

# Critical Issues Commentary

A BIBLICALLY BASED COMMENTARY ON ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOU

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## CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN DIVINATION

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*“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.” (2Timothy 4:2-4)*

There was a king in Israel who decided that he could set up his own way of coming to God. This king's story will provide a needed warning for those today that do likewise.

The king was Jeroboam. Jeroboam received a prophecy that God was going to tear 10 tribes away from Solomon and give them to him (1Kings 11:31) because of the idolatry of Solomon (1Kings 11:33). Solomon then decided to put Jeroboam to death, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt until Solomon died (1Kings 11:40). At Solomon's death the prophecy came true and Jeroboam became king over the 10 northern tribes.

However, once God had made Jeroboam king, Jeroboam became concerned. He reasoned: *“If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah” (1Kings 12:27)*. So, being a pragmatist, he set up two convenient houses of worship: Dan in the northern part of the realm and Bethel in the southern. Then he made priests out of non-Levites and instituted his own feast day, hoping to keep the people from going to Jerusalem as required by Torah.

To further make the new way of worshipping God amenable to the people, he placed a golden calf in each place of worship: *“So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt’” (1Kings 12:28)*. His words reminded the people

of Aaron's words. C. F. Keil comments, “What Jeroboam meant to say by the words, ‘Behold thy God,’ etc., was, ‘this is no new religion, but this was the form of worship which our fathers used in the desert, with Aaron himself leading the way.’”<sup>1</sup> He did not mean that the calves literally brought them out, but that they were representative of God who had brought them out. Keil goes on to argue that rather than instituting an entirely different religion, Jeroboam was altering the worship of God to suit his religious and political needs. Says Keil, “The sin of which Jeroboam was guilty consisted in the fact that he no longer allowed the people to go to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, but induced or compelled them to worship Jehovah before one or the other of the calves which he had set up . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Jeroboam thought he could come to God anyway that he saw fit, that he could institute his own version of worshipping God. Prophets of God spoke to him (1Kings 11:31; 13:1; 14:7-10) and he was healed by God (1Kings 13:6), but in the end he was judged as an evil doer (1Kings 14:10-14). Jeroboam saw no need to follow the prescriptions of Torah concerning how Israel was to worship God. How wrong he was!

I believe that God reveals the only means by which we can legitimately come to Him. In this article we will examine the claims of contemporary Christian mystics who assert that they have discovered methods to contact God, hear His voice, and even see inner images of Jesus that come alive and speak: methods borrowed from worldly sources and not

found in the Bible. I will claim that those who borrow practices from the pagans and try to use them as means to come to God sin in the same manner Jeroboam sinned.

### CAN MAN DECIDE HOW TO COME TO GOD?

In the previous issue of CIC, I argued that methods are not neutral: either humans can come to the true God by any means that they see fit or God restricts the means by which we can come to Him. This was proven by the fact that various forms of divination are forbidden where divination is defined as any technique used to gain secret information that God has not chosen to reveal. If we could come by any means, then tarot cards, Ouija boards, crystal balls, psychic powers, etc. could all legitimately be used to contact God. Since certain techniques are forbidden, then the claim that humans can come to God by any means whatsoever is unbiblical. Therefore, we conclude that God has restricted the means of coming to Him and worshipping Him.

There are restrictions. The question is, “Who determines them?” The options are that individuals determine them for themselves, church traditions determine the restrictions, or the Scriptures determine the restrictions. I argue that if individuals determine the restrictions for themselves, there are no restrictions. A good example is Morton Kelsey, the most prolific writer among twentieth century Christian mystics. Kelsey, open to any religious practice that will help in the “inner journey,” writes, “The inner journey is as individual as our thumbprint. We need to guide others on their way and never impose our way upon them.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Christian mystics opt for the second option -- church traditions. They find that mystics and their practices existed from the very early days of church history.<sup>4</sup> It is surprising that contemporary evangelicals sometimes cite Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions to jus-

tify their practices; but many do. They usually try to also find Biblical support, but such support cannot be found without twisting the Scriptures.

I believe that Scripture alone determines the valid means of coming to God. The Scripture reveals one obvious restriction: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’”* (John 14:6). The Bible not only reveals the only way to salvation, but it also provides the means of grace for living the Christian life. God does not leave this up to man’s ingenuity. He has not left us to sift through the religious practices of the cultures of the world in order to choose which ones to “Christianize.” Those who do are modern day Jeroboams who will not grant to God the right to tell them how God will be worshipped.

### THE CLAIMS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICS

In the past few weeks I have studied many books written by Christian mystics between 1947 and 2004. Comparing their teachings, one to another, has led me to conclude that these mystics differ little in their practices and their use of the Bible. I will cite many of their works, explain their beliefs, and show how what they practice flows from their basic beliefs.

