importantly, is firmly rooted in the Word of God. Foster and company have taken many far afield in pursuit of mystical experiences that lead to a pseudo-Christianity that has the appearance of spirituality, but not the substance.

The heart and soul of mysticism, Christian or otherwise, is the art of meditation or contemplation. Georgia Harkness informs us that, “Among

the church fathers, 'contemplation' was the usual term to designate what was later to be called mystical experience."⁵² Contemplative prayer, also known as centering prayer and breath prayer, is rapidly gaining popularity and acceptance in evangelical circles, so it is vital that we understand exactly what is being promoted and why we are concerned.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

First, we must distinguish between normal prayer, which is commanded throughout Scripture, and contemplative prayer, which is not. Prayer is our communication with God. The Lord speaks to us through His Word, we speak to Him in prayer. Such prayers are rational, intelligent, and flow from our minds. Paul said that he would pray with his spirit and he would pray with his mind also (1 Corinthians 14:15), not either/or. We are to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and in those prayers we are to make our requests known (Philippians 4:6).

In prayer we praise God for His known attributes. In prayer we confess specific sins (1 John 1:9). Gibberish, mindless, or wordless prayers are not found in the Word. Similarly, contemplative prayer is not of the scriptural variety; its origin is not the Bible but Eastern and Christian mystics. It should be mentioned that contemplative prayer — often simply called meditation — is the essence of Hinduism and Buddhism, and is practiced virtually identically in its Christianized form.

Contemplative prayer begins with detachment. Foster, in the early editions of *Celebration of Discipline*, wrote, "Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it."⁵³ In Eastern religions a person empties his mind to become one with the universe (or the Cosmic Mind). In Christian mysticism one empties the mind to become one with God, who is found in oneself. It is important to keep in mind Meister Eckhart's divine spark found within the soul of each human being. Foster quotes a number of mystics to describe this experience. For example, there is the Russian

mystic Theophan the Recluse, who said, "To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you."⁵⁴

The constant theme of the mystic is that union with God is possible through contemplative prayer, and that union with God is found within us. St. Teresa of Ávila states, "as I could not make reflection with my understanding I contrived to picture Christ within me."⁵⁵ She is quoted as also saying, "Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon Him in yourself."⁵⁶ Such statements show why the mystics were accused of pantheism. Silence is a noted feature of contemplation. Catherine de Haeck Doherty writes, "All in me is silent and ... I am immersed in the silence of God."⁵⁷ Francis de Sales notes, "by means of the imagination we confine our mind within the mystery on which we meditate."⁵⁸

Imagination is highly important to the mystics. As Teresa informs us, this is not an endeavor that comes from their understanding. Mystics are hung out in thin air, so to speak, and must make contact with God through imagination rather than through the rational use of their minds. The power of such experience becomes evident as Foster tells us, "We are to live in a perpetual, inward, listening silence so that God is the source of our words and actions."⁵⁹

So, through contemplative prayer, the person is to empty his mind, then fill it with imaginative experiences with Christ, whom we will find in the silence of our souls, resulting in God becoming the source of our words and actions.

The techniques are identical to those of Eastern religions and so are familiar to most of us through media presentations of Transcendental Meditation and yoga. Gary Thomas, founder of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality, gives these instructions:

"Choose a word (Jesus or Father, for example) as a focus for contemplative prayer. Repeat the word silently

*in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing. But centering prayer is a contemplative act in which you don't do anything; you're simply resting in the presence of God."*⁶⁰

So the repetition of words or short phrases, a mantra, is key to this experience. While Foster suggests a number of methods, he says:

*"[I] find it best to sit in a straight chair, with my back correctly positioned in the chair and both feet flat on the floor. ... Place the hands on the knees, palms up in a gesture of receptivity. Sometimes it is good to close the eyes to remove distractions and center the attention on Christ. At other times it is helpful to ponder a picture of the Lord or to look out at some lovely trees and plants for the same purpose."*⁶¹

Brennan Manning gives these instructions in his book, *The Signature of Jesus*:

*"The first step in faith is to stop thinking about God in prayer. ... Contemplative spirituality tends to emphasize the need for a change in consciousness ... we must come to see reality differently. Choose a single, sacred word ... repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly, and often. [E]nter into the great silence of God. Alone in that silence, the noise within will subside and the Voice of Love will be heard."*⁶²

It is apparently the repetition of the mantra that triggers the blank mind. With the mind blank and the heart open to whatever voices or visions that it encounters, accompanied with a vivid imagination, the individual enters the mystical state. Concerning all of this, Foster encourages, "Though it may sound strange to modern ears, we should without shame enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer."⁶³

By contrast, we search in vain to find any such encouragement or

instruction in the Scriptures. We do, however, find this type of contemplation at the heart of Eastern religions. It is both bold and revealing that Foster, in his recommendation of Catherine de Haeck Doherty's ministry, actually admits that the title of her book is, *Poustinia: Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man*.⁶⁴ This leaves little doubt about the source of this type of prayer.

BUT IS IT BIBLICAL?

