



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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“Put on the whole armor of God”

Summer 2021

Recovering From Trauma

It has been approximately a year and a half since the Covid-19 virus (a.k.a. CCP virus) first affected the world with suspicion, wonder, and fear, traumatizing the globe with paranoia that translated into stress and anxiety. The effects of this worldwide event have been devastating to say the least. How does one cope and recover from this kind of trauma, or for that matter, any kind of trauma?

by Bill Watson



Early on, last year in 2020, the world was introduced to allegedly a new strain of the Sars virus, called “Sars-Cov-2.” It goes without saying, since discovering this virus, there has been an enormous amount of suspicion, questions, and debate as to just what it actually is, how much of a threat it really presents, what kind of healthcare is appropriate, and to what extent of “lifestyle change” is actually necessary for minimizing or eliminating its negative effect upon the population of the world.

Clearly, we don’t need to discuss a lot of details about what mankind has contended with throughout the nations of the world over the last 15 to 18 months, but the conditions are, admittedly, common to the population of the world. Most of us have been required to wear masks, social distance, obey curfews, and get our temperatures taken on a regular basis. Many have had to be tested, too, on multiple occasions—especially those who are college or professional athletes. During the course of this “pandemic” (as per the WHO and CDC), limitations and restrictions to control crowds were also implemented. Sports events and entertainment engagements were limited and restructured at best, or canceled altogether, while nations globally locked down, reducing domestic and international travel to virtually a “crawl,” if at all!

Businesses, and even churches, were limited to ten of fewer people, or per-

haps closed altogether, while others were told to work out of their homes or perhaps were laid off or lost their jobs completely. The stresses caused from working at home added to the trauma due to the logistics and privacy challenges they presented. The conflation of one’s profession being conducted from home and the distractions they posed from mates and children, sadly, spiked the divorce rate. According to the *New York Post*, due to a combination of stress, financial strain, working from home, illness, death of a loved one, home schooling, etc., all contributed to a 34 percent increase in divorce from March through June of 2020, compared to 2019. These are real people—dads, moms, and children—that are now injured by divorce! This is a sobering statistic!

There is no doubt, the world has been traumatized over the last 15 to 18 months in such a way that it could take years to repair and recover from the damage it has caused economically and socially through the separation, division, and failure in families and personal relationships.

This so-called pandemic has redefined for many of us what family is and means, what entertainment is or what a vacation means; how, or where we will shop—online, or at a store. Many are rethinking how we will conduct business going forward, who we will work for, and how will we socially interact within our network of acquaintances at church, among business associates, and with classmates, friends, and family members. And, of course, the added anxiety and stress of

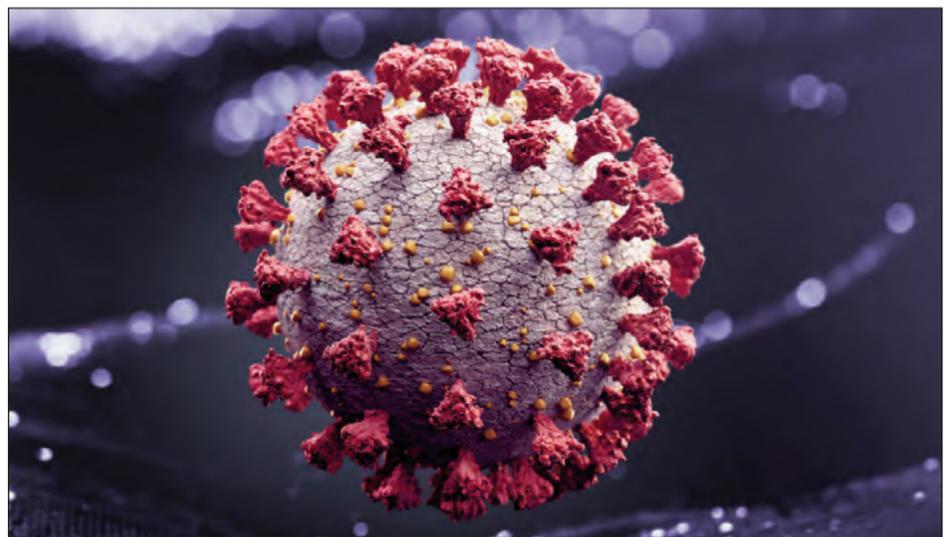
deciding whether or not one should wear a mask or get the “shot” of a non-FDA approved, Emergency Use inoculation can be very traumatizing decisions that do indeed weigh heavily on all of us and our families!

Reflecting on a Path Going Forward

It would appear that conditions are

beginning to loosen up here in the United States. But there remains some “hot spots” around the country, as there are around the world; like presently in Canada and India, where variants of the virus have caused new outbreaks that are threatening more lock-downs. But, this is not an unex-

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pected phenomenon when contending with infections of this nature.

However, with the advent of circumstances beginning to open up that will afford businesses, entertainment, and schools to start operating in reality again, as opposed to virtually online, people are going to experience some adjustments once more. Getting the **trauma** we've experienced over the last year and a half behind us will take some effort on our part—and *some more than others*.

Let's remember, this pandemic has affected all of us differently. Some of us lost jobs, opportunities, or had to reinvent ourselves and change careers. Others experienced separation, perhaps due to an elderly loved one in a nursing home where visiting wasn't allowed. Maybe we suffered with worry and anxiety about a loved one that was hospitalized and distressed by lingering health concerns from the effects of the virus. Others may have even lost a loved one or a close friend during this time due to complications arising from having the virus. But, suffice it to say, the variety of experiences that have negatively impacted us affect each of us differently—we all have our own story. And **trauma** is often the "common denominator" among us concerning the world we currently are living in.

On the other hand, trauma can originate from many different sources besides this present-day pandemic. Life is filled with **traumatizing events** and circumstances that can come upon us at anytime. Sources that are sometimes beyond our control—such as a hurricane, tornado, forest fire, or being victimized by a crime, among many other things—can cause

loss in our lives, which is often the root cause for the **trauma** we experience. Yes, *loss* is usually the basis of *trauma*. And the degree, or intensity of the *loss* will often determine the extent and severity of the **trauma**.

This **trauma** can go painfully deep and last a long time in the mind and emotions of an individual. Violent crimes, accidents, incidents of war, an unexpected illness, or death, all have their own *degree of trauma* associated with them; and how we cope with these **traumatizing events** is specific to the circumstances that caused it and our frame of mind—our mental and emotional ability to adjust to those circumstances. So, are there some keys we can use that will help us to at least minimize and improve our control of the **trauma** in our lives?

Things to Consider and Keep in Mind

As we consider what can be done, keep in mind Christ makes it clear to "come unto me, all you that labor [*toil, wearied, fatigued, work hard*] and are heavy laden [*loaded up, over burdened*], and I will give you rest [*refreshment, ease*]" (Matthew 11:28). Paul mentions; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). This is foundational to the *Christian outlook* when facing traumatic conditions. To recognize our Lord provides us with *refreshment, comfort, and ease* will indeed provide us the courage and resolve necessary to endure the trauma. *Always keep in mind*, "the LORD is near to those who

have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all.... The LORD redeems the soul [*nepesh—the air-breathing creature*] of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate" (Psalm 34:18-19, 22). There is no fear in the love of the Lord because "God is love" and "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:8, 18).

With this *as a foundation*, we know that *grieving loss* is natural and healthy. *We should take time to grieve*. Even David used thirty days to grieve the loss of his son. But he came to terms with the loss and resolved to move forward. Admittedly, this is not always easy to do. It can be arduous, grueling, and strenuous, taxing every mental and emotional fiber you have; and yes, it may take longer than thirty days to finally accept the loss. But the goal is to *get ahead of the trauma* at some point and *put it behind you*.

We need to keep in mind, God never leaves our side when we suffer—He is still right there standing by us, for our comfort, ease, and refreshment. It's in this *time of reflection* we **have opportunity** to move from "why me" to "how can I grow from this experience?" It's in these times of despair, when we're broken-hearted that *a contrite spirit is golden in "potential" for spiritual growth!* Easier said than done? Perhaps! But Paul encourages us to remember: "I know both how to

be abased and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. *I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me*" (Philippians 4:12-13).

Notice what Solomon said: "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow [*vexation, anger, grief, provocation, indignation, soreness*] is better than laughter [*in merriment or defiance, to scorn, sport, mocked*]: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better [*well, right, favor, kind*]. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth [*feasting, pleasure, gladness*]" (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

So, it becomes apparent, we are expected to work through the traumatic conditions we find ourselves faced with from time to time. We're even expected to view these experiences as *learning tools* for improving our outlooks, faith, commitments, and dedication to the God we represent. And how we do this takes determination to remain calm while in the storm; because trauma has been described by many professionals as feeling alone, helpless, humiliated, and hopeless. This is what many of us are up against when deep in the throes of trauma. It can be paralyzing—and it's not easy to see traumatic circumstances as learn-

— 2021 Holy Day Calendar —

New Testament Passover

March 26, 2021 (Observed at sundown)

Feast of Unleavened Bread

March 28 – April 3, 2021

Pentecost

May 16, 2021

Feast of Trumpets

September 7, 2021

Day of Atonement

September 16, 2021

Feast of Tabernacles

September 21 – September 27, 2021

Last Great Day (or Eighth Day)

September 28, 2021

Holy days are observed beginning sundown the previous evening and end at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.

Open Church Policy

The Church of God International is an open church.

We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do. Ω

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: August 15, 2021

Submissions may be sent to vancestinson@cgi.org

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ing tools when in the “thick of the torrents.”

Navigating the Torrents of Trauma

According to Mr. Ron Hawkins, Chairman of the Executive Board of the American Association of Christian Counselors, coming to terms with trauma occurs in three phases. These phases include, *first*, achieving a sense of safety and stability; *second*, processing the trauma; and *third*, consolidation and resolution. Working through the trauma means “*moving on from it.*” Now we may not like the hand we’re dealt, but it is critical we recognize a means by which we can “*play that hand.*” And fundamental to that is to remain engaged with your life and those loved ones around you.

Keep in mind, it’s at this time that family and friends can become beneficial, *assuming* they have your best interest at heart. Solomon saw this when he wrote that “Two are better than one...For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together they have heat... And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly [*hastily, swiftly, easily*] broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12).

In so many words, it’s a known fact, we are better off if we allow (trust) ourselves to be hardwired for relationships. And this is also at the basis for ministering to a traumatized individual—genuinely being there for them. Remember, it’s *not about you*. Paul

lays down a premise for all of us to keep in mind when asked occasionally to comfort another who is traumatized in their lives. He says, “let no corrupt [*worthless*] communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying [*building, concretely, structure*], that it may minister [*bestow, show, connect*] grace [*divine influence, reflection, favor, benefit, gift*] unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). In other words, when we hurt, be there for each other. Remember, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

So, when communicating to the traumatized in today’s world—and there are some who *live with trauma* due to scares caused from tragedies in our lives over the years—it’s important the message is clear that together we can face these conditions better than if we were alone, because without the sense of security, safety, and comfort others can provide, we will not be able to process the trauma.

Specifically, concerning this alleged pandemic, much of what we’ve gone through this last year and a half has been disruptive to our careers, lifestyles, and perhaps our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It has isolated some of us from work, school, church, friends, and loved ones. We have been told to obey certain rules that have restricted our freedoms and limited our *sovereign God-given rights* to go where we want to go and do what we want to do. This has been and remains troubling to cope with—a *forced lifestyle change* that

demands particular behaviors that don’t seem logical, or make sense!

So, there is, in this context, a *call for renewal*—revival in our Christian lives! So use this time to draw close to God. Find the “personal adjustments” to the limitations we find ourselves surrounded by. How you, in your relationship with God, determine to cope with what is required of us may, indeed, vary from person to person. But if we expect to resolve the discomfort and disruption in our lives and be healed from the *trauma* we might be experiencing, then it must come from God our Healer, according to our faith.

Paul told us to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service. And be not conformed [*fashion alike, to pattern alike*] to this world: but be you transformed [*metamorphose, changed, transfigured*] by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect [*completeness, full of age, mature*] will of God” (Romans 12:1–2). Paul continues this same line of reasoning when he says, “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). And he shares this same advice with the Christians at Colossae when he says, “But now you also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication [*vile, vulgar*] out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge [*God’s Word*] after the image of him that created him”

(Colossians 3 :8–10).