### THE KINGDOM “WITHIN”

One common theme is that the kingdom of God is inside the individual. Agnes Sanford was an early pioneer in bringing mysticism to twentieth century evangelicals. Her book *“The Healing Light”* was originally published in 1947. In it she said this about the kingdom of God: *“‘The kingdom of God is within you,’ said Jesus. And it is the indwelling light, the secret place of the consciousness of the Most High that is the kingdom of Heaven in its present manifestation on this earth.”*<sup>5</sup> Sanford believed there were laws we needed to learn to “turn on” so that we could release God’s power and work miracles. *“Learning to live in the kingdom of Heaven,”* she goes on, *“is learning to turn on the light of God within.”*<sup>6</sup> Since she does not explain the gospel in Biblical terms, one is left with the impression that what she calls the

divine “force” is within each person to be tapped into if they only knew the laws that govern that force.<sup>7</sup>

Another twentieth century mystic who taught of the kingdom within was Ruth Carter Stapleton, the 1970’s teacher of inner healing and sister of President Jimmy Carter. She wrote, *“The concentrated mind is more amazing. It can become a vehicle for communicating with the core of our being which Jesus called ‘the kingdom of God within.’”*<sup>8</sup>

Morton Kelsey also taught this: *“What meditation does mean is a way for us to unlock and open the door to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming that this holy kingdom was within us and among us.”*<sup>9</sup>

Jose Silva taught that the kingdom of God was within us and that we needed to get into an alpha brain wave level and our right brain hemispheres to unlock the powers of the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup> Silva is the founder of the Silva Mind Control method that boasted 6 million followers in the 1980’s, but Silva is rarely confused with evangelicals.

Mystics latch onto the idea of the kingdom within because the idea gives a compelling reason for a “journey inward.” It dovetails nicely with the thinking of people in a culture influenced by New Age ideas and post-modern thought. Go deep inside of your self through an Eastern technique, and there you will meet God, or so they think. But does the Bible teach that the Kingdom of God is within human beings? The passage they are referencing is **Luke 17:20, 21**: *“Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.”* The phrase *“the kingdom of God is within you”* is found in the King James and the NIV. I believe that the context favors the NASB translation. Jesus was not telling His enemies, the Pharisees, that the kingdom was within them, but that it was among them in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> If they were going to enter the kingdom, they would have to repent and turn to Christ for salvation (see **Mark 1:14, 15**). There is nothing in this passage that would suggest that if the

Pharisees took an inward journey using meditative techniques they would find God’s kingdom!

### ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In 1980, the movie *“Altered States”* was released. It was about a man who used hallucinatory mushrooms and an isolation chamber to achieve a terrifying altered state of consciousness. The movie showed the dangers of such a journey. Interestingly, many of the teachers of Christian mysticism also warn of dangers that lurk for those who journey within. Kelsey, who learned his version of Christian mysticism by integrating many diverse religious practices with the depth psychology of Carl Jung,<sup>12</sup> claimed that below our rational consciousness lays a whole inner world where one meets the “Other.”<sup>13</sup> The problem is that when people learn techniques to access this inner realm beyond the conscious mind, they often meet horrible forces of darkness. According to Kelsey, evil exists there that is both intrinsic and extrinsic to the human psyche.<sup>14</sup> Some who go on this journey do not have a strong ego and a strong connection to the outer, material world, and cannot get back.<sup>15</sup>

If it is so dangerous (as other Christian mystics besides Kelsey also admit), why go there? The answer is that mystics think that God is to be found within. Since the realm of the unconscious mind, demonic powers, Jesus Christ and His kingdom, and any other spiritual reality is hidden from us through normal means of knowing, they think special techniques are needed. Kelsey describes his beliefs:

There are various techniques for opening up the tight capsule of space and time. Zen and Yoga, paying attention to dreams, prayer, contemplation, meditation, and the use of biofeedback all can be helpful for some people in reaching stillness and opening themselves to new experiences within. . . . There is a real danger in much of Eastern thought and in our own scientific probing into the mind, but is not because there is something dark and evil lurking in either of them. The danger lies in the fact that Eastern ways of prayer and scientific interest in

altered states of consciousness do not go far enough. The road stops once the relaxation, the peace and the detachment, or the extrasensory perception is achieved, and then one is left to wander.<sup>16</sup>

Kelsey thinks that those on the “inner journey” have to navigate the dangers and press further inward until they meet God there and find wholeness.

Richard Foster also mentions the danger: “So that we may not be led astray, however, we must understand that we are not engaging in some flippant work. We are not calling on some cosmic bellhop. This is a serious and even dangerous business.”<sup>17</sup>

Many Christian mystics think the “kingdom within” is a realm to be explored by spiritual pioneers who will brave the dangerous journey. Those who have done so can become guides or “masters” to help the uninitiated on their journey. Kelsey writes elsewhere, “Indeed I would suggest that everyone who is serious about relating to the spiritual realm find himself a spiritual director, if there were more men trained and experienced in this way.”<sup>18</sup>

Richard Foster laments the lack of “living masters” and claims that people are turning to Eastern meditation because the church has “abrogated the field.”<sup>19</sup> If Foster was right when he wrote that in 1978, he should be very encouraged now because today the church is awash in mystical practices. Some of the most popular Christian authors promote mystical practices from the middle ages.<sup>20</sup> We now have our own “living spiritual masters” who are putting on seminars in a city near you.