No experience or methodology promoting spirituality can be dismissed or accepted without investigation. Scripture is the final arbiter and Scripture in no way promotes the mysticism we have been examining. The following admission in Winfried Corduan's book, *Mysticism, An Evangelical Option?*, is most interesting. Corduan would not take as strong a stand on the Scriptures as we would, and would even see a mild form of mysticism as valid for the Christian. But toward the end of his book he raises some important points:

"Set into the context of the New Testament, this aspect of the mystical experience becomes problematic. For it would entail that mystical experience becomes a source of revelation, a private avenue of insight into God and his workings. If so, as Arthur L. Johnson points out, the evangelical commitment to Scripture as the sole source of revelation becomes undermined. 'The Scriptures nowhere teach that God gives us any knowledge through "spiritual experience." Knowledge of spiritual matters is always linked to God's propositional revelation, the written Word.'"⁶⁵

Corduan sounds an important alarm. Mysticism, both ancient and modern, is chock full of supposed revelations from God. This is the draw: God will personally meet you in the center of your soul and communicate to you matters far beyond anything found in Scripture. "Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word,"⁶⁶ Foster tells us. This is no

slip of the pen. Foster is not advocating listening to the voice of God in the written revelation of God. He is not even equating "his word" with the Bible. He is speaking of hearing God's voice outside of the Scriptures, and obeying that revelation. This is one of the greatest dangers of mysticism. Corduan continues:

"We have claimed that mysticism is a very important aspect of New Testament theology. [Corduan defines mysticism somewhat differently than in this article.] And yet there is no mystical experience to be sought. There is no truth to be learned through New Testament mysticism. There is no plan of asceticism or meditation to actualize this mystical reality. Rather, there are two important imperatives. The first is, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus!' (Acts 16:31). Immediately the realities discussed above are actualized. The second is, 'Live ... according to the Spirit!' (Rom. 8:5). The point now is to live a life in the light of the fact that those realities are given by God's grace. Christians do not need to seek present realities, but to enjoy them. As they yield to the work of God, the Holy Spirit produces a new supernatural life in them."⁶⁷

This is New Testament spirituality: regeneration and the indwelling, enabling power of the Holy Spirit, all based on Scripture. If God had wanted us to encounter Him through mystical practices such as contemplative prayer, He would have said so.

MODERN PROMOTERS OF MYSTICISM

What was once in a corner has moved into the mainstream. More organizations, colleges, seminaries, and authors are proclaiming the superiority of mystical Christianity. And all this attention seems to be directed toward the young. For example, in the late 1990s, Youth Specialties and the San Francisco Theological Seminary teamed up to do a three-year test project to develop an approach to youth ministry which incorporates

contemplative practices. The project was funded by the Lilly Endowment Fund. The late Mike Yaconelli, co-founder of Youth Specialties, grew interested in contemplative prayer during a spiritually dry time of his life after reading a book by Henri Nouwen. Youth Specialties now has incorporated contemplative prayer and mysticism in its annual pastor's conferences and national youth conventions that reach over 100,000 youth workers each year.⁶⁸ Each conference offers courses on how to develop a contemplative youth ministry, pray the *Lectio Divina* (an ancient four-step form of contemplative prayer), and walk the prayer labyrinths.

Christianity Today's sister publication, *Christian Parenting*, published an article in 2004 that promoted the *Lectio Divina* for young people. And *Christianity Today* itself noted that "Christian" singers, including John Michael Talbot, boldly endorse contemplative prayer as well as Eastern practices such as Tai Chi and yoga. Michael W. Smith gives away Brennan Manning's books, Michael Card turns to him for advice and named his son after him, Larry Crabb seeks his counsel, Eugene Peterson loves his work, Max Lucado endorses his books, Philip Yancey considers him a good friend,⁶⁹ and Multnomah and NavPress, evangelical publishers, publish his books. Mysticism and contemplative prayer are seeping into evangelicalism from many sources and a deluge could very well be in the offing.

LABYRINTHS

Most evangelical Christians probably would not recognize themselves in the previous discussion of mysticism, but there are subtle influences at work drawing believers in this direction, even without their knowledge. While firmly denying any part in classical mysticism, many are participating in time-honored mystical practices. It must be recognized that many are doing this unintentionally, for new opportunities are turning up that seem to defy recognized categories. Some are innocently adopting ancient

mystical practices because they are being endorsed by trusted Christian leaders. The danger is that involvement in some of these things, no matter how pure the motive, may easily lead the participant away from a biblical faith and into subjectivism, mysticism, or even the occult.

The Labyrinth Society is only six years old, but boasts 800 members and wide-ranging influence. A labyrinth is sort of a maze, some developed with bushes or other vegetation; others are created with stones, tiles, wool, or even canvas. Labyrinth lovers recoil from the word “maze,” however, pointing out that:

“Labyrinths are not mazes, although in the English language the words *labyrinth* and *maze* are frequently confused. Mazes contain cul-de-sacs and dead ends. They have more than one entrance and more than one exit and are designed to make us lose our way; they’re a game. Labyrinths have the exact opposite purpose: they are designed to help us find our way. They have only one path — from the outer edge into the center and back our [sic] again.”⁷⁰

Labyrinths sometimes are called “Pneuma Labyrinths,” or simply “prayer walks.”

Labyrinths are by no means distinctively Christian. According to the Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, President and Founder of Veriditas, The Voice of the Labyrinth Movement:

“The labyrinth is an ancient pattern found in many cultures around the world. Labyrinth designs were found on pottery, tablets and tiles [that] date as far back as 4000 years. Many patterns are based on spirals from nature. In Native American culture it is called the Medicine Wheel and Man in the Maze. The Celts described it as the Never Ending Circle. It is also called the Kabala in mystical Judaism. One feature they all share is that they have one path, which winds in a circuitous way to the center.”⁷¹

While the history of labyrinths is sketchy, it appears that they first entered Christendom during the Middle Ages. Many Christians during that time tried to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem at some point in their lives, but the Crusades made the visits increasingly difficult, if not impossible. Labyrinths were built in and around many Catholic cathedrals as a substitute, allowing Christians to symbolically fulfill their obligations, as some believed these pilgrimages were necessary for salvation.