This Christian *transformation for the twenty-first century* will demand from all of us who are following Christ a resolve that is going to *take courage, bravery, and faith* to stand up to the forces that are in the shadows. We must learn to be free from the *fears* in our lives, which only *feeds the torment of trauma*. “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness [*frankness, assurance, confidence, speak freely, or openly*] in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love: but perfect [*complete*] love casts out fear: because fear has torment [*penal infliction, punish, chastise, to curtail*]. He that fears is not made perfect [*complete, fulfill, accomplished*] in love” (1 John 4:17–18).

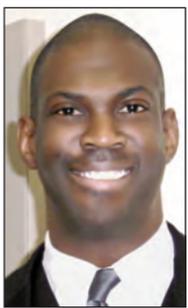
So, brethren, draw close to our Lord Jesus Christ and *be fearless in your faith* because He can and will heal you of any trauma you may have, *if only* you would embrace the comfort in knowing what He has waiting for us; and there is nothing in this physical realm comparable to what He has reserved for us in His dimension.

Keep the words of the apostle Paul in mind whenever you begin to allow your fears or losses to overwhelm you. Notice what he says: “For I reckon that the sufferings [*hardships, pain, emotions, affliction*] of this present time [*the twenty-first century—our life’s circumstances*] are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Oh Lord, *increase our faith* that we might be able to *endure to the end!*

Followers of ‘the Way’

by George Roper



Names can carry a great deal of meaning. One manner in which meaning is attributed is observed when an object, practice, or movement is named after a person.

The derivative name is known as an *eponym*. Eponyms are a reflection of the impression that an individual has made upon their contemporaries. Over time, the point of reference concerning whom something is named after can lose its context. Gaining familiarity with the influence behind how objects, practices, or movements were named helps flesh out the fuller meaning behind an eponym.

Some instances of an eponym may or may not be based in fact, giving way to an eponym being influenced by folklore. In such instances, it is difficult to verify if an account is accurate in the absence of multiple corroborating historical sources. One such example of this is depicted by the fourth Earl of Sandwich. John Montagu was a British aristocrat. He was appointed to

the position of Earl of Sandwich in 1729.

The Earl of Sandwich had many vices. Among them was a penchant for heavy gambling, known to extend for hours on end. It is said, during his gambling sessions the Earl would have his chef prepare slices of meat between two pieces of bread. He chose to eat while remaining at the gambling table to avoid taking a pause from his wagers. He reasoned the two pieces of bread surrounding the meat would keep him from getting his hands greasy and prevented him from staining his playing cards. The Earl’s gambling guest would emulate him and order the same. The Earl of Sandwich soon became associated with his concoction of meat between two slices of bread, bringing his entrée to take on his name and be known as the “sandwich.”

Another example of an eponym is demonstrated through an anecdote concerning Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott. Mr. Boycott was a retired British army captain and served as an estate manager in Ireland in the 1880s. He operated as the man-

ager and rental agent of a large development whose land was leased by farmers and their families. The estate was owned by an aristocrat who resided in Britain. Mr. Boycott collected the rental payments from those in the farming community for the absentee landlord.

One season, a poor harvest was experienced which negatively affected profits of the lessees. The farmers petitioned for a reduction in rent. However, that request was refused. Instead, Mr. Boycott sought to evict those renters experiencing hardship. In response, the tenants halted all farming, ceased remitting their harvest, and refused to make rental payments to Mr. Boycott. In addition, other industries of the grounds refused to give service to Mr. Boycott. His household staff, farming hands, and stable workers all engaged in a work stoppage. The courier refused to deliver his mail. Businesses would no longer carry out transactions with him, while food supply agents abstained from selling to him.

In an attempt to recoup lost income and rental payments, Mr. Boycott was

forced to hire outside personnel to reap the crops in the village that he managed. The replacement workers were escorted to and from the work site by a security detail composed of a regiment of the British Royal Army and the then standing police force of Ireland. The deployment numbered over one thousand men. In the end, the cost of the security presence far exceeded the value of the harvest brought in. The actions of the villagers became associated with their antagonist. Hence, to abstain from engaging in dealings with another came to be known as a “boycott.”

The Bible also contains eponyms which resonated with those during the time of the first century church. In the time of the early church, the followers of Jesus Christ were referred to by many names. One term applying to the followers of Christ was the Greek word *Christianos*, which is translated as Christians. The word Christian is used sparingly and is only referenced three times in the New Testament. During the first century, the word

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Christian was not the dominant term used to describe the followers of Christ. It is first cited in Acts 11.

“Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:25–26, NKJV).

Another eponym used to specify the followers of Jesus of Nazareth is the word *Nazarenes*. Describing the followers of Christ as “Nazarenes” was far more common in the early church period. Historical texts also refer to a sect of the followers of Christ as Nazarenes, referencing them as such through the fourth century. We find the term first used in the Book of Acts as a case is made against the apostle Paul during a hearing.

“For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5, NKJV).

An argument can be made, that the attribution of the terms *Christians* or *Nazarenes* originated from those out-

side of the movement. While another eponym referring to the followers of Christ is one that is believed to be self-attributed. Those of the early church identified themselves as followers of “the Way.” In the first century, this term became the most common reference for the followers of Jesus. The apostle Paul acknowledges his affiliation with the group known as “the Way” in an audience with Governor Felix over Judea.

“However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of *the Way*, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14, NIV).

Often times, rulers appointed to serve the area of Judea were not native to the region or well versed in Jewish culture. Such rulers would often find themselves uninformed of developments in the Jewish community. However, Governor Felix was already aware of the organization that Paul identified with.

Then Felix, who was well acquainted with *the Way*, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case” (Acts 24:22, NIV).

During the first century, the religious body known as “the Way” was the recipient of antagonism from Jew and Gentile alike. Paul was a witness to how the group that he belonged to was maligned.

“And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of *the Way* before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disci-

ples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:8–9, NIV).

Those of the Gentile community also took exception to the group’s promotion. The local idol-makers feared the religious sect’s influence would sway customers from purchasing idols and hurt sales. The backlash was so strong that an uproar arose in the city of

Ephesus.

“And about that time there arose a great commotion about *the Way*” (Acts 19:23, NIV).

The early church, also known as “the Way,” assumed a name acquired from Christ’s own description of Himself.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am *the way* and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6, NIV).

The identifying name that the first century church was “the Way,” an eponym stemming from the Head of the church, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). The name not only identified who led this following of believers, it also highlighted the precepts and values of Christ Himself.

Today, followers of Christ are predominantly known as Christians. However, a stronger grasp of the names and eponyms that the church has held in the past can give greater insight into our identity as members of Christ’s body today. We too are to be followers of Christ but not just in name only. We are to internalize and exhibit the very mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

Therefore, we are Christians, we are Nazarenes, we are followers of *the Way*.

The early church, also known as “the Way,” assumed a name acquired from Christ’s own description of Himself.

Are fallen angels immortal beings?

QUESTION: Are evil spirits immortal? Did the spirits [that possessed the pigs in Matthew 8 and Mark 5] die with the pigs that killed themselves? ... Are there scriptures that say evil spirits are to die? The spirits [in Matthew 8] said they [expected] to be tormented. What about being destroyed or perishing?

C.C., Scammon, KS

ANSWER: There is no good reason for believing that the demons in these passages died or were attempting to commit suicide. They were just doing what demons do; they were bringing about misery, destruction, and death—and Jesus prevents human suffering and death by allowing the evil spirits to enter into and destroy a herd of 2,000 pigs. The demons knew Jesus’ identity, so they thought He was there to increase their torment by casting them out and perhaps driving them into a place of confinement, where they would remain until judgment day. The demons requested that they be permitted to enter the herd of pigs instead, and Jesus permitted it. They immediately did to the pigs what they would have eventually done to the men—they drove them to their death.

Matthew’s account refers to two demon-possessed men, while Mark’s account mentions only one. Perhaps Mark’s intention for focusing on only the one is to show that a single human life is more valuable than the lives of a very large number of animals.

But what about the final judgment for the world of evil spirits? Will these beings ultimately be destroyed, or will they be tormented forever?

I will give you the view I believe to be the most plausible biblically.

God alone is *inmately* immortal. He has “life in Himself” (John 5:26; cf. 1 Timothy 6:16). All created entities, including angels and other sentient beings, exist as long as God sustains their existence. Their “immortality” (undying state) is dependent entirely on the One who alone is by nature immortal. Angels are ontologically different from humans, but both are a part of the created order, and just as both were caused to exist, both can be destroyed.

We have often stated that the traditional concept of an ever-burning hell where the souls of unredeemed humans are tormented endlessly is incompatible with the biblical concept of a loving and merciful Creator; but, for some strange reason, we have not always applied the same logic to fallen angels, though they are sentient beings and clearly capable of feeling pain—at least the pain of fear and dread. The old argument, “They’re made of spirit, and spirit cannot be destroyed,” has no solid biblical foundation.

In my opinion, all the incorrigibly wicked—human beings and spirit beings alike—will ultimately be destroyed.

Assumptions about the Nephilim

QUESTION: I would just like to inform you that you are wrong about the Nephilim

Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

or half-breed of fallen angels and man. When Lucifer was cast along with the others under him they then had flesh. They were no longer of spirit. There is proof of this throughout the Bible. The offspring started to eat the flesh of men. They were giants. Goliath was one such. They were destroyed in the flood along with the rest of the sinners. Demons are the spirits of these abominations. They are vile, and only seek to destroy. It says in the Bible that angels cannot marry. It doesn’t say fallen angels ate as such after being cast out. The fallen under Lucifer are his generals. They command the demons. You are very right as to warn do not look for evidence. They only have 1 purpose. To destroy what

God has created. I for some reason felt compelled to write this to you. If you chose not to believe what I’m telling you it is not a big deal to me. You have already warned to stay away from demons and the New Age. That is good enough for me. Have a good day and God bless.

S.G. (sent by email)

ANSWER: The problem here is that you’re speaking in such dogmatic terms, though there is no actual biblical proof for any of the things you claim. What you’re proposing is a *theory*, not a biblically supported dogma. You rely on speculative ideas, not definitive biblical statements, about the nature of fallen angels and the identity of the Nephilim.

You begin by stating, “I would like to inform you that you are wrong...” No, you are informing us of your disagreement with our views on this subject.

You state rather dogmatically that “[w]hen Lucifer was cast [out of heaven] along with the others under him they then had flesh. They were no longer of spirit. There is proof of this throughout the Bible.” If there is proof of this, show it to me. I suspect that the best you can do is read this idea into certain texts, but that’s not proof; it’s speculation, or guess work, at best.

You claim that the “offspring [of fallen angels made flesh] started to eat the flesh of men.” Where is that in the Bible? You seem to be reading ideas from extrabiblical literature into biblical accounts. If so, you should not claim biblical authority for your views on this topic.

You go on to state, “Demons are the spirits of these abominations.” Please show me where the Bible says this. Some unknown writer who lived in the second century BC may have included this claim in one or more of his works, but it’s a mistake to rely on such sources or to assume that their interpretations of certain biblical texts were drawn from a tradition handed down from the time of Moses.

Finally, you state, “If you choose not to believe what I’m telling you it is not a big deal to me.” My choice is to not accept your view as *provable* from Scripture, because it’s not. The two views of Genesis 6 I consider most plausible are not provable, either. I do not consider them to be dogmas, but theories that are, in my judgment, consistent with the biblical data. The “angels became flesh and had sex with women” view is the least plausible of all, in my opinion.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2021

North American Feast Sites

This year the Feast of Tabernacles begins at sunset on September 20 and concludes at sunset on September 27, which begins the Eighth Day (or Last Great Day). You are encouraged to make your festival plans as soon as possible (for updates and more detailed information, visit www.cgi.org/fot).

Medina, Ohio

Location: 3398 Old Weymouth Road, Medina, OH 44256
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LODGING INFORMATION

Holiday Inn (15471 Royalton Rd [Rt 82], Strongsville, Ohio 44136)
Web: holidayinn.com/cle-strongsvil
Phone: 440-238-8800

Holiday Inn Express and Suites (5185 Gateway Dr., Medina, Ohio 44256)
Web: guestreservations.com/holiday-inn-express-suites
Phone: 330-722-6006

Comfort Suites, Brunswick (1464 Town Center Blvd., Brunswick, Ohio 44212)
Web: guestreservations.com/comfort-inn-brunswick
Phone: 330-558-9961

Additional Lodging Resources

<https://www.vrbo.com/>
<https://www.airbnb.com/>

Collingwood, Ontario

Festival Coordinators: Rick Dubler and Jim French
E-mail: Rick.Dubler@CgiCanada.org; Jim.French@CgiCanada.org

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

Location: North Shore Oceanfront Hotel (201 75th Ave. N, Myrtle Beach, SC 29572)

Web: <https://northshoremrtlebeach.com/>

Phone: *Please note:* Reservations for the Feast of Tabernacles can be made through Central Reservations: **1-800-599-9872** (ask for **Church of God International room block**).