The type of meditation that Christian mystics advocate requires a different state of consciousness than normal, awake, thinking. That is why there is so much interest in dreams among mystics. Sleeping is one time that all humans are in a different state of consciousness. The alpha level of brain activity happens when people are entering sleep and waking up. The theta level is a where people go under deep hypnosis or deep meditation, and in the early stages of sleep.<sup>21</sup> Hypnosis and eastern meditative techniques purposely put someone in an altered state of consciousness with the

hope of learning something about the unconscious or subconscious mind or contacting the world of the spirits. Christian versions of it suggest that God can be contacted by purposely entering an altered state of consciousness (though few like to call it that).

Foster claims that what he often receives through meditation is guidance for solving problems and living a better life, approvingly citing Kelsey to that end.<sup>22</sup> He points out that people who are not religious have other uses for meditation:

It may have value in dropping our blood pressure or in relieving tension. It may even provide us with meaningful insights by helping us get in touch with our subconscious mind. But the idea of actual contact and communion with a spiritual sphere of existence sounds unscientific and faintly reasonable. If you feel that we live in a purely physical universe, you will view meditation as a good way to obtain a consistent alpha brain-wave pattern.<sup>23</sup>

He goes on to say for those who live in a universe created by an infinite, personal God, meditation is a communication between the “Lover and the one beloved.”<sup>24</sup> Since the same techniques are being used, this means that when the alpha level is achieved there we hear from God. Christian mystics commune with God in an altered state of consciousness.

Morton Kelsey describes altered states of consciousness and the benefits of them. He describes various versions of Eastern religion which enable the “conscious mind to halt.”<sup>25</sup> Writes Kelsey, “In both Yoga and Zen meditation, the activity of the brain changes. Alpha and sometimes theta waves are produced, and in both of these the capacity of the mind changes.”<sup>26</sup> He says, “[P]sychic gifts often depend on a state of relaxation like this. The most gifted psychics often have to relax to the point where silence begins to take over before they can tune in to these gifts.”<sup>27</sup> The following material is Kelsey telling what sort of capacities can be gained by being in an altered state of consciousness through Eastern forms

of meditation:

A person may become open to telepathy and thus know what is going on in other people’s minds, to precognition, . . . to clairvoyance, . . . or to psychokinesis (one’s thoughts have some kind of direct effect upon physical objects, including healing of humans beings). These capacities are often found among Hindu gurus, Zen masters, or anyone who uses deep meditation, as well as among Christian saints. They appear to be one of the results of continued meditation. There is danger, of course, if people enter meditation just to find these capacities.<sup>28</sup>

Kelsey is very frank about the fact that the actual practice is the same for Christians or people from other religions, as well as the results. Kelsey says, “Alpha waves are apparently induced in the brain.”<sup>29</sup> He even suggests that rhythmical breathing that is taught in various meditative practices, Christian and otherwise, may “go along with alpha and theta wave activity in the brain.”<sup>30</sup>

Kelsey, who has done more research and writing on this topic than any recent Christian author, believes that any technique that works can be adopted by Christians regardless of its source. He says, “When we are clear enough about our own point of view, we can find help in the methods of Eastern Christianity or in the ways of the Far East, perhaps by consulting the *I Ching* or through mandala contemplation; we may even find help in the ways of shamanism or Islam. If we are clear about where we stand and the direction we must take, such methods may be useful in order to follow our own way to the end.”<sup>31</sup> The end for Kelsey is described as follows: “Only as the whole person is turned toward the meditative process does the *experience* of the Divine expressed in Jesus Christ become a reality.”<sup>32</sup> My question is: how does he know it is really Jesus Christ he is meeting through these techniques? The assumption apparently is that if a Christian goes into an altered state of consciousness using pagan techniques, the Christian will meet Jesus there. Those of other religions evidently



do not. This is a dangerous assumption.

Kelsey may sound extreme, but consider this: he has a book published by an evangelical publishing house, and in the 1970's was an author popular with people in the Charismatic renewal. Richard Foster quoted him approvingly. Greg Boyd in his recently published *Seeing Is Believing* also promotes a version of mysticism and cites Kelsey approvingly. Boyd calls his own practice "resting in Christ" and equates it with one of Kelsey's practices.<sup>33</sup> Other authors may be better at "sanitizing" Eastern mysticism when they integrate it into their Christianity, but Kelsey is more honest about where it comes from and more unabashed about explaining the various issues about mystical practices. These practices do invoke an altered state of consciousness involving gaining an alpha brain level similar to hypnosis. Calling it "resting in Christ" or by any other name does not change the nature of the practice.

We will now examine some of the techniques that Christian authors have promoted to put people into the form of "altered" consciousness we have been describing.