One of the best known labyrinths was made of tile in the early 13th century and inlaid in the floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France. But walking the labyrinth fell out of favor during the 16th and 17th centuries as the Catholic Church moved away from mysticism and more into rationalism.

Until very recently the labyrinth at Chartres was covered with chairs, having not been used for its original purpose for centuries. In 1992, Artress, after a visit to Chartres, brought a model of the 11-circuit labyrinth back to Grace Cathedral, an Episcopal church in San Francisco. Since then, more than a million people are reported to have walked that labyrinth. As some walk a labyrinth, they claim a feeling of coming home. Others say they recall “ancient memories,” by tapping into a level of consciousness not experienced before.

THE PURPOSE OF LABYRINTHS

Artress says, “The labyrinth has only one path so there are no tricks to it and no dead ends. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. It touches our sorrows and releases our joys. Walk it with an open mind and an open heart.”⁷² Artress then describes the three stages of the walk and the guidelines for experiencing it:

“Purgation (Releasing) ~ A releasing, a letting go of the details of your life. This is the act of shedding thoughts and distractions. A time to open the heart

and quiet the mind. Illumination (Receiving) ~ When you reach the center, stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive. Union (Returning) ~ As you leave, following the same path out of the center as you came in, you enter the third stage, which is joining God, your Higher Power, or the healing forces at work in the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching for. ... Quiet your mind and become aware of your breath. Allow yourself to find the pace your body wants to go. The path is two ways. Those going in will meet those coming out. You may ‘pass’ people or let others step around you. Do what feels natural.”⁷³

Anyone familiar with classical mysticism of any stripe will immediately recognize that labyrinths are a tool to move the worshiper into a mystical union with God. And as “a device, the labyrinth has been compared to, in terms of function, rosaries, Stations of the Cross and the tao-te-ching, or the Chinese Book of the Way.”⁷⁴ Yet even with all of its obvious connections with various world religions and medieval Roman Catholicism, some have tried to conjure up biblical support from Jeremiah 6:16, “Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.”⁷⁵

All of this would be of little consequence if the labyrinth revival were confined to a few European cathedrals and a liberal church in San Francisco. The fact is, interest in labyrinths has caught fire inside and outside the evangelical community. The Lighthouse Trails, a Christian organization that studies such subjects, reports that a Google search on labyrinths revealed 116,000 hits in March 2004. Less than a year later, a Google search brought up 290,000 hits. More alarming is that labyrinths are rapidly becoming a recognized

form of worship in many evangelical organizations and churches.

They are being promoted by Youth for Christ, Youth Specialties, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, The Emergent Church Convention, NavPress, Rick Warren (through his recommendation of NavPress' pro-contemplative magazine, *Discipleship Journal*, and speaking at Youth Specialties conferences), Zondervan Publishing, National Pastors Convention, *Leadership* magazine, Group Publishing, and a host of others. At the 2004 National Pastors Convention, held in San Diego, the daily morning schedule included: opportunities to walk the labyrinth, "Contemplative Morning Prayer Exercise," and "Sustainable Life Forum: Stretching and Yoga." Speakers at this convention included Rick Warren, Howard Hendricks, Dan Kimball, and Brian McLaren.

VISUALIZATION

A number of years ago, Karen Mains pretty much torpedoed her own ministry, Chapel of the Air, when she wrote *Lonely No More*. In that book she chronicled her journey into Jungian psychology, visualization, and the occult.

Mains described dreams about her "male-self," a man she called Eddie Bishop. "He was tall ... well formed and trim, somewhere in his early thirties. ... His fine, dark hair fell in a thick lock across his forehead. ... his blue-gray eyes looking earnestly into mine."⁷⁶ The details of his communication are specific: "You are everything I have ever wanted spiritually," he said [in the dream] before I started to drive away."⁷⁷ Mains said these experiences had taken place "six or eight times a year for the last four or five years"⁷⁸ and have had a "positively profound effect" on her, compelling her to seek psychospiritual counsel.⁷⁹

During a later session with her "spiritual director" at Cenacle, a Catholic contemplative retreat center, Mains told of a drastic change in the entity. She described an "idiot-child sitting at a table with other people. Its head was totally bald and lolled to one side. It was drooling and seemed

to be six, seven, or eight years of age ... it was so emaciated and malnourished. ... He turned his sad, huge eyes on me and smiled sweetly. ... This is my idiot-child, the idiot-self of my self."⁸⁰

Her "spiritual director" had her close her eyes and see the child again. She did so and began to communicate with the image, who surprised them both by revealing that it is the "Christ child." Mains ponders the thought that the young man and the idiot-child are both Jesus Christ who has "been attempting to woo me because an essential part of my identity in Him has been expelled from my adult development."⁸¹

We find that this "Christ child," whom she is instructed to always take with her, is her "spiritual authority," who she is "afraid of having" and has "rejected not only [as] a part of myself, but a part of myself that is Christ."⁸² While she admits that the psychological concept of the male-within-the-female (and vice versa) was developed by Carl Jung, she has always seen it as "exceptionally scriptural."⁸³ In her analysis of her visualization experiences, Mains wrote:

"Through my hardships I discover there's a small part of myself that hasn't grown whole along with the rest of me. It's been maimed by neglect during years of married life. I call it my 'idiot-self.' I'm discovering that this malnourished orphan needs to be nursed and nurtured. I must find the idiot-self creeping about in the infrastructure of my soul. ... Self of my self, this abandoned child is very much a part of me. ... I understand that in some way, I, the intuitive, introverted, feeling-proficient female, have become the substitute for [my husband] David's own female self, his anima, to use the Jungian terminology. He ... functions for me as my animus. ... I have abdicated to my husband my own maleness."⁸⁴

An uproar followed the publication of *Lonely No More*. It was immediately removed from the bookshelves and

taken out of print, but not before irreparable damage had been done. The people of God were just not ready for a heavy dose of visualization and occultic practices at the time. Fast-forward a dozen years and the spiritual landscape is different today, and apparently more primed for such techniques. David Seamand, a frequent guest on such programs as "Focus on the Family," has written a number of books advocating "Christian" visualization including, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* and *Healing of Memories*.

Recently, popular author and theologian Gregory Boyd has written a book called *Seeing Is Believing*. Boyd's publication is a good example of how occultic visualization practices are creeping into evangelicalism. Boyd's thesis is that, "it's not so much *what we intellectually believe is true* that impacts us; it's *what we experience as real*."⁸⁵ "Experience" is the key word, used literally hundreds of times in this small volume (57 times in the eight-page introduction alone). How does one go about experiencing Jesus? Using 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6 as his main text, Boyd tells us that imagination, when guided by the Holy Spirit and submitted to the authority of Scripture, is our main receptor to the spiritual world.⁸⁶ The problem, Boyd argues, is that our Western mindset rejects imagination as make-believe. So it is necessary to reject this worldview and adopt an Eastern, mystical understanding. When this happens, we begin to use our imagination to discover the real Jesus.⁸⁷

The most disturbing part of Boyd's imaginative prayer method is that it evolves into New Age visualization. Boyd does not deny this, but he says his program should not be condemned through guilt by association.⁸⁸ By visualization, what we mean is that at some point in this process the image comes alive and begins to act independently of the person, such as happened with Karen Mains. At that point, contact has been made with the spirit world in ways clearly condemned by Scripture. For example, Boyd gives numerous examples such as this one:

“Sometimes as I rest with the Lord he will say something unexpected like, ‘Are you ready for more of my freedom?’”⁸⁹

Then Jesus leads him to some memory from his past and reconstructs it. This is not wholesome imagination, but the altering of reality and contact with the spirit world as he naively assumes the spirit speaking to him is really Jesus. Boyd maintains that only in this manner can a person grow in his knowledge of Christ and/or have his memories healed.

Apologists John Weldon and John Ankerberg tell us:

“Visualization is the use of mental concentration and directed imagery in the attempt to secure particular goals, whether physical, psychological, vocational, educational, or spiritual. Visualization attempts to program the mind to discover inner power and guidance. It is often used as a means to, or in conjunction with, altered states of consciousness (e.g., as produced by meditation), and is frequently used to develop psychic abilities or make contact with spirits.”⁹⁰

Visualization is being used today not only in the occult, but also in New Age medicine in an attempt to manipulate mystical life energies; in education to tap the “higher self” and its powers; and in psychotherapy and the Church to bring about inner healing.

Visualization must be distinguished from imagination. Healthy imagination is a good and wonderful gift from God, but visualization is something very different. In visualization, a person is trying either to directly alter reality or make contact with the spirit world. Both of these practices are condemned in Scripture. Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon distinguish visualization proper from the non-occult use of the imagination:

“The visualization we are concerned with is an ancient witchcraft technique that has been at the heart of shamanism for thousands of years, yet is gaining increasing acceptance in today’s

secular society and now more and more within the church. It attempts to use vivid images held in the mind as a means of healing diseases, creating wealth, and otherwise manipulating reality. Strangely enough, a number of Christian leaders teach and practice these same techniques in the name of Christ, without recognizing them for what they are.”⁹¹

A practitioner of visualization describes it in this manner:

“Programmed visualization...is the deliberate use of the power of your own mind to create your own reality. ...there is nothing too insignificant or too grand for you to visualize. *Our lives are limited by what we see as possible.* ... A basic rule of visualization is: *You can use visualization to have whatever you want, but YOU MUST REALLY, REALLY WANT WHAT YOU VISUALIZE.*”⁹²

Visualization has gained popularity in Western culture as Eastern mystical thought has invaded and been increasingly accepted. This is true because visualization fits best with a pantheistic worldview that sees humans as divine and creators of their own reality. Visualization is an important technique that supposedly taps the higher self and initiates contact with the ultimate cosmic reality.

By contrast, the Scriptures do not teach or encourage visualization for the healing of memories, healing of body or soul, or spiritual growth. Rather, we are called to be renewed daily by the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the Word of God.

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9. *Mysticism: An Evangelical Option?*, op. cit., pg. 35.
10. *The Faith*, op. cit., pg. 270. (Bernard also regarded the “kiss of the Feet” in The Song of Solomon as being the purgative stage and the “kiss of the Hand” as the illuminative. See, *Mysticism*, op. cit., pg. 91.)
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21. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-120.
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33. *Ibid.*, pg. 206. This endorsement is also found on the backside of the dust jacket.
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36. *Ibid.*, pp. 100, 102, 108.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 128.
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39. *Ibid.*, pg. 131, cf. pg. 133.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-149.
41. Dietrich Bonhoeffer cited in *ibid.*, pg. 146.
42. *Ibid.*, pg. 148.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159, 162.
44. *Ibid.*, pg. 165.
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 53. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978, pg. 15.
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EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

Perhaps this transition is still in motion and we'll see even more blatant distancing from evangelical Christianity."