Festival Coordinator: Mike Nolen
Phone: 843-761-5211
E-mail: tmnolen@homesc.com

ROOM DESCRIPTIONS AND RATES:

Ocean Front Queens: These rooms are equipped with microwaves, small refrigerators, and coffee pots. The rate per night is \$89.00.

Ocean View Queens: These rooms offer the same amenities as the Ocean Front rooms with a lesser view of the ocean. The rate per night is \$79.00.

One Bedroom Villa Suite: These room are off the beach but have a full ocean view. Most are equipped with a galley kitchen (please be sure to specify), in addition to a living room and separate bedroom. The rate per night is \$119.00.

Two Bedroom Villa Suite: The Villas offer two bedrooms, living room, two and a half baths, and a full kitchen. They are a short walk from the beach and have an ocean view. The rate per night is \$159.00.

As noted above, you may make your reservations by calling Central Reservations at **1-800-599-9872** and ask for Church of God International room block.

Fishkill, New York

Location: Conference Center of Springhill Suites/Residence Inn (500 Westage Buisness Center Drive, Fishkill, New York 12524). The hotel is located on a large lake-centered campus. The campus houses many other hotels, retail outlets and restaurants.

Phone: 845-896-8100 (make reservations by phone 24/7 for "Church of God")

Rate: \$139, studio, 1 king bed, sofa bed, trundle bed, microwave, mini-fridge (no kitchenette). (Deadline to make reservations at this hotel is 8/21/2021.)

ADDITIONAL LODGING:

Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham
 14 Schuyler Blvd.
 Fishkill, New York 12524

Phone: 845-896-5210 (make reservations by phone 24/7 for "Church of God," Group Code: 2109church)

Rates: \$99, 1 queen bed suite, full kitchenette / \$119, 2 double bed suite

Hot Springs, Arkansas

Location: The Legendary Vapors (315 Park Avenue, Hot Springs, Arkansas)
Festival Coordinator: Skip Martin
E-mail: SMartin400@gmail.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/127437209343667

LODGING INFORMATION:

The Arlington Resort Hotel and Spa (239 Central Avenue Hot Springs, AR 71901)

Phone: 1-800-643-1502

E-mail: info@arlingtonhotel.com

Website: www.arlingtonhotel.com

The Staybridge Suites (103 Lookout Circle, Hot Springs, AR 71913)

Phone: 501-525-6500

Website: www.ihg.com/staybridge/hotels/us/en/reservation

E-mail: staybridge.suites@squarecap.com

Candlewood Suites (3404 Central Hot Springs (Hwy 7), Hot Springs, AR 71913)

Phone: 501-624-4000

Website: <https://www.ihg.com/candlewood/content/us/en/exp/suites>

We are working on housing discounts, but VRBO and AirBnB Rentals have many houses, cabins, and condos available in the area on a variety of budget and housing needs.

VRBO: www.vrbo.com/vacation-rentals/usa/arkansas/hot-springs

AirBnB: www.airbnb.com/s/Hot-Springs—Arkansas—United-States/homes?adults=1&place_id=ChIJR1AyiJMqzYcRDR4CRPm-qLo&checkin=2021-09-20&checkout=2021-09-28

Check the website (www.cgi.org/fot) or Facebook page ([facebook.com/groups/127437209343667](https://www.facebook.com/groups/127437209343667)) for updates.

Galveston, Texas

Location: Galveston Island Convention Center (The San Luis Resort, Spa, & Conference Center, 5222 Sewall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77551)

Housing: Galveston offers a host of variety for housing from VRBO starting around \$100 a night for a three bedroom house, as well as various hotels.

Registration: E-mail Clifton Buchanan at cbuchanan126@gmail.com.

Panama City Beach, Florida

(sponsored by Common Faith Network)

Website: <https://commonfaithnetwork.org/feast-of-tabernacles/>

McCall, Idaho

(sponsored by the Celebration Church of God)

Website: <https://celebrationchurchofgod.org/feast-of-tabernacles>

“GNASHING OF TEETH”

Jesus says the angels will “throw them [the wicked] into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Does this mean unrepentant sinners will suffer the horrors of hell for eternity?

by Mike James

One of the primary beliefs of the Church of God International is the belief that man does not have an immortal soul. At the final judgment, men and women will either live on with new spirit bodies or be burned up and destroyed in a fire. Despite the record of history and Scripture, some in our Church continue to be confused by some scriptures that are interpreted in different ways by Christians who do believe in the immortality of the soul doctrine.

Some of the scriptures that cause confusion are the “gnashing of teeth” scriptures that address the condition some will experience when they learn they will be missing out on eternal life. I want to take a close look at these scriptures to help make it clear that they are *not* discussing a conscious state of existence for those who go into “hell” fire.

The primary scripture used by some to imply there will be pain and suffering for the wicked in “hell” fire is found in **Matthew 13:41–42**. This scripture reads: “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” A literal reading of just these two verses might give the implication that those thrown into this fiery judgment are weeping and suffering (gnashing teeth) while they are in the fire.

The problem here is failing to read this passage in the light of all the other scriptures that deal with the subject of hell fire and, specifically, of “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” When we do that, the picture becomes much clearer as to how to read **Matthew 13:41–42**.

Before we go any further, I am assuming most of you reading this article are familiar with our church’s teaching on the judgment that will befall the wicked in the end. We believe those who do not submit to God in the post-millennial judgment period will be destroyed by fire. This is known as the second death. It is possible there might be some initial pain and suffering when these individuals are destroyed by fire, but they will not be suffering very long before their death occurs. If you are not familiar with our beliefs on this, please read our booklets, *Hell You Say?* and *Lazarus and the Rich Man*, to learn more about our teaching. These book-



Is this the fate of millions? Many believe the souls of the wicked will eternally weep and howl in the white-hot flames of eternal hell. But this concept of souls suffering endlessly in an everlasting torture chamber has been read into the New Testament. Neither Jesus nor the apostles ever taught that such a place existed.

lets can be found on our website (cgi.org) under the MEDIA heading. Choose the LITERATURE option under MEDIA and scroll through the list to read or download those booklets.

Let’s get back to analyzing the other scriptures that use the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” to better understand the **Matthew 13** scripture. When we look for the phrase “gnashing of teeth” in scripture it is often associated with rage or defiance. Notice how the phrase is used in Job 16:9: “God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes.” The gnashing of the teeth fits the rage or anger example in this scripture. We also find this same context in **Psalm 35:16; 37:12; Lamentations 2:16**, and **Acts 7:54**. In **Psalm 112:10**, the context seems to be about the wicked being destroyed and melting away. So why would the wicked be gnashing their teeth as they melt away? If we keep in mind our previous examples, it would seem to be because they are angry they are being destroyed rather than because of suffering.

Larry Dixon, author of *The Other Side of the Good News*, points out that “gnashing of teeth” is associated in Rabbinic thought “almost always with anger (not, as generally supposed, with

anguish).”

Taking a look at how Jesus uses the phrase in the gospels will provide a clearer picture. Jesus uses the phrase “weeping and gnashing [grinding] of teeth” seven times:

- **Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30**, where the phrase is accompanied by being thrown into darkness outside.
- **Matthew 13:41–42**, where the phrase is used for those who are weeded out of the kingdom and thrown into the fiery furnace.
- **Matthew 13:49–50**, where the phrase is used of the wicked who are thrown into the fiery furnace. This is related to fishes being brought ashore where the good ones are kept (get into kingdom) and the bad ones are thrown away (don’t make it into the kingdom).
- **Matthew 24:51**, where the phrase is used in a parable and the people who are mentioned are also cut to pieces.
- **Luke 13:28**, where the phrase is used for those thrown out from entering the Kingdom.

In five of the seven scriptures cited above, those who gnash their teeth are banished from a location of joy with

no mention of a fire. In the two examples with fire there is no mention of the people getting out of the fire. So it would be wise to assume fire is going to destroy these physical mortal beings that are thrown into it.

Since the scene in these seven scriptures is likened to those who get into the Kingdom and those who do not, it makes sense to understand the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” to relate to the anger and anguish the wicked will feel when they realize they are about to be punished for their wickedness by being thrown into the fire that will bring on their second death (**Revelation 20:14–15**).

Bruce Milne, in *The Message of Heaven and Hell*, describes the weeping as expressing “immense, almost unbearable regret. The person so consigned will be conscious of their fate and will be overwhelmed by the contemplation of it.” Paul Helm, in *The Last Things*, addresses the weeping as “a time of wailing and of self-despair.” The point here is the connection of the weeping with the gnashing of the teeth. These wicked people will be suffering from anguish and despair,

realizing their fate rather than gnashing their teeth due to pain.

Marius Reiser, in *Jesus and Judgment*, says the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” signifies “despairing rage.” Edward Fudge, in *The Fire That Consumes*, says the phrase sums up two attitudes. Weeping expresses remorse and sorrow and the teeth gnashing expresses rage. There is no mention in any of these verses of the idea of people gnashing their teeth due to pain or agony they may be feeling from the fire.

We must not forget that all scripture is not to be taken literally. The phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” may be an allusion to the coming destruction of the wicked. Those who are not found worthy to enter God’s Kingdom will have reason to weep and angrily gnash their teeth. They will be losing out on eternal life, and that is enough to make anyone cry or fall into a rage. But Scripture is clear (**Romans 6:23**) the wicked will not be suffering in agony for any length of time; they will merely be burned up (**Malachi 4:1–3**).

Sources:

The Fire That Consumes by Edward Fudge
Immortality or Resurrection? by Samuele Bacchiocchi

Treating Christians with Anxiety Disorder

by Michelle Yvonne L. Algarra



ANXIETY DISORDER, as opposed to the ordinary form of anxiety people experience, afflicts some Christians in God's church. It is a form of mental illness or psychological ailment and, though debilitating, is treatable. Help is available, both pharmacological and cognitive. According to Wikipedia, anxiety disorders are a "group of mental disorders characterized by feelings of anxiety and fear." Anxiety disorders usually involve excessive, frequent, constant, and unrealistic worry and tension with little or no reason.

There are different types of anxiety disorders, including Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), panic disorder, agoraphobia, and so on. It is caused by low levels of GABA or gamma amino butyric acid, a neurotransmitter that reduces activity in the central nervous system. (Treatment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder will be the main focus of this article). The amygdala, part of the brain which is the seat of emotions, is central to the processing of fear and anxiety, and its function may be implicated in anxiety disorders. Researchers have noted "amygdala frontal lobe in parietal coupling with GAD patients may reflect the natural engagement of a cognitive control system to regulate anxiety." GAD, specifically, is caused by imbalance of the brain chemicals serotonin and noradrenaline, which are involved in the control and regulation of mood.

Some patients afflicted with GAD

experience anxiety attacks periodically for lengthy periods of time, sleeping and eating habits affected, and engage in OCD-like symptoms, which can only be described by observers who do not suffer from the illness as idiosyncrasies, eccentricities, and mannerisms. Other symptoms include fatigue or tiredness, muscle tension or aches, trembling, crying spells, heart palpitations, sweating, nausea, diarrhea, or irritable bowel syndrome, among others. Symptoms may vary relative to the real patient's condition or predisposition, but the element of anxiety is a common variable.

Form of treatment is primarily pharmacological because it is impossible to overcome through human effort alone. Drugs include SSRIs or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (antidepressants), benzodiazepine anxiolytics like Alprazolam or Clonazepam (calming agents which attenuate or decrease abnormal excitation in the brain), and beta-blockers.

Another form of treatment as an adjunct to medication is cognitive-behavioral therapy. Individuals examine how the thoughts and behaviors contribute to anxiety. This form of treatment is performed by professionals or therapists, and for Christians, also by ministers of the church. Usually Christians, inclusive of ministers, who are only aware of the ordinary anxiety people experience and not Generalized Anxiety Disorder, sometimes force a Christian afflicted with the illness, yet unaware of the existence of drugs that may alleviate the symptoms, to implement measures to overcome it without any form of medication. This is simply ignorance because, just like physical ailments

untreated with the help of a physician (in the case of GAD, psychiatric), and relying on blind faith alone, the condition may persist and leave the individual incapacitated. Faith without works is dead, and the Bible's prescription to healing does not disallow availing of professional help if it is available.

Pharmacological treatment is necessary because anxiety disorders can affect a person's spiritual life, and taking anxiolytics do not mean a Christian is somehow deficient in his or her own faith. Conditions can become more manageable with the proper combination of medical/psychological intervention and spiritual support. Otherwise day-to-day activities will continue to be disrupted, impossible to maintain a semblance of productivity.