### TECHNIQUES FOR THE JOURNEY INWARD BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Most Christian mystics recommend connecting prayer to breathing (we showed why earlier, because rhythmic breathing is helpful in achieving alpha level brain-waves). Ruth Carter Stapleton recommends that a person sit upright and erect in a chair.<sup>34</sup> To enter meditation she has a breathing exercise: "At last, seated or lying down, use your breath as an expression of inspiration. . . . Breathe in deeply before meditation, repeating in your mind as you breathe, 'I breathe in the Spirit,' and exhaling saying, 'I breathe out love.'"<sup>35</sup> Richard Foster has his own version of this:

Having seated yourself comfortably, slowly become conscious of your breathing. This will help you get in touch with your body and indicate to you the level of tension within. Inhale deeply, slowly tilting your head back as far as it will go. Then exhale, allowing your head

slowly to come forward until your chin nearly rests on your chest. Do this for several moments, praying inwardly something like this: 'Lord, I exhale my fear over my geometry exam, I inhale your peace. I exhale my spiritual apathy, I inhale Your light and life.'<sup>36</sup>

Morton Kelsey suggested using the "Jesus prayer" ("Lord Jesus have mercy on me") repetitively in conjunction with breathing, citing several medieval sources.<sup>37</sup> Kelsey summarizes, "The ancient Christian traditions of hesychasm<sup>38</sup> stressed the use of the Jesus prayer and an imageless sense of God's presence as well as awareness of breathing. The essential element linking these practices was the search for silence, for inward stillness."<sup>39</sup>

Agnes Sanford had a slightly different process, but still spoke about breathing. Here is Sanford's technique:

In order to receive God's life in the body, we must first be able to forget the body so that we can quiet the mind and concentrate the spiritual energies of God. . . . Many people find it helpful to meditate with the feet raised, resting upon a footstool or even upon another chair. . . . The one who prays will discover the reason for this as he connects more and more closely with the life of God. . . . He will notice as he relaxes that even his breathing is altered, becoming slow, thin and light, as if to leave room for the Spirit of God within.<sup>40</sup>

Sanford emphasizes immanence so much so that she scarcely distinguishes the Creator from the created. She says,

Having quieted our nerves and minds by sitting in the most comfortable position and by relaxing, let us now open our spirits to receive the abundant life of God. How easy this becomes when we realize that God is not a far-away sovereign, but is actually the medium in which we live – the very breath of life! . . . For as we tune in our thought-vibrations to the thought-vibrations of God, we

expose ourselves, as it were, to His eternal shining and so receive His image upon ourselves.<sup>41</sup>

This type of thinking takes away God's sovereign right to declare the terms by which we must come to Him and makes Him a part of the universe to be tapped into by those who know the secret. It strikes me that many of these mystical techniques are like "conjuring up" God. God does not allow that!

### REPEATED WORDS AND PHRASES

As we saw in Kelsey's description of the Jesus prayer, breathing techniques can be used in conjunction with a repeated phrase to enable the Christian mystic to empty the mind and find "the silence." The repetition of a word or phrase, over and over, as part of meditation became popular in this country with the practice of Transcendental Meditation. TM uses the names of Hindu deities, repeating a particular one (given to the devotee) over and over in an attempt to silence the mind. Christian mystics who use similar techniques try to dismiss the similarities. They often argue that Christians lost their ability to enter the inner world of silence because of Western rationalism (all of the mystical writers I read blame the West and rationalism for the lack of Eastern practices in the church). Ruth Carter Stapleton writes:

The seldom-considered art of listening to God is learned as we bring ourselves to the place of attentive silence. Because as human beings we need silence, and because our noisy Christianity tends to ignore that need, into that void has rushed a variety of Eastern meditative disciplines, the most popular of which is Transcendental Meditation. There is no need to argue against such discipline. What we need is to discover the authentic native Christian expression of meditation which makes all other disciplines unnecessary and inferior.<sup>42</sup>

The problem is that the Bible teaches no "discipline" to shut down the mind in order to make contact with God. Stapleton goes on, "Silence intimidates

when it should bless. It is looked upon as a void, when it could and should be considered a profound opportunity for communication with God."<sup>43</sup> The Bible never teaches that silence puts one in touch with God.

The techniques of Christian mystics differ little from those of Eastern mystics. An example is Ruth Carter Stapleton. Stapleton claims that there is a "sixth sense" by which we should be able to hear God's voice: "In the same way we who have been unwilling, through ignorance, to live in the light of silence have lost the ability to exercise that divinely bestowed sixth sense which enables us to listen in meditation to the voiceless voice of God."<sup>44</sup> This is not a neglected Biblical practice; the writers of Scripture knew nothing of it. It is simply TM that uses a Christian phrase for the mantra. After introducing the seating and breathing exercises mentioned earlier, Stapleton gives the next step: "To achieve this concentration [earlier called "silence"] select a single meaningful phrase such as, 'I am one with God,' 'God is love' or just the word *Jesus* or *God*. With your eyes closed, quietly and slowly, begin to repeat this phrase or word over and over in your mind (not audibly). . . . Make no effort to move beyond this repetition because when you are ready, you will automatically flow into the indescribable, indefinable state of mind we call meditation."<sup>45</sup>

The repeated phrase is designed to silence the mind and put the practitioner into an altered state of consciousness. TM and "Christian" practices that mimic it only differ in minor details. It has been shown that as far as physiological responses go, the word or phrase used in this type of meditation makes no difference.<sup>46</sup> The research of Dr. Herbert Benson shows that various techniques work: "These include repetitive prayers such as the rosary as in the Catholic tradition, centering prayers in Protestant religions and pre-davening prayers in Judaism. The specific method used usually reflects the beliefs of the person eliciting the relaxation response (Benson, 1984)."<sup>47</sup>

Do not be deceived. These methods are not taught in the Bible. They are borrowed from the East and brought into

Christianity by people who are evidently not satisfied with the means of grace God has provided all Christians. We are not lacking mystical capabilities because Western rationalism robbed us of them; we lack them because God never gave them. They are illicit means of divination.