Meyer's web site offers the opportunity to become a ministry partner by completing an application form. As a "partner," one is allowed "access" to her "Partner Cafe." Meyer's ministry states, "This section of our website is dedicated to our partners who are making a difference and leaving a legacy around the world!" It appears to be yet another in her efforts to allow her devotees to experience her current theme of *enjoying everyday life*. The "Partner Cafe" gives her supporters such features as, "Special Discounts, Daily Comics, Daily Scriptures, Crossword Puzzles, Games, Special Broadcasts, Recipes, Free Downloads, Screensavers, and much more..."

It should not take a fierce cynic to ask, based upon the selections available, how the "Daily Scriptures" found their way onto the list. While it is good to note that Scripture is prioritized ahead of such things as crossword puzzles, games, and recipes, the Word of God is located below the discounts and comics.

Meyer presents the wrong idea when she makes her focal point personal enjoyment and happiness. Apologist and Bible scholar Ron Rhodes correctly states that our "Happiness is Not God's Goal." Rhodes further observes, "We must dispel the popular myth that God's primary

goal for humanity is happiness. ... God cares for our righteous character far more than He cares for mere comforts of life. After all, our character has eternal ramifications. Our personal level of comfort does not! ... He cares more about holiness than He does about happiness" (*Why Do Bad Things Happen If God Is Good?*, pp. 150-151). Rhodes is right on target, and while Meyer may insist she doesn't disagree, her emphasis on "enjoying everyday life" vastly obscures any sound biblical principles of holiness and righteous character. Holiness, rather than happiness, is a much harder sell to the masses.

Meyer's experience-based and pragmatic theology became further evident on the King broadcast. Meyer told the audience that her life as a Christian "just wasn't working for me." In February 1976, during a time of desperation, she claims to have cried out to God. It was here that she says she "became so very acutely aware of not only the presence of God, but the goodness of God." Meyer described the event as, "I actually felt like somebody just kind of took my head off and filled me with liquid love and put my head back on and turned me loose. ... And life was better."

Yet the tragedy in Meyer's pragmatism is her inability to clearly define and defend the claims of the Christian faith which she uses as a platform to merchandise her ministry and its resources. Such is a sad commentary for one selected as both one of 25 of the most influential Evangelicals and one of 50 of the most influential Christians.

As King pressed Meyer as to why she chose Christianity over other faiths — “There are a lot of roads to God,” King quipped — Meyer responded, “Yeah, I’m sure that — You know, first of all, I didn’t even think of anything else because this was all I’d ever heard about or known. And I know that question is always there, What about this?, What about that?, And what about something else? And ... all I know is that this works.”

King then inquiringly underscored Meyer’s pragmatism with, “If it works, don’t knock it?” “Yes,” Meyer responded, leaving no doubt as to her results-oriented faith.

Meyer also maintained that further evidence for the validity of the Christian faith is because she knows in her heart, but admits that this is very hard to describe. Thus for Meyer, the truth of the Christian faith is based upon a subjective feeling and the “fact” that it works. However, for the evangelical Christian the truth of Christianity is based upon the person and claims of Jesus Christ, not upon methods which allow one to enjoy everyday life.

Then, too, one should ask what if Meyer hadn’t grown up in a country where she was so frequently exposed to the Christian faith and teaching? What if she had grown up in a Muslim country, cried out to Muhammad, and there claimed the Islamic faith true, because it works? Or, at least, in her subjective experience mindset thought it “worked.”

Moreover, King’s assertion that all religions are simply different paths arriving at the same destination, should have never been given a pass by one positioned on a select roster of influential Evangelicals. Bible teachers such as Al Mohler and John MacArthur, who frequently appear on *Larry King Live*, have challenged and refuted such a claim. The Christian faith is not wrong or lacking because it is intolerant of other religious worldviews, a truth Meyer is either ignorant of or ashamed to defend. Examine any other world religion or belief — and exactly like the Christian faith — all others express the same intolerance (or exclusiveness) as to its doctrine and practice. So why such silence from an “influential evangelical”?

During a radio interview shortly after the King broadcast, Meyer’s pragmatism once again was visible. Todd Wilken, host of the St. Louis-based radio broadcast *Issues, Etc.*, had the opportunity to record an interview with Meyer following the release of her book, *Approval Addiction*. Wilken seized the occasion to explore beyond the self-worth, self-esteem gist of Meyer’s publication to more crucial issues of her theology — or lack thereof. During the interview, important doctrinal concerns — like those at the heart of the Reformation — were laughingly dismissed by Meyer, who said, “I don’t like to play word games.”

In an effort to discern Meyer’s statement in her recent book, “We must learn to think about and believe in our righteousness” (pg. 35), Wilken pressed Meyer as to a biblical understanding and distinction between being

“declared righteous” (imputed) and being “made righteous” (inherent or infused). Meyer is on record as declaring that to confess oneself to be “a poor miserable sinner” is “a lie from the pit of hell.” When Wilken underscored the important difference, Meyer replied, “That’s fine too, you know. I mean, like I said, you know, you didn’t care for the phrase, but to me all this is word games, you know. It’s just — it’s people making, you know, a big deal out of — it’s like the Law. It’s splitting hairs over something that doesn’t make any difference.”