Since it is both a psychological as well as a physical illness relative to the workings of the brain, it is not a form of emotional or spiritual dysfunction. At this juncture, a mistaken notion would be for a Christian suffering from GAD to rely on medication alone, and nothing else. It is quite unfortunate that medication only provides a temporary relief and not a cure, and may even lead to physical and psychological dependence and abuse. Ultimately, total healing relies on and is a prerogative of the Creator.

Aside from meds, other means of treating anxiety should be implemented while seeking counselling. Behavioral therapy includes regular sleep (getting enough rest; if necessary, taking sedatives in moderation, or even just herbal meds like St. John's Wort, Ashwaganda, and Valerian Root), listening to relaxing music and good Christian speakers/teachers, appropriate recreation—Sabbath-

keeping, setting aside realistic goals, and physical exercise. More importantly, reading God's Word, Christian fellowship, fasting, and best of all PRAYER. Relying on God ultimately for healing, in the long run, is where faith comes from, not just desensitization.

While waiting for God's answer to one's prayers, then, one also has to do one's part in implementing steps to overcome GAD. Differentiate between prescribed meds for anxiety and other drugs, including alcohol. Alcohol and illicit drugs might mask the symptoms of anxiety disorder and make it more difficult for the illness to be treated.

There are many scriptures dealing with anxiety, but they should not be taken out of context or misapplied to force a suffering Christian with GAD to overcome through his own effort alone, as indicated earlier. But meditating on them is essentially a part of cognitive therapy. Read or reread the following: Matthew 6:25–34, Proverbs 3:5–6, Romans 8:38–39, Philippians 4:6–7, Luke 12:24–34, Matthew 11:28–30, John 14:27, Colossians 3:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Psalm 55:22, Proverbs 12:25, 1 Peter 5:6–8, Psalm 23:4, Hebrews 13:5–6, and Psalm 56:3.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Philippians 4:6–7).

Continually rely on Jesus, our Mediator, so prayer for healing can be answered.

A Medicated Society

by Michelle Yvonne L. Algarra

A book written by Dr. Ray D. Strand, *Death by Prescription*, deals with the painful scenario of a drug dependent, overmedicated society, and the evils prevalent in pharmaceutical companies.

All drugs definitely have side effects, even herbal medicines to a certain extent. Although physicians and drugs and various forms of medical treatment can and do alleviate human suffering, physical and psychological, total and unquestioned reliance on them without qualification has caused horrible consequences.

Because of greed for profits and human error or mistakes, the medical and pharmaceutical world has often exacerbated patients' conditions rather than treating them effectively.

Adverse drug reactions have become common knowledge. Antidepressants like Prozac can actually cause suicidal tendencies. Appetite suppressants like

Phenfluramine have caused grievous heart ailments (like cardiac arrhythmias) and death and had to be taken out of the market. Thalidomide taken by pregnant mothers resulted in birth defects. Viagra and Levitra, drugs commonly taken for erectile dysfunction, has caused priapism or persistent and abnormally painful erections and even traumatic heart failure. Propulsid, used to treat gastric reflux, has reportedly caused serious cardiac rhythm disturbances. Chronic use of antipsychotic medications can lead to EPS (extrapyramidal syndrome), TD (tardive dyskinesia—rhythmic involuntary movements of the face, tongue, mouth, and jaw). And the list is endless.

The primary consideration in the maintenance of good health is the development of a healthy lifestyle and habits. For many, this includes over-coming overdependence on drugs and

seeking appropriate medical help through cost-effective measures. It also includes arming oneself with proper knowledge, even as lay people, through personal reading and study of drug literature and paraphernalia.

We are biological creatures. We are physical, with bodies that get sick, "malfunction," get diseased, and eventually die. However, it is much better to concentrate on treating the causes rather than the effects.

To minimize overdependence on dangerous medication, one must learn to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Have a healthy diet, including all the food groups and lots of fruits and vegetables. Have exercise or regular physical activity and avoid being sedentary. Avoid the risk of various chronic degenerative diseases. Avoid too much alcohol, as much as possible, and do not smoke, take prohibited drugs, or partake of too much junk food.

Consider organic and holistic alternatives to synthetic substances (but not apart from the approval of your medical doctor).

Maintain a positive spirit through having a spiritual life, relationship with God, the church, and community service. Read and study the Bible and other healthy uplifting literature.

And most important of all, realize that Jesus Christ is the Great Physician who can heal all maladies and can provide divine intervention. He sometimes works through medical intervention, but for the most part it is reliance on faith that counts. Even if old age and death are inevitable realities, healthy living and longevity are possible by taking care of our minds and bodies.

As "the Elder" wished for "beloved Gaius," "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1–2, NKJV), may it be so with you.

In Loving Memory

Ferrell Vincent
1935 – 2021



Ferrell Vincent, 86, of Louisville passed away Sunday, March 21, 2021, at University Hospital in Louisville.

The Edmonson County native was a CSX Railroad retiree, was a pitcher for the Boston Red Sox AAA Minor League affiliate, a US Army veteran of the Korean War, and a lifetime member of the Church of God. He served as an elder in the Church of God International for many years.

He was a son of the late Albert Polk Vincent and Ethie Mae Bullock Vincent. He was preceded in death by a son, Bryan Vincent.

A celebration of life service was held April 18, 2021, at Gravit Funeral Home.

Surviving are his wife Barbara Jean Vincent; a daughter, Patsy Gwen Black (Arnie) of Sevierville, TN; a son, Greg Vincent (Carol) of Rossville, GA; a brother, Vernon Vincent of Louisville; a daughter-in-law, Kim Vincent; seven grandchildren, Heather White, Jessica Ville, Carrie McClanahan, Missouri McClanahan, Tony Vincent, Aaron Vincent, and Amber Vincent; nine great-grandchildren; and a great great grandchild.

Expressions of sympathy may take the form of donations to the American Cancer Society.

Frances L. Morgan
1933 – 2021



Mrs. Frances L. Morgan, 88, of Easley, SC, passed on Tuesday, January 26, 2021 at Prisma Baptist Easley Hospital. She was the daughter of James Liddell and Gladys Duke Liddell.

A graduate of Simpson High School, she furthered her education at Greenville Technical College, where

she received several certificates.

Frances was a dietary supervisor at Easley Baptist Hospital (formerly Prisma Health Baptist Easley Hospital) for more than 20 years. She was also a member of the Church of God International for several years.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, William Furman Morgan; and one brother, James Liddell, Jr.

Surviving are two daughters, Sharon Kay Williams of Easley, SC, and Melanie Michelle Morgan of the home; a granddaughter reared in the home, Tangela J. (Jorge) Ibarra of Simpsonville, SC; two sons, William A. (Vira) Morgan of Easley, SC, and Kevin E. Morgan of Easley, SC; four grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and a host of other relatives and friends.

Emma Cutwright Stallings
1940 – 2021



Mrs. Emma Cutwright Stallings, the daughter of the late Mr. George Boze, Sr. and Mrs. Annie Will Cutwright Boykin, was born on January 5, 1940 in LaGrange, Georgia.

A wonderful woman of great faith and courage, she was a member of the Church of God International for over 20 years. During her time of suffering and wellness, she was able to testify of God's grace and mercy to endure all things. Helping others in any way she could and encouraging others to have a personal relationship with God was a part of her ministry.

As an avid reader, honor student, and basketball player, Emma graduated from Ethel W. Kight High School in 1958.

Emma provided superior performance and total commitment during her working career. She began working at an early age and retired after many years of service at Dobbs House in Atlanta, Georgia. Emma was a caring and compassionate person who impacted the lives of others.

Emma was united in holy matrimony to the late Mr. Wilbert Stallings on July 31, 1960. This union was blessed with five children. She was a courageous, strong, and devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and friend and enjoyed family gatherings.

Emma quietly and peacefully

departed this life on March 6, 2021. In addition to her parents, Emma was preceded in death by her brother, Willie W. (Peno) Poole.

Those left to cherish her memories are children, Mrs. Chantis (Willie) Walker, Ms. Allison Parks, Mr. Wilbert (Melanie) Stallings, Ms. Angela Ferguson, Mrs. Tonya (Dennis) Thomas; grandchildren, Quintessia Tiller, Maria Danyelle Tutt, Brittney Watts, LaSharrowal Tutt, Yanden Stallings, Samari Walker, Shatia Stallings, Ashley Thomas, Jordan Thomas; great grandchildren, Donovan Ryals, Jasmine Tutt, Cameron Tutt, Kyree Watts, Nyah Tiller, Symphony Williamson, Dakota Tiller, Kaiden Watts, Maya Stallings; great great grandchild, Sophia (FiFi) Ryals; her siblings, George Boze, Jr., Gwendolyn Russell, Garvel Boze; a host of nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

Leonard Wilson
1942 – 2021

Leonard Wilson, 79, of Suffolk, VA passed away Thursday, May 6, 2021. He was the son of the late Raymond and Carrie Wilson.

Mr. Wilson worked in construction at Wilson's Home Improvement. He was a member of the Church of God International and hosted a CGI congregation in Portsmouth, VA.

Left to cherish his memory is his wife Glory J. Wilson and his eight children. Gloria and Leonard were married in 1984. Gloria expressed Leonard was a very good husband. The couple often attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. He will be missed.

A graveside service took place on Monday, May 10, 2021, in the Meadowbrook Memorial Gardens, with Mike James officiating.

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory"

1 Corinthians 15:51-54
English Standard Version

Update on the Church of God International in Ghana

The Ghanaian church is doing extremely well. At the moment, we have churches in Kumasi and Oda. Apart from these places, we also have groups of brethren in places like Sampa, Takoradi, and Subinso. There are also people who have been calling us from across the length and breadth of the country, seeking to fellowship with us. But because of the long distances between us, it will be more appropriate for us to go and establish churches for those people in their various localities.

Aside from the aforementioned churches, we also had the Accra church. Unfortunately, it has been suspended owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because those brethren fellowshiped in a classroom block, but in the heat of the pandemic and its associated restrictions, the Ghana Government stopped all the churches

that worshipped in classrooms, and our church in Accra was not an exception.

Somewhere in March–April, we decided to go to Sampa, Drobo, Dormaa and their surrounding towns and villages for an intensive outreach program as the brethren there have been calling us to come and preach the Kingdom message to them. These are all places around Ghana-Cote d'Ivoire border. But due to lack of funds, we could not go there for that important program as we had planned. However, we hope to go there as soon as the church is able to raise some funds.

Now, concerning the water project, in fact, it has been carried out successfully and now the Kumasi church can boast of potable water which can even be commercialized to generate some revenue for the church. In view of that, I have called on the Ghana Water Company and the Food and Drugs

Authority to come and do their inspection so that we can enlarge the project and start the commercial production. We have also erected CGI-GHANA sign boards and billboards at some vantage points of the Kumasi Metropolis (see accompanying pictures).

I might also mention the land we have acquired in Dadieso (about 33 km from the Kumasi CGI church premises) to build a Feast site.

Let me end here by saying that I, together with my team of workers in Ghana, intend to storm the whole country with the good news of the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, we plead with the entire CGI community across the world to prayerfully support us so that our needs can be met and we can go out there and broadcast the message.

Thank you!

Robert Owusu



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- Download lessons of our *Home Bible Study Course*, or send for a hard copy.
- Download iTunes hymns from our hymnal.
- Read the Bible online in over 25 versions and in many languages, including the Hebrew and Greek.
- See and hear our online *Web Chats*.
- See/hear thousands of archived sermons, booklets, and articles.
- Peruse our online literature library!
- Make prayer requests!
- Find local church congregations using unique scalable maps.

Watch for more to come!

Should We Venerate Mary and the Saints?