### Visualization and Imagination

The most recently published book that promotes a form of Christian mysticism is written by Dr. Greg Boyd, the pastor of a large church in the St. Paul metropolitan area. Dr. Boyd has published eleven books and is a well known author. I know him to be a very kind and personable man who is passionate about what he believes. However, I think that the practice he is promoting in his latest book is dangerously in error. Therefore I have included a section in this article that critiques the book *Seeing is Believing*.

*Seeing is Believing* promotes "cataphatic prayer,"<sup>48</sup> a version of mysticism that involves using mental images of the human imagination to supposedly help a person experience God more profoundly. The following is a definition of cataphatic prayer published in a Creighton University article:

Another form of prayer, called *cataphatic*, honors and reverences images and feelings and goes through them to God. This form of prayer also has an ancient and well-attested history in the world of religions. Any sort of prayer that highlights the mediation of creation can be called *cataphatic*. So, praying before icons or images of saints; the mediation of sacraments and sacramentals; prayer out in creation - all these are *cataphatic* forms of prayer.<sup>49</sup>

Boyd claims support for cataphatic prayer from a long list of people from church history including some contemporary proponents: "Such notable authors as Agnes Sanford, Morton Kelsey, David Seamands, and Richard Foster are among these modern advocates of cataphatic spirituality."<sup>50</sup>

To prove the need for this type of practice Boyd cites this premise: "We become what we imaginatively see."<sup>51</sup>

He argues, based on **2Corinthians 3:18**, that only believers can *imaginatively* "see" an image of Jesus in their minds.<sup>52</sup> He argues that this is something we have to learn to do. The problem is that Boyd is importing ideas into the text that Paul never discusses. There is nothing in **2Corinthians 3** and **4** that indicates that all believers (Boyd admits that it is about all believers) have literally seen a mental picture of the person of Jesus in their minds (or at least should have such a mental image). In the context Paul was discussing the fact that those who were not believing had hardened minds. There was a veil of unbelief keeping them from seeing the truth of the gospel (see **2Corinthians 3:14-16**). What they were not "seeing" because of the "veil" was the truth of the gospel: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (**2Corinthians 4:3**).

Boyd has done a category shift and uses the resulting confusion to promote his visualization technique. "Seeing" in the context of the passage was to believe the gospel and be converted. It was not creating a mental image of Jesus in one's mind hoping thereby to become like that mental image. Peter makes it clear that the issue in the New Testament is faith in the person and work of Christ: "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (**1Peter 1:8**). In the same epistle from which Boyd claims to find justification for his practice, Paul wrote this: "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (**2Corinthians 5:7**). Rather than "Seeing is Believing" (Boyd's title), the reality is "believing is seeing." This type of "seeing" has nothing to do with images, mental or otherwise. It has to do with the content of the gospel.

Where this goes in Greg Boyd's book is that through a process he learned, he was able to go into a mental world that came alive. Jesus meets him in this world and re-interprets his memories for the purpose of bringing healing. Calling his technique, "resting in Christ," Boyd cites Morton Kelsey and Richard Foster as proponents of imaginative meditation.<sup>53</sup> He is right that Foster and Kelsey teach a version of this. He is wrong to suggest that "resting in Christ" as a Biblical

concept has anything to do with having a mental image of Jesus that comes alive and talks to you. This practice is never taught in scripture and has nothing to do with any Biblical passage about resting in Christ. This is another category error. It confuses people who are unaware of the semantic slight of hand that is going on. Kelsey was transparent about where he got his ideas, mainly from Carl Jung and Eastern practices.

The actual practice of imaginative prayer is similar to what we discussed before, but different in one key way. The Christianized versions of TM had as a goal the silencing of the mind to contact God and hear from God. The goal of cataphatic prayer is to use an inner, mental image to “see Jesus.” The process involves quietness, setting a mental scene, solitude, and a sitting position similar to those discussed earlier.<sup>54</sup> Boyd calls this “finding one’s inner sanctuary.” The desire is to experience Jesus “with all five senses.”<sup>55</sup>

Richard Foster recommends using one’s imagination in a similar way. He makes a very bold claim: “Hence, you can *actually* encounter the living Christ in the event, be addressed by His voice and be touched by His healing power. It can be more than an exercise of the imagination; it can be a genuine confrontation. Jesus Christ will actually come to you.”<sup>56</sup> Boyd cites Foster approvingly on this point.<sup>57</sup> Dear Reader: Please do not misunderstand. This is not about someone thinking about Jesus and perhaps imagining what He might look like (whether or not that is a good idea is worth discussing but it is not at issue here). This is about a technique that will put one in an altered state of consciousness (whether they call it that or not) in which an image of Jesus becomes the living Christ and the person experiences the reality of this Christ who speaks to them. They claim they are gaining information from Christ (if it is really Him) beyond what is written in the Bible. This information cannot be gained through normal means of study or normal means of knowing. It is secret, spiritual information. Therefore, it is forbidden (**Deuteronomy 29:29**).