Doesn’t make any difference? Tell that to Martin Luther and the Reformers. Historian Philip Schaff said of Luther, “Henceforth the doctrine of justification by faith alone was for him to the end of life the sum and substance of the gospel, the heart of theology, the central truth of Christianity, the article of the standing or falling church” (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, pg. 124). The proper understanding of justification, which Meyer fails to grasp, affirms that the sinner is *declared* holy and legally absolved from the consequence of sin; it never, like Meyer, says, “I am not a poor miserable sinner.”

Esteemed English preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones addresses well the important distinction, “It does not mean that we are *made* righteous, but rather that God *regards* us as righteous and *declares* us to be righteous. This has often been a difficulty to many people. They say that because they are conscious of sin within they cannot be in a justified state; but anyone who speaks like that shows immediately that he has no understanding of this great and crucial doctrine of justification. Justification makes no actual change in us; but is a declaration by God concerning us. It is not something that results from what we do but rather something that is done for us. We have only been made righteous in the sense that God regards us as righteous, and pronounces us to be righteous” (Lloyd-Jones cited in Peter Jeffery, *Bitesize Theology*, pp. 71-72, emphasis added).

Last August, Meyer presented yet another of her efforts with an aim toward practical results, asserting “give us 30 days and we will help you change your outlook on life!” More pragmatism added to Meyer’s repertoire.

Norman Geisler, scholar, dean, and professor of theology and apologetics, cuts through the error of Meyer’s argument for the validity of the Christian faith, “The pragmatic view has been severely criticized, because something is not true simply because it works. Lying may ‘work’ to avoid a negative result or achieve a desired objective at the expense of another person, but that doesn’t make the lies true. Something can be known to be contrary to facts, yet still followed, because it seems the most practical course of action under the circumstances. Neither is something right because it works. Cheating ‘works,’ but it is not right” (*Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 606).

Does the Gospel change lives? That goes without saying. Does the Christian faith give purpose, direction,

and stability to those who embrace it? Without a doubt. Christianity is unique and true, but not because it “works.” It is unique because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. While other religious leaders promoted their teachings as the way to God and/or salvation, Jesus promoted Himself as the way to God and the sole means of salvation. Those who embrace the teachings of Muhammad, Buddha, Confucius, or even Dr. Phil, will likewise claim that the precepts of these esteemed teachers “work” and help them to “enjoy everyday life,” but that doesn’t make them true in the life and death matter of salvation. Perhaps Meyer has never considered this critical specific. She should.

By nearly all the standards used to gauge success, Joyce Meyer is at the top of her game. She has authored more than 70 books, conducts close to 20 conferences per year, is broadcast on more than 600 television stations and 400 radio stations, and, as noted above, finds herself on elite lists of influential “Evangelicals” and “Christians.” Yet in that which is far more important — the realm of the very understanding of the basis for the truthfulness of the Christian faith — she fails miserably.

To Joyce we say, it’s not results, it’s not word games. Christianity stands on the person of Christ, not pragmatism or practical results.

—MKG

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

Publisher. Strupp also disclosed that, “David Newberger, Tuft’s attorney, claimed that the suspension was in retaliation for a sexual harassment claim Tuft had made against a supervisor several months ago.” In 2004, Tuft filed a complaint against Andrew Schneider, an investigative reporter and editor and, according to *The St. Louis Journalism Review*, “a favorite” of *Post-Dispatch* editor Ellen Soeteber. Schneider has since resigned, taking a position with the *Baltimore Sun*.

Almost immediately following the editorial apology, fellow journalists — both from within and outside the *Post-Dispatch* — rallied to Tuft’s defense. Reporter Bill McClellan, an associate of Tuft at the *Post-Dispatch*, questioned the pettiness of the issues cited in the apology. For example, it was stated that while Tuft’s May 1 article used the word “hefty” to describe Meyer’s \$900,000 annual salary, the term was never used by the Meyer ministry spokesman cited by Tuft. In the original report, Tuft wrote that Meyer Ministry spokesman Mark “Sutherland noted that Meyer has never denied getting a hefty salary.” McClellan countered with, “Call us hopelessly proletarian, but unless the [*Post-Dispatch*’s] owners raise our salaries considerably, most reporters will continue to think that a \$900,000 salary is ‘hefty.’”

The St. Louis Journalism Review agreed with McClellan’s judgment, noting that the *Post-Dispatch*’s editors have hung a good reporter “out to dry.” Ed Bishop, in his *SJR* editorial titled, “It’s worse than petty,” wrote, “Tuft thought the word ‘hefty’ was appropriately descriptive. I might point out that half a dozen or so editors who read the piece before it was published thought so too, including Soeteber, I presume.”

The most detailed response to the newspaper’s apology came from a group calling itself, “Missourians Fired Up! ... and Fighting Back.” The organization contended that the “sloppiest work” in the entire episode was not by Tuft, but by the *Post-Dispatch*’s editors in their apology. “The apology, which reads like it was written by an attorney for Joyce Meyer, and probably was after bullying by said attorneys, does not attempt to independently verify anything, instead it merely parrots the rhetoric put out by Meyer’s spokesperson. By doing so, they discredit themselves far more than any minor errors contained in the original stories,” the report argued.