Part 3

by Mike James

Editor's note: This is the third of a four-part series examining the practice of the veneration of Mary and the saints. Once the final installment is published, we'll offer the entire series in booklet form.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY (Chapter 5)

Another major Marian doctrine of the Catholic Church is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. This doctrine states that Mary ascended into heaven body and soul. This doctrine was officially stated by Pope Pius XII on November 1, 1950 in the Papal Bull *Munificentissimus Deus*. The Orthodox Church does believe in the bodily assumption of Mary, but does not proclaim it as a dogma. Pope Pius XII cited many ancient texts in support of the belief, but none of them came from the apocryphal stories of the passing of the Virgin.¹¹⁴ He referred the faithful to the eighth-century homilies of Germanus of Constantinople, Modestus of Jerusalem, Andrew of Crete, and John Damascene, who had themselves used the Apocrypha as sources, but he omitted all mention of this or of the legend.¹¹⁵ Some scholars believe that the apocryphal tales of the Virgin's death, in which she is spared mortal decay, originated among the Christian community in Egypt.¹¹⁶ A long tradition existed there that viewed incorruption as a privilege of true greatness.¹¹⁷

For the first few hundred years of Christianity there is no mention on how Mary died. The first mention of her demise comes from Epiphanius, the Bishop of Salamis in the fourth century. He stated that nobody knew what happened to Mary. By the end of the fifth century an apocryphal gospel called, *The Journeys of the Blessed Mary (Transitus Beatae Mariae)*, had gained popularity.¹¹⁸ This apocryphal Gospel gave rise to a score of *Transitus* accounts in Coptic, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, and Armenian.¹¹⁹ Some of the roots of the Assumption doctrine also can be found in the apocryphal Gospel of John (end of the fourth century).¹²⁰ These apocryphal works contain heretical elements. For example, Jesus is seen as an angelic being and not divine. Another example is Paul not being considered an apostle in the same category as the Twelve (pointing again to the Ebionites).¹²¹ Finally, the believer appears subject to complicated rituals designed to free him from the wiles of demons at the moment of his death.¹²²

Some scholars believe that the apocryphal tales of the Virgin's death, in

which she is spared mortal decay, sometimes even given a "garment of incorruptibility" by Jesus originated among Christians in Egypt.¹²³ The Catholic and Orthodox tradition around Mary has been to define her as someone of true greatness. But the scriptural record does not back their tradition. In fact, as we saw in the first section of this booklet, Scripture looks at Mary the same as other believers. Evidence for this can be found in Matthew 12:46–50 where Jesus states that only those who do the will of His Father should be considered His brother, sister, or mother. Here Jesus is equating His mother with any other believer.

Gregory of Tours was the first church figure to explicitly state his belief in the Assumption of Mary. He based his belief on the apocryphal work, *The Journeys of the Blessed Mary*. Many serious scholars believe that and the other apocryphal works on Mary's life were made up. Contrary to the claim of Pope Pius XII that the Assumption of Mary is a "divinely revealed truth dogma," the historical reality is that the Catholic Church has developed this teaching on the basis of heretical writings that were officially condemned by the early Church.¹²⁴ Sometime between 494 and 496 A.D. Pope Gelasius issued a decree entitled *Decretum de Libris Canonice Ecclesiasticis et Apocryphis*, in which he officially set forth the distinction between canonical writings to be accepted and the apocryphal writings to be rejected.¹²⁵ Among the apocryphal writings to be rejected, Gelasius includes *Liber qui appellatur Transitus, id est Assumptio Sanctae Mariae, Apocryphus* (the apocryphal book called *Transitus*, which is the *Assumption of Holy Mary*).¹²⁶ This entire decree and its condemnation was reaffirmed by Pope Hormisdas in the sixth century, around A.D. 520.¹²⁷

Another issue that arises with the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is the question as to whether or not she died. This is a debated point among Catholics due to the Pope Pius XII statement, "Having completed the course of her earthly life, [she] was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." Pope Paul VI's Constitution is equally circumspect: "the immaculate Virgin was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory upon the completion of her earthly sojourn."¹²⁸ Most Catholic theologians would probably admit that

Mary had to die before going to heaven, but many Catholics do believe she did not experience death. Once again, these ideas fly in the face of Scripture. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that all men (and women) die. In John 3:13 we read that only Christ has ascended into heaven.

Doctrines like the Assumption do a disservice to the Word of God. The doctrine gives Mary a goddess-like position and place. Notice how the words of St. Bernard on Mary further this goddess-like concept. Addressing Mary, Bernard says: "Since you have heard joyous and glad tidings, let us hear the joyous reply we long for.... The angel is waiting for your reply. It is time for him to return to the one who sent him.... The price of our salvation is being offered you. If you consent, we shall immediately be set free.... Doleful Adam and his unhappy offspring, exiled from Paradise, implore you, kind Virgin, to give this answer.... For it the whole world is waiting, bowed down at your feet."¹²⁹ Falling at someone's feet implies we are worshipping them, the Bible is clear we should only worship God (Revelation 19:10).

Furthermore, notice how the Catholic *Catechism* expands on the meaning of the doctrine, saying: "Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix."¹³⁰ This dogma is giving Mary god-like status. Scripture makes it clear only Christ can save our souls from death (Acts 4:12). Is there a danger in giving Mary this lofty status? Yes, remember Satan is trying to diminish our relationship with Christ, the only One who can save us. By building up the presence of Mary many sincere Christians are focusing on Mary, who has no power to do anything. What is even more sinister is the deception in focusing on a Mother goddess-like figure.

In his article, "Mary and the Pope: Remarks on the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary," Professor Hermann Sasses clearly acknowledges that "The Marian cult was the Christian replacement for the cults of the great female deities, which played such a great role in the life of pre-Christian pagan humanity, the holy virgins and divine mothers, the Babylonian Ishtar, whose cult had already forced its way into Israel, the Syrian Queen of Heaven, the great mother of Asia Minor, the Egyptian Isis, whose favor in the West is testi-

fied to by the long use of the name 'Isidor' among Jews and Christians. But unfortunately it was not only a Christian replacement for a pagan religion, it was likewise a pagan religion in Christian guise. The Marian cult is the last of the great cults of a female divinity, which made its way from the Orient into the Roman world, since in the second Punic War Rome had adopted the cult of the Magna Mater of Asia Minor."¹³¹

In closing this section I'd like to reiterate the importance of going to Scripture to determine what we are to believe. As we have already seen the idea that Mary was bodily assumed into heaven comes from sources that are not biblical. These sources have an unknown author or the given author is false. These sources contain errors in comparison to the Bible, and they were written hundreds of years after Mary died. The Bible gives us no support to put Mary in the position the Catholic and Orthodox churches do.

APPARITIONS AND THE VIRGIN MARY (Chapter 6)

One of the arguments made by those who believe Mary is in heaven and can answer our prayers has to do with the supposed apparitions of Mary throughout history. Those who believe in venerating Mary argue Mary has spoken to believers in these apparitions, and the fact she is seen and speaks is evidence she is conscious and alive in heaven where she can petition her Son for us. No doubt, some of these experiences are real to the people who experience them, but there are many other explanations (than the belief that it is Mary who died 2,000 years ago that they are experiencing).

Before discussing some of these famous incidents, I'd like to make sure we are all aware of some scriptures that are important when we discuss the phenomena of apparitions. It's important to recognize that Satan deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He is out to devour us (1 Peter 5:8) because he knows we can become part of God's family (Hebrews 2) and acquire a position greater than he ever had (Hebrews 2:5–8; Revelation 12:7–9; Isaiah 14:12–16). God allows this warfare (1 Timothy 1:18; Ephesians 6:12) between the forces of the devil and the followers of God to



take place because it helps refine us (1 Peter 1:7). Notice that the Bible tells us Satan speaks lies and is the father of lies (John 8:44). He can blind the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4), but he can also deceive believers in Jesus. Notice carefully 2 Corinthians 11:13–15. Here we read Satan can be disguised as an angel of light and his servants can be disguised as servants of righteousness. I believe this can happen even among people who say they believe in Christ. Notice there will be wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Acts 20:29–30 says they will not spare the flock, and truth will be distorted. These sheep must be seen as part of the flock in order for these statements to be made. Finally, we read in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 that Satan will provide power to the Beast or False Prophet at the end of the age to perform signs and lying wonders. Many speculate that if the anti-Christ can manifest false miracles at the end of the age, obviously Satan has the power to produce these lying wonders now, too. Matthew 24:24 confirms this.

One famous Catholic story about the power of Satan comes to us from the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century a Sister Magdalena of the Cross was a Franciscan nun who lived in Spain. Throughout her life she performed various miracles, which included stigmata (wounds on the body similar to the nail wounds of Christ), public levitations, and a decades-long fast. Prior to her death the nun admitted that it was all a hoax. The stigmata were self-inflicted, and the fasting was a hoax. Her levitations, like her ability to know the future, were real, the nun said, but far from divinely inspired; these powers, Magdalena said, had been granted her by Satan in exchange for her soul.¹³² Before she died, the church administered the rite of exorcism.

So far we have established the ability for Satan to deceive, and make the bad look good. Now let's take a closer look at the apparitions of the Virgin Mary.

According to Father Peter Gumpel, the Vatican had never officially recognized any apparition of Mary. This was something, the priest added, that even most Catholics did not know.¹³³ Those who study these phenomena provide five possible explanations. First of all, the apparitions could be real manifestations of the Virgin Mary. Second, the experience could be due to hysteria or mental illness in those who experience this sort of thing. A third scenario is these events could be hoaxes. Fourth, the experiences could be some type of experience that is occurring in the mind or brain of those who are seeing something. Many of the seers of the apparitions were teens or children, at least in the last two hundred years. Child psychology tells us young people's visions could be unconscious imaginative projections. To children this would seem like reality. Finally, the fifth possibility is these experi-

ences are the work of the devil and his demons. Other theories about apparitions that could fall into category two or four above include Recurrent Spontaneous Psychokinesis (RSPK) and Altered State of Consciousness (ASC). RSPK is due to seizures in the nervous system, which can bring on visions. An ASC can occur through training or drugs, but others have the ability to naturally bring it about. Let's take a closer look at some of the more famous apparition incidents that have occurred over the past couple hundred years.

When you begin to do some research on the various visionaries over the years you find some striking similarities. Emotional loss and unhappy families provide a common thread linking their lives prior to the apparitions.¹³⁴ It is also striking how many nineteenth-century apparition sites were surrounded by places of Marian devotion and pilgrimages, without themselves having previously attracted much attention.¹³⁵

Nineteenth-century Marian apparitions occurred in clusters at times of exceptional political or social stress.¹³⁶ The same was true of the period that began in 1914, as war, political upheaval, and economic crisis formed the backdrop to new apparitions across Europe.¹³⁷ The 1980s brought another wave of new apparitions of the Virgin Mary. The majority of these were reported outside Europe, in Africa and Central and Latin America.¹³⁸ Just like earlier European apparitions, the more recent apparitions developed in a climate of economic issues, political problems, and fears.

In an Orthodox Church in Queens, for example, an icon of St. Irene began weeping during the 1989 Gulf War.¹³⁹ Indeed publicity surrounding St. Irene's seemed to trigger a mini flood of weeping icons across the mid-Atlantic region.¹⁴⁰ But miraculous events also occur in other religions. Some Hasidic Jews in New York claim that their religious leader can effect miraculous cures; a group of Muslim *tariquas* are said to perform mystical healings; and an eighty-four year old Buddhist nun in Thailand is believed to have cured a range of illnesses from cancer to paralysis by touch and herbal medicines.¹⁴¹ Let's not forget even in nonreligious contexts there are experiences of paranormal phenomena.

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary can be traced back at least to the third century. St. Gregory the Wonderworker stated that Mary had appeared to him with John the Baptist. In 1491, a group of Alsatian villagers reported that God's wrath was about to come down. This was the first apparition that was endorsed by a pope. Possibly the most important apparition in history occurred near Mexico City in 1531. In this encounter, Juan Diego said he met a beautiful young woman who claimed to be the "eternal virgin, holy Mother of the true God." The apparition told Juan to tell the bishop of Mexico she

wanted a church built at the spot he saw her. The bishop wanted some sort of proof that it was truly the Virgin. He asked for roses that would bloom in mid-winter. Juan Diego found the roses and wrapped them in his cloak. Later Juan Diego produced an image of the Virgin that was miraculously produced on his cloak. About 10 million people a year visit the church at Guadeloupe to view the image on the cloak.

The most popular visions of Mary over the last two hundred years or so have occurred in the following locations: La Salette, France (1846); Lourdes, France (1858); Pontmain, France (1871); Fatima, Portugal (1917); Beauraing, Belgium (1932–1933); Banneux, Belgium (1933); Garabandal, Spain (1961–1965); and Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina (1981–). All of the visionaries in these incidents were children and teens ranging in age from 7 to 18. The average age of them all is only 9. In many of these incidents it is the community, not the seers, that makes the initial identification of the phenomena as an apparition of the Virgin Mary.¹⁴² Following La Salette, people expected Mary to bring news and issue commands, and there was intense pressure on seers to deliver messages.¹⁴³ People asked the kids to tell them what the apparition said and wanted. In response, some of the messages may have been produced, albeit unconsciously, in order to satisfy community expectation.¹⁴⁴ This view is supported by the fact that in all cases of visions with messages it takes time, frequently several separate experiences, for the message or messages to emerge.¹⁴⁵

Let's take a closer look at the apparitions at Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje, which are three of the most famous. The visions at Lourdes, France began on February 11, 1858. The seer was 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous. She claimed to have had visions on all but three of the days between February 18 and March 4. On February 11, Bernadette and her sister and a friend went out to gather some firewood. They said they came upon a small beautiful lady at the Massabielle grotto. On the first visit the lady did not reveal who she was, but told the girl to come back. On return visits the lady revealed herself as the "Immaculate Conception."