In Boyd’s case, he gains healing from a painful childhood memory of a mean-spirited grandmother who had no pres-

ent for him because he was a “bad boy.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus comes to him in that little boy memory, tells him he is a “good boy” and gives him a present.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, to complete the healing, Jesus brings Boyd’s departed grandmother to him and the grandmother makes things right with Boyd, and then departs hand in hand with Jesus: “She and Jesus joined hands and I watched them walk off into the distance.”<sup>60</sup> His memory was “reworked” and he found healing. Not to begrudge a person his emotional well being, this experience is problematic for several reasons. How do we know this was the real Jesus who is changing a person’s memories? The Bible forbids talking to the dead, how then would Jesus create a chance for a person to hear words from his departed grandmother? This is a means of gaining un-revealed information that is not accessible by ordinary means of knowing. This story fits the definition of divination.

Kelsey cites Carl Jung concerning the use of imagination in meditation: “In the same way,’ Jung went on, ‘when you concentrate on a mental picture, it begins to stir, the image becomes enriched by details, it moves and develops. Each time, naturally, you mistrust it and have the idea that you have just made it up, that it is merely your own invention.”<sup>61</sup> Kelsey adds his own comments:

It is usually not too difficult for most people to start the process by concentrating on something graphic. The hard part comes in realizing that something could move unexpectedly inside us without our conscious direction. That is why it is so vital in developing imagination, meditation, or contemplation to realize that our ego is not the only force operating within us.<sup>62</sup>

I am not denying the reality of the experiences that Foster, Kelsey, Stapleton, Boyd and others. I am not denying that the practices that invoked the experiences “work” in the manner described by these authors. I am denying that the techniques that are used are valid means of coming to God. They are man-made ways that are not revealed in the Scriptures. There is no assurance that this “force operating within us” as Kelsey calls it,

is God.

## DREAM INTERPRETATION

One theme common with contemporary Christian mystics is that dreams are to be considered significant and that they are a way that the “Divine” as Kelsey says, is trying to speak to us. As I said before, going to sleep and waking up is one time all people enter the alpha brain wave level. It is in this level where dreams can be remembered. Interpreting dreams is a way to naturally gain information that comes to us in an altered state of consciousness without resorting to techniques to put one’s self in that state. We simply write down our dreams and seek their meaning.

Again, Morton Kelsey was a leader in exploring this means of gaining information from the spirit world. Kelsey relied on the research and teaching of Carl Jung. According to Kelsey, Jung believed that the unconscious mind thinks symbolically or metaphorically.<sup>63</sup> Kelsey shares his understanding of Jung’s thinking: “The task of dream interpretation, according to Jung, is that of learning a strange language with many nuances, of learning to understand the symbolic communications of the unconscious – the language of art, literature, mythology, and folklore. He saw no attempt on the part of the unconscious to deceive or distort.”<sup>64</sup> Jung believed that the unconscious is connected to a larger spiritual reality, a “collective unconscious.” Kelsey believed that the Hebrew prophets were tapping into the “collective unconscious”: “The images of Ezekiel, although little studied in recent years, are well known in song and literature. They are genuine productions of what depth psychology would call the collective unconscious, something from beyond the conscious mind and often beyond the limits of personal experience.”<sup>65</sup>

Kelsey followed Jung to the belief that the “Other” as he says, can be found in the unconscious which connects the individual to a spiritual reality. Kelsey said about Jung’s experiences and understanding of “depth psychology”: “From this fact came the certainty that reality, and frequently the best of reality, is found in these depths. This is also reality that demands a religious attitude from people,



and it is found only when we allow ourselves to be led by the thinking of the unconscious, symbolic thinking that can be found in fantasy and dream and in myth and story.<sup>66</sup> So following the theories of Carl Jung who had a spirit guide named Philemon,<sup>67</sup> contemporary mystics are looking for meaning from the world of the unconscious mind (a concept not found in the Bible). Dreams are considered a means of access to this world of symbol and myth.

It should be obvious that this Jungian understanding of dreams has nothing to do with how God spoke to the prophets in the Old Testament. That God has spoken in dreams as He has seen fit, does not prove that every dream is meaningful or ought to be taken seriously. Also, the Bible knows nothing of an art of dream interpretation that can be learned by serious students. God interprets dreams as He sees fit as Daniel and Joseph experienced.