Roy Temple, who wrote the *Missourians Fired Up!* essay, analyzed the issues for which the newspaper apologized. The contrasts between the corrections and the actual reports repeatedly demonstrate how the *Post-Dispatch*’s editors have provided more credibility to Meyer’s ministry than it deserves. Temple argues, “The PD should have been proud that they had a reporter who was willing to stand up to powerful interests and to point out the important questions that JMM should be answering, given that they enjoy a tax-exempt status.”

—MKG

NEW GROUND FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

While delegates to the recent 58th General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church voted to keep several matters of church business and polity the same, they did move into unprecedented territory by electing a woman vice president. Ella Simmons was elected on July 3 to one of nine vice presidential positions of the denomination, which has its headquarters in Silver Spring, Md.

Simmons has held various academic positions at the Seventh-day Adventist-affiliated college in Huntsville, Ala., and university in Riverside, Calif. A spokesman for the sect commented that Simmons’ election is an example of the broadening diversity amongst the church’s administration.

In another vote, church members re-elected Jan Paulsen to a second term as president. Paulsen, a native of Norway, had been previously re-elected in 2000. He began serving as president in 1999 after taking over the

office from Robert S. Folkenberg, who resigned following allegations of questionable business practices. (See *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1999, pp. 22-23.)

Delegates also approved a resolution extolling the writings of church founder, Ellen G. White. The resolution, which passed without floor discussion, acknowledged, "that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been richly blessed by the Lord through the gift of prophecy manifested in the ministry and writings of Ellen G. White." It further announced, "Her writings continue to be a most positive influence in the life of the Church, providing for it comfort, guidance, instruction, correction, and theological stimulus."

Amid the lauding of White, church delegates also affirmed the Bible, saying the Scriptures "constitute our supreme rule of faith and practice and [are] the standard by which all teaching and experience is to be tested." Dr. Angel Manuel Rodriguez added that for Adventists, the "Bible is the fundamental ground of Adventist faith and practice" and that White's gift of prophecy "can enrich but not define our faith and practice." Rodriguez serves as director of the church's Biblical Research Institute.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's General Conference is held every five years and its recent session was held in St. Louis. The church claims more than a million members in North America, realizing an increase of over 150,000 new members in the past five years. The Adventist church estimates a worldwide membership of 14.3 million.

—MKG

BROWN HURDLES LEGAL WOES

Clint Brown, the pastor who acquired Benny Hinn's 25-acre World Outreach Church complex in Orlando, Fla., has survived a recent series of legal woes. Brown's wife, Angela, filed for divorce in March 2004. The divorce proceedings exposed Brown's wealthy and wasteful lifestyle. (See *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 2005, pg. 22.) In August 2002, he was sued by Deborah Mitchell, one of his former parishioners, in an attempt to receive payment of a \$200,000 loan. Mitchell said Brown requested the money from her in 1999 to help in securing new facilities for his FaithWorld congregation. Brown claimed the money from Mitchell was a gift to the church and not a loan.

Last April, the Heritage Christian Center in Denver filed suit against him for repayment of a \$100,000 loan. Dennis Leonard, pastor for the Denver church, alleges Brown received the money from him five years ago to help purchase a new building for his FaithWorld church.

Both loans were made by verbal agreement with no witnesses.

In July, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported that Brown had settled the two lawsuits. On June 15, shortly before Mitchell's case was set to go to trial, Brown reached a settlement. "Within days of reaching an agreement with former member Deborah Mitchell, church attorneys 'amicably resolved' a similar lawsuit" with the Heritage Christian Center, the newspaper reported.

The Denver church, which dropped its suit against Brown on June 22, was seeking repayment of its \$100,000 loan plus interest along with legal costs and fees.

Brown's FaithWorld claims 6,000 members. Hinn claimed for his World Outreach Church a weekly attendance of 10,000.

—MKG

FEWER MORMONS?

The Mormon majority appears to be losing ground — at least with respect to population in their home state of Utah. The Latter-day Saint domination in Utah, once claimed at 70 percent or higher, is now reported to be just 62.4 percent, with every county in the state showing a decrease. The Mormon share of the state's population has been dropping for more than a decade, with records indicating a decline every year from 1989 through 2004.

According to a news article in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, "if the current trends continue, LDS residents no longer will constitute a majority by 2030." The report also disclosed, "Within the next three years, the Mormon share of Utah's population is expected to hit its lowest level since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints started keeping membership numbers." This pattern could well alter Utah's political climate.

Tim Heaton, a professor at Brigham Young University who reviews LDS church demographics, says that from one-third to one-half of those on the Mormon membership rolls are not active members. Employing Heaton's observations, it would mean that at its best, fewer than 42 percent of the population in Utah are faithful Mormons. A worst-case scenario would place the figure at 31.2 percent.

The Tribune also revealed that "Utah saw a similar trend in the early 1900s with the mining boom, but once the mines became unprofitable, workers left and the LDS percentage rose again. Steady economic growth through the 1990s, with a slight hiccup a few years ago, has shifted the main reason people move to Utah from religion to jobs."

One factor cited was the decline in births. "In the 1960s, Utah women of childbearing age averaged 4.3 children, far surpassing the national average. That number is down to 2.6 children per woman — only a half-percent above the norm," the *Tribune* reported.

Officials for the LDS church refused to comment directly on the numbers, but did say, "The church has

always extended a hand of friendship and fellowship to those of other faiths, and will continue to do so."