Interestingly enough, the Pope defined this dogma only four years before. Bernadette reported all this to her parish priest, who was skeptical until he heard that the lady referred to the "Immaculate Conception," of which Bernadette was not knowledgeable. The lady also informed Bernadette to dig in the ground at a certain spot and to drink from the water that would bubble up there. Cures were reported from drinking the water there. Many miracles have said to have been documented there.

Thousands of people have traveled to Lourdes looking for a miracle. Some have attested to having been healed. But is this evidence that God or the Virgin

Mary did the healing? In his book *Cured: The Life-Changing Science of Spontaneous Healing*, Jeffrey Rediger examines numerous examples of spontaneous healing. In many of these cases the people who experience the "miracle" are not seeking help from God or a higher power. Rediger's theory is that healing may occur for a variety of reasons, chief among them is the idea these people make a major change in their life. For someone who has been suffering from a long-term disease, planning and traveling to Lourdes could be a trigger to reengage their immune system in such a way as to activate it to fight the disease.

Another astonishing fact is that no one who lives in and around Lourdes has been "cured" since the first healings in 1858.¹⁴⁶ Another possibility Rediger addresses is how many times belief is enough to help the mind heal the body. This is not to disallow the fact that God can heal, but why would God want people to believe the Virgin Mary is involved, when Scripture is clear that she is sleeping in her grave (1 Corinthians 15:22–23, 52)?

The tension here comes about due to the idea that Satan would not heal people. So how could these apparitions be a deception from Satan? This will be addressed at the end of this section, but we need to get into some background information on this incident. Central to Bernadette's message about the apparitions was the ceremonies and bathing that many pilgrims perform at the Lourdes water source Bernadette found. But throughout this region of France (Pyrenees), villagers were known for celebrating the festival of Saint John the Baptist (and the summer solstice) by rolling in the dew and worshipping at local fountains.¹⁴⁷ Bernadette was likely to have known such tales of miraculous discovery and healing fountains, especially those of Betharram and Garaison, the pilgrimage sites nearest to Lourdes and the most famous of the region.¹⁴⁸ Betharram is only a few miles from the grotto at Lourdes. In its (Betharram's) founding legend, shepherds were guarding their flocks at the base of the mountain when a ray of light in the bushes showed them the way to a statue of the Virgin.¹⁴⁹ Bernadette reportedly visited Betharram, and stories tell how her treasured rosary was probably bought there.¹⁵⁰ While in the imposing seventeenth-century church she presumably prayed before an altar, which showed a rendering of the Virgin appearing to shepherds in the mountains.¹⁵¹ Most important of all was the story of Angleze de Sagazan, a 12-year-old shepherdess who saw the Virgin at Garaison in the early sixteenth century.¹⁵²

Here was a tale of an innocent, ignorant pious girl, who spoke nothing more and successfully petitioned the authorities to undertake a costly religious venture.¹⁵³ Just like what happened with Bernadette. Angleze went to live in a convent while Garaison

Continued next page

became a pilgrimage center.

The smallness of the apparition is less surprising if one considers that, across the Pyrenean chain, the most sacred and ancient representations of the Virgin were generally tiny.¹⁵⁴ By first calling the apparition *uo petito damizela*, Bernadette chose the term used to describe fairies, the little women of the forest.¹⁵⁵

The people of Lourdes were unsure of what Bernadette may have seen. It could have been a fairy queen, because Bernadette's repeated requests for the vision's identity were reminiscent of fairy queen's reticence to reveal her name.¹⁵⁶

Another interesting point with Bernadette pertains to her response to the question about which paintings of the Virgin Mary looked most like the apparition she had seen. Bernadette insisted the local statue of the Virgin was most like her.¹⁵⁷

The Fatima apparition occurred in Fatima, Portugal between May and October of 1917. On May 5, 1917, just eight days before the first apparition, Pope Benedict XV publicly called for a renewal of prayer life, and he especially mentioned that prayers be directed "to the great Mother of God."¹⁵⁸ Three young children, Lucia Santos and her two cousins, claimed to have been visited by the Virgin Mary six times. In the vision that occurred in July the Virgin Mary gave three secrets to the children. The final vision occurred in October 1917 and the Virgin promised a miracle on that day. Somewhere between 30,000 and 100,000 people showed up for this event. According to some accounts, after some rain the sun broke through the sky and appeared as a spinning disc. Not everyone saw the same thing; some saw the sun "dance," others witnessed bright colors, and some saw nothing at all. There were a lot of reporters and photographers there, too, but no authentic picture of what the sun did is available. A handful of skeptics, nearly all the newspapermen, would concede only that the sun had seemed to radiate an unusual heat.¹⁵⁹ Lucia stated she saw the Virgin on this day with St. Joseph and the baby Jesus.

Following the October 13, 1917 vision, the children claimed that the apparition told them that World War I would end that very day.¹⁶⁰ The war ended in 1918. In her 1924 account, Lucia said that she was not paying full attention during this apparition and may have confused the dates.¹⁶¹ In later accounts, Lucia simply admitted she made a mistake.¹⁶²

The children were also told three secrets in the apparitions that were later revealed. The first secret pertained to a vision of hell that Lucia said occurred on July 13, 1917. In her memoir, Lucia stated they saw a great sea of fire which seemed to be under the earth. In the fire were demons and souls in human form. They heard shrieks and groans of despair. The demons were said to look like

unknown animals, all black and transparent. The Virgin told them that they had seen "hell where the souls of poor sinners go."¹⁶³ "To save them God wishes to establish in the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If they do what I tell you, many souls will be saved, and there will be peace. The war is going to end but if they do not stop offending God another and worse one will begin in the reign of Pius XI."¹⁶⁴ "When you see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign given you by God that He is about to punish the world for its crimes, by means of war, famine, and persecutions of the Church and of the Holy Father. To prevent this, I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace; if not she will spread her errors throughout the world, causing many wars and persecutions of the church. The good will be martyred; the Holy Father will have much to suffer; various nations will be annihilated. In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and she will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."¹⁶⁵

Since this was supposedly said in 1917, some believe Mary foretold the end of WWI and the start of WWII, because Pope Pius reigned as Pope from 1922 to 1939. The unknown light could be interpreted in many different ways, so I will leave that alone. More specifically, she mentions Russia spreading her errors, which could be understood as the Cold War era when Russian hegemony spread over a great part of the world. Could Russia have been consecrated by Pope John Paul's influence in helping to pull Poland away from the Soviet Union? Some could look at it that way. Was the end of the Cold War, the "peace" described above? Hard to say, but let us not forget, Scripture does not allow for the dead to speak to us. If this apparition did not come from God, could Satan know and influence future events? Maybe not to the degree God can, but perhaps enough to be close to predicting future events.

Recall the scripture in Daniel 10:13, 20, where the angel was held up by the Prince of Persia. A Prince of Greece is also mentioned. This provides evidence that demonic powers hold sway over individual nations. If these demonic powers have sway over nations isn't it possible they can determine future outcomes in these nations? Remember, Satan is called the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). There is a spiritual battle being waged on the earth that will not hinder God's ultimate plan, but may work against it for a time. I believe Satan and his demons can influence political and religious leaders to do his bidding for as long as God allows it.

The second secret pertained to the ending of World War I along with a prediction of another worse war to come during the reign of Pope Pius XI, if men did not stop offending God and if Russia did not convert. Interestingly enough, the first two secrets were not revealed until 1941, "when the Second World War had already begun and the spread of Russian-style communism was a *fait accompli*."¹⁶⁶

The third secret supposedly pertains to the persecution of Christians during the twentieth century and the failed assassination of Pope John Paul II in 1981. Here is the third secret: "And we saw in an immense light that is God: something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it, a Bishop dressed in White, we had the impression that it was the Holy Father. Other Bishops, Priests, men and women religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersion in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God." After reading the secret I find it difficult to agree with the assessment of the church on the meaning of the third secret. For me, it reads like a Nostradamus prophecy composed in such a way that almost anything could be read into it.

Another prediction Lucia received from the Virgin dealt with the second half of the twentieth century. There would be a big, big war, the Virgin said, in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁶⁷ This seems to imply a bigger war than WWII, which never occurred, but once again it's difficult to pin that prophecy down.

During one of the apparitions Lucia asked the woman she saw where she came from. The woman was said to respond, "I come from heaven."¹⁶⁸ Another interesting thing the Virgin told the children pertained to two young women who lived in the village. The women had recently died and Lucia was informed one of the women was in heaven and the other was in purgatory until "the end of the world."¹⁶⁹ Again, the Bible does not teach heaven as the reward of the saved. The Kingdom of God is coming to this earth (Revelation 5:10). Purgatory is not even mentioned in the

Bible.

Most Christians believe they go to heaven when they die, but Scripture teaches that the dead are asleep until one of two future resurrections (Revelation 20). John 3:13 also states no one has ascended into heaven except Christ. So what was providing false information to the children? Based upon Scripture, the most plausible explanation is the messages are being used by a spiritual force to confuse people away from God's truth.

In Lucia's memoirs she describes at some length how she and her cousins attempted to follow, so far as they understood them, Mary's instructions to perform penance for sinners.¹⁷⁰ One of the forms of penance was for the children to beat themselves around the legs with nettles. This requirement from Mary only makes sense in a Catholic context. There is nothing at all in God's Word that would lead one to think little children should be responsible for redeeming sinners through acts of penance.

Another interesting piece of information on Fatima was the reaction of Lucia's mother to her story. Should we overlook the fact that Lucia's mother initially insisted that Lucia, a gifted storyteller, was fantasizing.¹⁷¹ There also seemed to be some friction between Lucia and her mother. In one vision, Mary told Lucia she must learn how to read not long after her mother forbade it.¹⁷² Others reported Lucia had a great memory and had the ability to entertain people. Being the youngest of seven children, Lucia was doted on by her older siblings and would entertain them. She also learned the Catholic catechism by age five, which was very unique. When she turned seven her mother told her to tend to the sheep in the field like the other kids. This ended the special status she had up until that time. Within a year of working in the fields the other girls working in the fields started to report unique experiences. In 1915, one group of girls reported seeing a figure like a "statue made of snow."¹⁷³

Could any of this background information have played a part in what occurred? We can't say for sure, but it is interesting to see what we learn when we take a closer look at reports of extraordinary occurrences.

As a footnote to the Fatima story, we note the fact that Fatima had a significant impact on the Vatican. The significance accorded by the Holy See to the apparitions at Cova Da Iria (Fatima) was formally acknowledged on October 29, 1950, when amid much fanfare, the "Pilgrim statue" of the Fatima Virgin arrived in Rome after traveling through Europe for almost three years.¹⁷⁴ The very next day at a meeting with over 400 bishops, Pope Pius XII announced his intention to define the dogma of the Assumption, holding that the Virgin Mary had been assumed not only spiritually into heaven but bodily as well.¹⁷⁵

I will spend a bit more time with the

apparitions at Medjugorje since this is the most recent and most studied of all the apparitions. The apparitions began here in June of 1981. At the time Medjugorje was part of Yugoslavia, but since the country disintegrated in the 1990s the town now exists in Bosnia-Herzegovina near the Croatian border. The visionaries here were six children: Mirjana Dragicevic Soldo, Ivanka Ivankovic Elez, Jacov Colo, Vicka Ivankovic, Marija Pavlovic, and Ivan Dragicevic. The visions continue to occur on a monthly basis for two of the seers. Numerous miracles and conversions have also reportedly occurred.

The earliest vision was first seen by Ivanka, whose mother had died one month before the first vision. Ivanka asked Mirjana to take a look at something at the base of a hillside. Ivanka immediately described it as the Madonna, but Mirjana was not sure what she was seeing. What she thought she had seen, Ivanka said, was a "bright figure" or "outline" that for some reason she felt certain was the Virgin Mary.¹⁷⁶

The two girls then came upon a third girl named Milka. Milka was gathering her sheep, and all three girls looked back at the location the apparition had appeared. This time Ivanka saw a shining young woman who seemed to hover. Mirjana saw a young woman holding a baby in a blanket. A fourth girl came on the scene, a 16-year-old named Vicka, and she noticed that the other three girls were staring at something. Frightened, she ran away and came upon two young boys who accompanied her back to the other three girls. The youngest boy ran away, but Vicka now saw the woman holding the baby about 200 yards away. The older boy recalled seeing something "white and turning."¹⁷⁷ All of the children related their story to other villagers, but most did not believe them. Vicka's grandmother told her it could have been the devil disguising himself as an angel of light to fool people.