Christian mystics have more in common with occultists and New Age followers than the Biblical authors. One contemporary "prophet" has a website where one can sign up for so much money per month to have his or her dreams interpreted.<sup>68</sup> Richard Foster cites both Jung and Kelsey approvingly concerning the language of images.<sup>69</sup> Greg Boyd says this: "The place where God usually interacts with his people is in their imagination. And whether he does this while we are awake or while we are asleep, it comes to the same thing."<sup>70</sup> Boyd, like all of these mystic authors, blames Western assumptions for the fact that most of us do not take our dreams seriously and recommends Kelsey's book *God, Dreams, and Revelations* for further insights on dream interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

### PUTTING GOD IN A BOX?

I have debated people about these techniques many times. They often say, "God can do anything and use anything, you are trying to put God in a box." You probably have heard that argument. When I was doing my research on divination for the previous issue of CIC, I thought about the "putting God in a box" accusation. The Biblical record shows that it is God who purposely limits the ways we can come to Him. If there is a "box"

God made it. I think a better analogy than a box, is a sheepfold. It is a Biblical analogy.

Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber*" (John 10:1). The true sheep enter the sheepfold through the door, Jesus Christ (John 10:7). He as the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). He protects His sheep from the wolves, gives them pasture, and abundant life (John 10:10-15). Being in the sheepfold may seem restrictive compared to the adventures of exploring the bigger world out there unencumbered by the guidance of the Shepherd. However the restrictions are there to save our spiritual lives.

The restrictions God places on how and by what means we may legitimately come to Him and receive spiritual truth are for our own good. The spirit world that Christian mystics like Morton Kelsey want to explore is far more complex than even Jung and Kelsey give it credit for being. The dangers of deception are far more real. In fact, if we journey into the world of the spirits by means other than what God has ordained, we **will** be deceived, not **may be** deceived. The spirits who inhabit that world have been there for many thousands of years practicing the art of deception. They willingly give people whatever experience they would tend to think is from God. Jose Silva, who is Catholic, when he went into his alpha level to gain guides received Jesus and Mary.<sup>72</sup> The spirits will give you what you would expect is from God in your own context. They will provide any experience that serves their deceptive purposes, including sending a spiritual "Jesus" (see 2Corinthians 11:4). The prohibitions on divination are there to protect us from these malicious entities.

So we are not putting God in a box, God is putting us in a sheepfold if we are willing to be there. The practices of "thinking outside the box" that are so popular today are fatal when it comes to spirituality. God has not left access to spiritual truth in the hands of innovative thinkers who like pioneers blaze new trails. God has given access to Himself, once for all, through Jesus Christ who is our heavenly High Priest. The truth is

revealed once for all in the Scriptures.

### CONCLUSION

Jeroboam was an innovator when it came to the worship of Yahweh. He saw no reason for the restrictions about how, when and where God would be worshipped. He had cultural reasons for making the changes he did. The people in the northern kingdom were very prosperous agriculturally. The indigenous people had fertility gods that were concrete and vivid representations of deity. There were also political issues in Jeroboam's mind. Jerusalem was the headquarters of the Davidic kingdom and if the people went to the pilgrim feasts there and sacrificed through the Levitical priesthood, they may long to be reunited with the southern kingdom. So Jeroboam "thought outside of the box." He became a spiritual pioneer who came up with culturally acceptable ways to worship Yahweh. He made worship convenient and relevant.

Jeroboam was not a pagan; he had many legitimate experiences with the true God. Yahweh's prophets spoke to him. He was called by God to be king over Israel. He was healed, not by Baal, but by God. There is no evidence he really believed that the golden calves were God, he simply used them to represent God to the people (in rebellion against the 10 commandments). He saw the need for feasts and a priesthood; he just made up his own. He mingled the worship of Yahweh with the practices of the pagans. Here is the summary of Jeroboam's life: "*And He will give up Israel on account of the sins of Jeroboam, which he committed and with which he made Israel to sin*" (1Kings 14:16). God alone will determine the means by which people can come to Him.

Those today who are evangelical Christians, who know God through the gospel, yet dabble in the practices of the pagans, are spiritual "sons of Jeroboam." They are, like Jeroboam, very creative in making Christianity relevant to the current culture. The problem is not Western rationalism as the contemporary mystics all claim. They are fighting an obsolete battle. The prevailing culture in America is very much "spiritual." They claim the need for mystical experience to fight against modernity when they are in a

post-modern culture that has embraced the East. The danger today is not that people think that the material realm is all there is, it is that they think they can contact the spiritual realm their own way. They are practicing divination.

Next month we shall discuss means of grace. God has given us legitimate means of coming to Him and communing with Him. None of these require an altered state of consciousness.