In separate articles, the *Tribune* also reported that the consensus that the LDS church is the fastest-growing faith in the world is a "Mormon myth." One article, citing "LDS-published statistics," revealed that the annual number of Mormon "converts declined from a high of 321,385 in 1996 to 241,239 in 2004." Another article stated that the church's "missionary force has dropped from nearly 62,000 to about 51,000," noting the reduction was an effect in the "declining number of new LDS converts."

—MKG

CERULLO FACES INCOME TAX CHARGES

Healing evangelist Morris Cerullo has been charged with three counts of filing false personal income tax returns. The United States Attorney of the Southern District of California claims that Cerullo failed to report more than \$550,000 of income between 1998 and 2000, according to a Religious News Service report. The indictment alleged that, in 1998 alone, Cerullo underreported at least \$290,000 of income. The charges were filed following an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service. If convicted, each count has a maximum penalty of \$100,000 and up to three years in prison.

Cerullo's attorney Gregory Vega told the *San Diego Union-Tribune* that the evangelist "looks forward to an opportunity to respond to the allegations in a court of law." Vega added that after the IRS' three-year investigation, there were no improprieties discovered in the operation of Cerullo's ministry.

Cerullo is president of Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, based in San Diego. Cerullo has conducted his healing campaigns worldwide for four decades, has written dozens of books, and broadcasts daily on the INSP Inspirational Network, which is headed by his son David.

—MKG

BOOKS IN REVIEW

(continued from page 28)

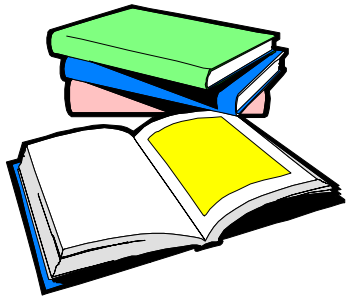
tion), captivating pull-quotes, and discussion questions (located at the conclusion of each chapter).

The book's back cover tells the reader, "*Crucified in the Media* will help you discern fact from fiction and help you defend more historically accurate portrayals of Jesus." In a day and age when many — including some Christians — derive their perception of Jesus and the Bible from anti-Christian sources and the secular media, a book such as this is a great asset to sort through the onslaught of misinformation.

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

SO WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

by Fritz Ridenour

Regal Books, 256 pages, \$13.99

This excellent work was first published nearly four decades ago and has undergone periodic updates. It has now been “completely revised and updated for the postmodern age.” It boasts of over 1 million books in print. Ridenour’s methodology is the same as when he first wrote the book: use the plumb line of Christianity to compare other faiths. In his new edition, he looks at 20 worldviews and stresses the importance of the biblical one.

Ridenour examines the Roman Catholic Church’s doctrines of authority, salvation, purgatory, indulgences, and Mary. Additionally, a few pages are dedicated to the “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” issues first brought about in the 1990s. Similarities and differences are then discussed as Catholicism is compared with the Orthodox Church. The differences are summed up between these two and what evangelical Christians believe.

The volume then examines several of the major religions of the world. Included is a look at Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. At the end of each of these chapters is a section, “Summing Up Major Differences Between ... and Christians.” The section contains a quick synopsis regarding God, Jesus Christ, sin, and salvation, with Scripture references to support the claims.

From world religions, Ridenour moves on to cults and new religious movements, starting with a chapter entitled “Where Did the Cults Come From?” Subsequent to this section is a study of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and the New Age movement. The final chapter deals with eleven more viewpoints that undermine, challenge, or attack biblical Christianity. These topics include Baha’i, Christian Science, Evolutionism, Freemasonry, Hare Krishna, The International Churches of Christ, Secular Humanism, Postmodernism, Unification Church (The Moonies), Unitarianism, and Wicca (Witchcraft and Neo-Paganism). Concluding each section of this segment

is “So What’s the Difference” which examines the sect’s view of various doctrines and practices versus what the Bible really teaches on the matter. Each section is practical, informative, and concise, especially for those who desire the basic knowledge of these groups, yet do not wish an exhaustive study on the matter.

This is a handy work which fortunately continues to be updated and kept in print. As the introduction indicates, it “spells out the differences between the historic Christian faith and other views represented in major religions, cults and ideologies that are vying for the hearts and minds of people today.”

—AMG

CRUCIFIED IN THE MEDIA

by C. Marvin Pate and Sheryl L. Pate

Baker Books, 222 pages, \$13.99

For the believer who wants to stay current with many of the latest campaigns against the Christian faith without having to keep nearly a dozen volumes on his (or her) bookshelf, this is the book to get. This publication covers a lot of ground examining and responding to such contemporary assaults as the Jesus Seminar, Dan Brown and his best-seller *The Da Vinci Code*, Michael Drosnin’s *The Bible Code* and *The Bible Code II*, the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, and more.

In addition, the authors explore controversial topics including the Shroud of Turin, the James ossuary, Mel Gibson and his blockbuster film *The Passion of the Christ*, and the fantasy writings of J.R.R. Tolkien (of *Lord of the Rings* fame).

There is also a chapter dedicated to a response to the various attacks upon the resurrection of Christ which endlessly circulate in one manner or another, year-in and year-out. The authors also examine pluralism (the teaching that Jesus is not the only way of salvation). When you have “Christian superstars” appearing on such broadcasts as *Larry King Live* and agreeing with the host’s pluralistic statements — or at best allowing them to go unchallenged — it shows just how crucial this material is.

The publication is attractively presented with an abundance of sidebars (containing additional informa-

(continues on page 27)

Editor’s Note: The publications featured in PFO’s *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.00 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.