In a later interview on the incident, Mirjana was asked about the distance between where she stood and where she first saw the Virgin and the baby. Estimates of the distance were about 1,000 feet. The interviewer then asked: "You couldn't have seen details of the Blessed Mother's face; you couldn't have seen the baby Jesus from that distance. They would have been a mere speck upon the mountain."¹⁷⁸ Mirjana responded, "No, I saw her very clearly as if she was right by me."¹⁷⁹

The girls returned the next day at about the same time. This time a small crowd had gathered at the site with them. Once again, they saw a shining light that later manifested as the young woman they had seen the day before. The seers ran closer to the apparition and according to witnesses ran and jumped through rocks at such an incredible speed that other young men in the group could not keep up. Similar

reports were made of the visionaries at Garabandal, Spain. In fact, the girls in Spain also reportedly moved backwards in an upright position or on their knees.¹⁸⁰

In this encounter, Ivanka spoke to the apparition and asked where her mother was. "She is with me," the smiling young woman answered.¹⁸¹ Mirjana also asked how her grandfather was who had died earlier that year. "He is well," was the answer, audible to only the children.¹⁸² The apparition was also asked at this encounter who she was. She stated she was the Virgin Mary.

There are many reasons here for doubting this was the Virgin Mary. We have seen earlier that Scripture makes it clear the dead are asleep until a future resurrection. Here, whatever it was that was responding to Ivanka gave her the impression that her dead mother was in the heavenly realm with the Virgin. The same with Mirjana's grandfather. This goes against what the Word of God teaches (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5). All six visionaries explain that the Blessed Mother promises those who abandon themselves to the will of the Eternal Father, who pray (particularly the rosary) shall be taken by the hand after death to the throne of God—that is, they shall reenter paradise.¹⁸³

At one point during the visions during the first year, the seers asked the Virgin how they should pray. "Continue to recite seven Our Fathers, seven Hail Marys, and seven Glory Bes...."¹⁸⁴ This is curious when you think of the fact that Scripture does not connect proper prayer to reciting Hail Marys and Glory Bes (Matthew 6:7).

None of the six young visionaries had known about the story of Lourdes and Bernadette, but just a few days after their first apparition the children were reading a book about Lourdes to each other. After learning that the Virgin had appeared to Bernadette on a total of nineteen occasions, the Medjugorje seers agreed among themselves that it was likely they also would see the Madonna nineteen times.¹⁸⁵

As the apparitions continued during the first year in Medjugorje some other people began to witness things. The apparitions began to occur inside a local church once the communist authorities grew concerned with the popularity the visionaries were receiving. In the fall, during one of the apparitions in the church, something strange occurred. Father Luka Susac saw a white pillar of bright light that gradually became the "outline" of a woman who stood with her arms extended, gazing toward the church.¹⁸⁶ He summoned three other priests, who all would testify that for half an hour they had witnessed the same phenomenon.¹⁸⁷ On October 28, 1981, more than five hundred people who were praying near the local church swore they saw flames ignite in the hill area where the first vision had occurred.

When the area was investigated there was no sign of any fire or the remains of a fire.

Some other reports from the seers not only shock me, but they shocked the priests who heard about them. The children asked the apparition if all religions were good at an apparition in October. "All religions are similar before God," said the Virgin, a statement that more than a few priests found shocking.¹⁸⁸ The Virgin's reply to a question about reincarnation had been unusually lengthy and detailed: "We go to heaven in full conscience; that which we have now. At the moment of death, we are conscious of the separation of body and soul."¹⁸⁹ This reply from the supposed Virgin flies in the face of the Holy Bible, which is clear that the dead are asleep when they die. The supposed Virgin Mary went on to explain more about what happens at death: "The body drawn from the earth decomposes after death.... Man receives a transfigured body. Whoever has done very much evil during his life can go straight to heaven if he confesses, is sorry for what he has done, and receives communion at the end of his life."¹⁹⁰ Once again, this could not be an apparition from God if the vision claimed the dead go to heaven (John 3:13). This is a deception Satan has foisted on humans for thousands of years.

The first commission to investigate the apparitions was established in January 1982. The local Bishop Zanic formed the commission with four theologians. All of the theologians believed the children were frauds and said so before investigating. Only one of the four eventually met the visionaries. After he did meet the children he changed his mind and concluded that the apparitions were authentic. Zanic berated the man.¹⁹¹ Mirjana also suffered through some police interrogations, and teachers were instructed (by communist authorities) to taunt and mock her. Yet she still held to her stories.

The seers were also investigated by Dr. Ludvik Stopar, a professor of psychiatry. Dr. Stopar was flabbergasted by the way the visionaries went absolutely silent in the same instant at the beginning of the apparitions. The professor ended his report thusly: "I had the impression coming into contact with a supernatural reality in Medjugorje."¹⁹²

One of the more outlandish claims of the children came from first Vicka and Jakov, then Mirjana—they claimed the Virgin had transported them physically to visit heaven, hell, and purgatory. While visiting a friend's house in November of 1981, Vicka and Jakov told a story of the virgin transporting them to heaven, hell, and purgatory. To Vicka, heaven appeared as a "huge endless tunnel filled with an unearthly kind of light."¹⁹³ She could see countless people who seemed to wear robes of a luminous yellow and gray. All he could remember of heaven, Jakov said,

was "many people praying, all speaking together."¹⁹⁴

After seeing heaven, they said they were showed purgatory. Jakov saw only "a cloud" with people moving inside.¹⁹⁵ Vicka gave a much more detailed description. She had viewed purgatory as a "dark chasm," suspended between heaven and hell. She heard "moanings and lamentations, and the sound of countless fingers knocking, as though they want to get out."¹⁹⁶ The Virgin had told them that Purgatory was "the place where souls are purified, and that much prayer is needed for the people there."¹⁹⁷

Hell turned out to be a bad trip for the kids. Jakov said, "Hell exists; I have seen it. Perhaps before, I had some doubts, but now I know it really exists."¹⁹⁸ Vicka described hell as a vast pit with "an ocean of raging flames" at its center.¹⁹⁹ She said the lost approached the fire of hell naked, then they throw themselves into the fire. "Before they went into the fire they looked like normal people. The more they are against God's will the deeper they go, the more they rage against Him."²⁰⁰ When they came out of the fire they had blackened skin. Vicka said, "They don't have human shapes anymore; they are more like grotesque animals, but unlike anything on earth."²⁰¹

Soon after Vicka and Jakov reported this, Mirjana stated she had also been transported by the Virgin Mary. But she only wanted to glimpse heaven with the Virgin. She related she would not describe her view of heaven because it was too amazing, but she did report happy and healthy men and women. The grass and flowers there were too beautiful to describe. She gave a fuller description of what she saw in purgatory with the Virgin. She described it as a place where she could see only "people shivering, thrashing, writhing in pain."²⁰² The Madonna explained to her why such a place was necessary: "Since nothing can live in the sight of God but pure love, God's justice cleanses."²⁰³ The Virgin described purgatory as a series of "levels" that stretched all the way from the gates of hell to the portal of paradise.²⁰⁴ Souls in purgatory who prayed frequently were permitted occasionally to communicate with the living, the Madonna said; because the dead no longer have free will, they cannot atone for their sins and are completely dependent upon the prayers of those still living.²⁰⁵

Later in 1988, Vicka confided to a Father Bubalo about Purgatory. According to Vicka, the Virgin had said that many souls were stranded there without anyone on earth to pray for them, and "invited me to suffer for these abandoned souls."²⁰⁶ Since accepting this assignment, Vicka explained, during what appeared to be periods of unconsciousness, she had been "traveling" with the Virgin. There are two problems here with purgatory.

Continued next page

The first is, the dead know nothing (Psalm 6:5), and, the second is, there is no mention of purgatory in the Holy Bible. A third issue is Vicka's claim that she can perform a role for lost souls who are already dead. Christ is the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

Mirjana also stated, "I asked Our Lady how God can be so unmerciful as to throw people into Hell to suffer forever."²⁰⁷ The Virgin Mary told Mirjana the people in hell went there because of their own choice. She went on to explain to Mirjana that people in hell blame God for everything. Mirjana also asked Mary if many people go to hell. She was told, "Today, most people go to Purgatory, the next greatest number go to Hell, and only a few go directly to Heaven."²⁰⁸ Once again, the idea that people are suffering forever in hell is contrary to what the Bible teaches. The Bible makes it clear that the wicked dead will be burned up (Malachi 4; Isaiah 66; Romans 6:23) and that will be the end of them.

Later, in 1983, the Blessed Mother reportedly said the following: "In purgatory there are different levels: the lowest is close to hell and the highest gradually draws near to heaven. It is not on All Souls Day, but at Christmas, that the greatest number of souls leaves purgatory. There are in purgatory, souls who pray ardently to God, but for whom no relative or friend prays on earth.... The majority of people go to purgatory. Many go to hell. A small number go directly to heaven."²⁰⁹

These stories of the young seers visiting heaven, hell, and purgatory were too much for Bishop Zanic. He did not believe the Medjugorje visionaries were honest in large part because of these far-out stories about observing these locations. Zanic was also suspicious due to the fact Ivanka was the first one to see the Virgin, and she had been interested in what had happened to her mom since her death only a few months before.

Despite Zanic's skepticism, there were others who investigated the seers who provided support that something strange was going on. One interesting example occurred when a Father Nicholas Bulat a professor of dogma at the seminary in Split came to Medjugorje to investigate. Bulat appeared to be praying along with the visionaries as their ecstasy began. Suddenly, the professor lunged forward and plunged a long leatherworking needle into Vicka's left shoulder blade.²¹⁰ Vicka showed no reaction and continued to pray. Bulat reportedly plunged the needle in a second time with the same results. Bulat's "assault" on Vicka would be celebrated among some Franciscans (an order of priests who believed in the apparitions) as one more piece of compelling evidence that the children were neither frauds nor hysterics.²¹¹

A neuropsychiatrist, Dr. Enzo Gabrici, examined Ivan, Jakov, Marija and Vicka for four days. In his report he ruled out the possibilities of "hallu-

cinatory phenomena, epilepsy or post-hypnotic suggestion."²¹² Speaking of Vicka, Gabrici wrote: "The apparition does not tire her as is the case with hysterical trances; on the contrary she feels more invigorated."²¹³

Dr. Lucia Capello, a neurologist, wrote that she had been not only impressed but deeply shaken by "the three synchronizations" in the seers' behavior: First the visionaries dropped to their knees and their voices became inaudible in the same instant, without even a split second of separation; second, without any observable awareness of one another, their voices again became audible at exactly the same moment, on the third word of the Our Father; finally, the head and eyes of each visionary were raised in the same instant at the end of the apparition (when the Madonna ascended), as all five uttered the word "Ode." There was "no natural explanation" that could account for such perfect simultaneity, Dr. Capello wrote.²¹⁴

During one of the visions in 1985, Ivanka reported the Virgin had asked her what she wished for. Ivanka asked to see her mother who had died. According to Ivanka, the Virgin smiled and nodded her head in agreement, and her mother suddenly appeared to her. Her mother was smiling, and she embraced and kissed Ivanka and said, "My child I am proud of you!" She then kissed her and disappeared.²¹⁵ Once again, from a strictly biblical perspective, this makes no sense. Ivanka's dead mother is not aware or awake and could not have really been what Ivanka saw that day. Could this have been a trick by the devil? I do believe that is one possibility.

Another interesting report pertained to a time in 1982. At this time the visionaries were submitting questions to the Madonna from the Franciscan friars in the town. One friar had asked Mirjana to ask if Croatia would ever be free. The Virgin's answer, Mirjana reported, was: "Yes, after a small war."²¹⁶ Now we need to remember this was when Yugoslavia was still a country. It would later break into Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia by 1995. The wars for separation began in the early 1990s. Someone could have made an educated guess that Croatia would become a nation due to the animosity that existed between the various ethnic groups in the Balkans. But reports like this helped lend credence to the apparitions that occurred there.