### End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> C. F. Keil, "I & II Kings" in *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Volume III (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1986) 198.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. 199.
- <sup>3</sup> Morton Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence*, (Paulist Press: Maywah, New Jersey, 1995) 75.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, see Greg Boyd, *Seeing is Believing; Experiencing Jesus through Imaginative Prayer*; (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2004) 90 – 95 for a list of mystics throughout church history.
- <sup>5</sup> Agnes Sanford, *The Healing Light*; (Charisma Books: Watchung, NJ, 1972 edition) 3. That Charisma books republished Sanford's 1947 book shows how mysticism was infiltrating the church.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> For her understanding of God as "energy" and a "force" and laws that enable us to do miracles see *ibid.*; 1, 4, 15, and she says on page 17, "Knowing then that we are part of God, that His life within us is an active energy and that He works through the laws of our bodies, let us study to adjust and conform ourselves to those laws."
- <sup>8</sup> Ruth Carter Stapleton, *The Experience of Inner Healing*, (Word: Waco, 1977), 165.
- <sup>9</sup> Kelsey, *Silence*; 11.
- <sup>10</sup> Video Tape; *The Silva Mind Control Method*; The John Ankerberg Show (Ankerberg Theological Research Institute: Chattanooga, 1986). This video features a debate between Silva and Dave Hunt. I highly recommend it. The issues they debate are even more pertinent today.
- <sup>11</sup> Whether "within" or "in your midst" is the preferable translation is often determined by one's eschatological views. Many wish to teach that there never was or will be a visible manifestation of the Kingdom; but that it only exists inside of people. However, those who favor "within" are not considering the many other passages in Luke/Acts about the Kingdom. The Kingdom is something people enter by faith, not something that enters them

(Luke 18:17); The Kingdom is something that has come near (Luke 10:9, 11); some there will see the Kingdom (Luke 9:27); People will eat bread in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:29; 14:15); The Kingdom will be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6, 7) and many other similar issues. None of these passages makes sense if the kingdom is internal to humans. The Kingdom was present in the person of Christ, so "in your midst" is the translation which fits everything else we learn about the Kingdom in Luke/Acts.

- <sup>12</sup> Morton Kelsey, *Christo-Psychology*; (Crossroad: New York, 1982) He devoted this entire book to integrating Carl Jung's ideas with Christianity. Jung taught the idea of a "collective unconscious" that could be assessed by techniques like those espoused by Kelsey. Jung himself saw that there were dangers involved with going there.
- <sup>13</sup> Kelsey *Silence*, 12, 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid. 93.
- <sup>15</sup> Kelsey describes psychosis where "over zealous" souls lose contact with the outer world. *Silence* 94.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. 154.
- <sup>17</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, (Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1978) 16.
- <sup>18</sup> Morton Kelsey, *Encounter With God*, (Bethany Fellowship: Minneapolis, 1972) 179.
- <sup>19</sup> Foster, *Celebration* 14.
- <sup>20</sup> For example see Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2002) 88, 89.
- <sup>21</sup> This website describes altered states and recommends them for all religious people, including Christians: <http://www.plim.org/meditate.html>; altered states are described here: <http://www.plim.org/alteredstate97.html>
- <sup>22</sup> Foster, *Celebration* 17.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid. 18.
- <sup>25</sup> Kelsey *Silence*, 149.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid. 150.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid. 150.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid. 143.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. 155.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Boyd, *Seeing*, 103.
- <sup>34</sup> Stapleton *Inner Healing* 164.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid. 165.
- <sup>36</sup> Foster, *Discipline*, 25.
- <sup>37</sup> Kelsey, *Silence*, 144, 145.
- <sup>38</sup> Here is a definition: "Hesychasts (*hesychastes* — quietist) were people, nearly all monks, who defended the theory that it is possible by an elaborate system of asceticism, detachment from earthly cares, submission to an approved master, prayer, especially perfect repose of body and will, to see a mystic light; which is none other than the *uncreated light* of God." From the Catholic Encyclopedia online: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07301a.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Kelsey, *Silence* 145.
- <sup>40</sup> Sanford, *Healing*, 21.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 22.
- <sup>42</sup> Stapleton, *Inner Healing*, 163.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. 165, 166.
- <sup>46</sup> See relaxation response therapy: <http://www.mind-body-medicine.com/relax.htm>
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Boyd, *Seeing*, 90-95.
- <sup>49</sup> [http://www.creighton.edu/~rocsj/liturgy/existentialism\\_part6.html](http://www.creighton.edu/~rocsj/liturgy/existentialism_part6.html); from "An Existential Approach to Liturgy"
- <sup>50</sup> Boyd, *Seeing*, 94.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid. 88.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid. 103.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid. 108.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Foster, *Celebration*, 26.
- <sup>57</sup> Boyd, *Seeing*, 111.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid. 117.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid. 121, 122.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid. 125.
- <sup>61</sup> Kelsey, *Silence*, 226, 227 citing C. G. Jung, *Analytical Psychology*.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid. 227.
- <sup>63</sup> Morton Kelsey, *God, Dreams, and Revelation*; (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1991) 172.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid. 45.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid. 173.
- <sup>67</sup> This website has Jung's depiction of Philemon: <http://www.crmspokane.org/Philemon.htm>
- <sup>68</sup> The man is John Paul Jackson this is the website: <http://www.streamsministries.com/>
- <sup>69</sup> Foster, *Celebration*, 22, 23.
- <sup>70</sup> Boyd, *Seeing*, 205.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid. 205, 206.
- <sup>72</sup> Ankerberg, *Silva*; video tape.

### Critical Issues Commentary

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