Due to the length of the apparitions (still occurring) and the modern times, the seers of Medjugorje were the most scientifically studied in the history of Catholicism. One of the most thorough investigations of the children was conducted by a team of doctors from the University of Montpellier. The group conducted numerous observations of the children during the apparitions. One interesting observation included simultaneity of eyeball movement

among the visionaries of less than one-fifth of a second at both the beginning and end of their apparitions; this was so far beyond the capacity of normal human functioning that no form of collusion or manipulation could account for it.²¹⁷ The leader of the doctors on this scientific team was Dr. Henri Joyeux, an internationally renowned cancer researcher. In the spring of 1985, Dr. Joyeux submitted a report that concluded: "The ecstasies are not pathological, nor is there any element of deceit. No scientific discipline seems able to describe this phenomena."²¹⁸

Dr. Joyeux agreed to an interview with *Paris Match*, a French language weekly newspaper. Joyeux was quoted in the periodical thusly: "The phenomena of the apparitions at Medjugorje cannot be explained scientifically.... In one word, these young people are healthy and there is no sign of epilepsy, nor is it a sleep or dream state. It is neither a case of pathological hallucination nor hallucination in the hearing or sight faculties.... It cannot be a cataleptic state, for during the ecstasy the facial muscles are operating in a normal way."²¹⁹ The doctor added: "It is more like a state of deep, active prayer, in which they are partially disconnected from the physical world, in a state of contemplation and sane encounter with a person whom they alone can see, hear and touch. We cannot reach the transmitter, but we can ascertain that the receivers are in a state of sane and good working order."²²⁰

In 1988, Dr. Marco Margnelli, a neurophysiologist and avowed atheist, came to Medjugorje "looking for any evidence that would contradict it [the apparitions] or expose it as a fake."²²¹ Margnelli concluded the seers did pass into "another state of consciousness" during their visions. Margnelli also mentioned something startling about his experience. He described a number of things he witnessed from the "synchronous movements" of the visionaries to the apparently miraculous healing of a woman with leukemia.²²² What had affected him most deeply were the birds: During the late afternoon, they would gather in the trees outside the rectory where the seers shared their apparitions, chirping and cooing and calling by the hundreds, at times deafeningly loud, until "they suddenly and simultaneously all go silent as soon as the apparition begins."²²³ This "absolute silence of the birds" haunted him, the doctor admitted.²²⁴ A few months after returning to Milan, Dr. Margnelli became a practicing Catholic.²²⁵

Some other confusing things the children heard from the Virgin pertained to Islam. The Virgin insisted that Islam must be respected. This was a challenge to some Catholic theologians. These writers were particularly offended by Mirjana's report that the Virgin had instructed her to respect the Islamic faith of her neighbors in

Sarajevo, saying, "In God there are neither divisions or religions. It is you in the world who have created divisions."²²⁶ This sounds like something the Devil would say when we think about the inconsistencies in the Koran relating to biblical figures. God makes it clear there is only one path to salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Islam does not recognize Jesus as the Son of God.

In the late 1990s, Jakov reported that during one of his apparitions the Madonna informed him she would no longer be visiting him on a regular basis. According to Jakov, the Virgin stated to him she would only visit him moving forward on the birthday of her Son, meaning Christmas. The problem is Christmas is not the true birthday of Jesus. The Catholic Church would even admit to this fact. But a young man living in a small town might not be aware of this truth. This is another reason to doubt the Virgin Mary as the source of the apparitions.

Like other apparition sites, Medjugorje claims to be a site of numerous miracles. There may be some unexplained healings that occurred here over the years, but that does not prove God or the Virgin Mary was the source of the healing. Many of the recorded healings were for multiple sclerosis or some other disease that attacks the nervous system. Difficult to diagnose and impossible to cure, such illnesses also are remarkably resistant to scientific study, making it very difficult to prove that a healing has been miraculous.²²⁷

By 1990, more than three thousand apparitions had been reported by the six Bosnian Croat seers, compared to a total of twenty-four at Lourdes and Fatima combined.²²⁸ What are we to make of all this? Let us allow the reflections of one Catholic priest involved with translating the Virgin's messages from the seers from Croatian into English weigh in. Father Philip Pavich answered like this when he was asked what he thought was going on in Medjugorje. "Well, I exclude hallucination and human invention. Absolutely. After eight years here, I feel certain that the visionaries are in touch with a spirit entity. But is it the Mother of God? There is some testimony I find difficult to deny. Rita Klaus, she's a remarkable miracle story, wonderfully healed, and a very powerful presence. But then, on the other hand, there's the story of Agnes Heupel who also received a miraculous healing and has turned into the leader of a cult. With the fruits it's sort of a pick-and-choose situation.

"A lot of people hold that it was Mary in the beginning, but somewhere she checked out and the visionaries have carried on without her. There's also the theory that visionaries are only human and make mistakes. And then the other possibility is that it's a dark spirit disguising itself as the Mother of God. Which is not uncommon; it has happened frequently in the past. In his

second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. The Vassula [Vassula Ryden, who claims to channel messages from Christ] thing sort of points this way.

“I know I haven’t spoken clearly about what I believe it is. It’s almost like I’m afraid to say it out loud. To say I believe that this entity is not the Mother of God but an evil spirit, one that comes as though benign but leaves a bloody mess on the ground.”²²⁹

So what do the experts say on visionaries? In this case we will consult some Catholic experts. According to the Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, only eleven of the 295 alleged apparitions that were investigated by the Church between 1905 and 1995 had been approved, meaning that “fewer than one in twenty-five are believed to be authentic,” said Father Augustine Di Noia, who had been assigned to the Congregation.²³⁰

Father Gabriel O’Donnell was not impressed by numerous studies conducted on the Medjugorje seers. When O’Donnell was a young priest he was part of one of the earliest brain studies on mystical experiences. “It was at Yeshiva University in New York,” he recalled.²³¹ “They hooked us up to these machines, then asked us to meditate or pray. Some of us were Catholic, some Jewish, some Buddhist, some Muslim—every religion you can imagine. And of course it registered that we went into an altered state as we prayed, and that the deeper we went, the more it registered. There clearly is physiologically something that happens to you, but that isn’t evidence of the supernatural. In fact, it conforms entirely to the laws of nature.”²³²

The French Jesuit Augustin Poulain (1836–1919) wrote a famous work that addresses visions in *Graces of Interior Prayer*, which was also published

under the title *Revelations and Visions*. Poulain breaks down authentic visions into Exterior Visions (seen by the eyes) but also Imaginative Visions (seen without eyes) and Intellectual Visions (seen by the mind alone). Poulain believed Exterior Visions could be of divine or diabolical origin and come in four varieties. Those of the first manner involve perception of the true heavenly bodies of Jesus or Mary, while those of the second manner involve seeing the “borrowed body” of a heavenly being “formed by the ministry of angels.”²³³ In cases of the third manner, the visionary did not perceive a true body, but rather saw the “luminous rays” of a body in heaven with the assistance of angels who “produce these undulations as they would produce sound waves.”²³⁴ In the fourth manner, which was “purely subjective, angels imprint the image of the object directly upon the retina.”²³⁵ It’s interesting that Poulain believes some of these manners of visions are the work of angels. There is possible scriptural evidence of this in Ezekiel 1 and the book of Revelation. If Scripture reveals that angels can manifest visions of the divine, Satan (a fallen angel) or his demonic minions (fallen angels) may be able to do the same.

Poulain’s idea that some of these other visions are just perceptions is also illuminating. In Ephesians 6:10–12, we read about our “struggle” or “wrestling” not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces (Satan and demons). This spiritual struggle occurs in the spiritual component of man, his or her brain. The spirit in man manifests itself in the brain. The brain is also how we see and perceive the world around us. Scripture confirms the spirit of this world can manifest false visions into the minds of unsuspecting humans (2 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:14). In each of the three cases we discussed (Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje), the seers

were able to see things that other witnesses who were present were not able to see.

Another legendary Catholic priest with knowledge of this subject is Father Benedict Groeschel. Groeschel provides some interesting comments on Bernadette’s apparitions at Lourdes. “Bernadette is the best because she makes the least possible subjective interpretation,” he explained.²³⁶ “Even when told that the words ‘Immaculate Conception’ referred to the Virgin Mary, Bernadette continues to say simply, ‘I saw a young lady who told me she was the ‘Immaculate Conception.’ Neither the priests who believed nor the priests who disbelieved could influence her. And Bernadette never added a syllable to what she was told during her apparitions.”²³⁷

I was struck by this tidbit from Groeschel. In many of the other apparitions, initially the seers are not quite sure what they are seeing. In some cases the seers influence each other in regard to what they see, or people they tell the story to seem to have some influence on what exactly they think the seers see. Eventually the Virgin Mary becomes the obvious answer and the seers agree. But not with Bernadette. She just reports the exact facts presented to her. So what’s the big deal? Well in Bernadette’s case the vision said she was the “Immaculate Conception.” Which everyone assumes means she is the Virgin Mary. But in truth we have seen Mary was not immaculately conceived. That concept, as we have noted earlier, is found nowhere in the Bible, and it comes from dubious sources. Would Satan and his minions want to confuse people about the nature of the dead? They have done it before.

Notice the story in 1 Samuel 28:7–20, where Saul consults a witch to bring up the dead priest Samuel for Saul the King, who is wearing a dis-

guise. Saul is wearing a disguise because he gave an edict that all mediums and spiritists should be expelled from the land. The witch falls into this category. Saul feels he has to go to her because he is worried about what will happen in a battle with the Philistines.

Now the question is how the “spirit” the witch saw could be Samuel if he was dead. Remember the Bible teaches the dead know nothing and sleep in their graves until a future resurrection (Ecclesiastes 3:19; Ecclesiastes 9:5–10; Psalm 146:4; Psalm 115:17; Psalm 6:5).

The word “spirit” here is a bad translation. The actual Hebrew word in 1 Samuel 28:13 is *elohim*. The word *elohim* is translated “god” or “gods” in Hebrew. So what does it mean that she saw “gods,” or a “god-like being” (as the Complete Jewish Bible translates it) coming up from the ground? Let’s not forget the Bible refers to Satan as a “god” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. If a demon or Satan can impersonate a dead priest (Samuel), why not the Virgin Mary?

One final point to make about the apparitions has to do with the attention that apparitions generate. For example, notice how the number of pilgrims increased for Medjugorje during the first nine years of the apparitions. In 1983, there were 50,000; 1985, 462,000; 1987, 857,000; and in 1989, 1.1 million. All of the major apparition sites continue to generate new visitors every year. Some will say that is to the glory of God, but is it? Is it to the glory of God when the focus is on the Virgin Mary rather than God (especially when the Virgin Mary is not even awake or alive at this time)?

Is the great deceiver (Revelation 12:9) creating a bright shiny object to pull people away from God’s Word and truth (John 17:17)? If this is the case, the Virgin Mary is not the only bright shiny object pulling faithful people away from God’s Word.

To be continued next issue

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The CGI, CEM, and other Christians will have a new Feast site in Hot Springs, AR in 2021. We have contracted with the “Legendary Vapors” to use their building for the entire Feast. The Vapors has a history that goes back to its construction in 1959. In the sixties, Hot Springs was a hotbed of illegal gambling, organized crime, and all the things that go along with it. Al Capone had his own suite in the Arlington Hotel.

The Vapors Lounge was famous for gambling and entertainment during the '60s. Hollywood stars frequented the Vapors to gamble and perform. Illegal gambling was shut down in the late sixties, and the Vapors Club only survived a few years after that. A church was in the building for about ten years, and the current owner is reestablishing it as a club. It now has a professional stage, sound system, lighting, etc. We will be using that room for church services. We will use some of the other rooms for seminars, classrooms, dining, and whatever else we need.

Services will begin each day at 11:00 AM Central time. On non-Sabbaths, we plan to have seminars at 9:30 AM, and will have Sabbath school in as many rooms as needed. We will have a meal on the first Holy Day for everyone. We will have a Pie and Ice Cream social, at least one interac-



tive Bible study, a game night, and other activities in the building. We will have a picnic for everyone. We are making arrangements for discounts for local attractions, such as the “Gangster Museum,” a local magic show, world-famous bathhouses, zip lines, go carts, and many other local attractions.

From the late 1800s till 1940, minor and major league baseball teams held spring training in Hot Springs. Yes, the Babe himself was in Hot Springs, many times. There is an alligator farm to visit and a riverboat to ride on Lake Hamilton, and there are plenty of lodging units with kitchens in which to stay. There are several beautiful parks to visit, walking trails all over town, a mountain tower to visit to see the entire area from, and there is even an off-road vehicle park.

Hot Springs is actually a national park, with many parks within the city. If I took another twenty pages, I couldn't write about all the fun things to do in Hot Springs.

And if that isn't enough, we will sing praises to our Father and His Son, listen to edifying seminars and sermons, and worship together. It is going to be a great Feast.

Planning is just beginning! Keep watching the CGI and CEM Facebook pages and websites. Much more information will be coming.

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