

Climbing Joyner's Gnostic Mountain

by Orrel Steinkamp

Historical Background

The first heresy the early church faced has been called "Gnosticism" by church historians. "Gnosis" is the Greek word for 'knowledge'. Gnostic teaching promoted special "higher knowledge" in which hidden truths are revealed directly to the seeking initiate. In computer terms the seeker can access God directly by mystical experiences without any reliance on the rational mind. This was the ancient path of "Gnosticism".

Gnosticism was imported into the Roman Empire from the Eastern Roman provinces in the form of "mystery religions". It was eclectic and adapted easily to other religious themes. Gnostic ideas morphed and blended with Christian teaching. Paul surely encountered this at Corinth among the false apostles whom he contested, as well as at Colossae. This is commonly understood by biblical scholars. Indeed, Gnosticism was the 'New Age' of the first century.

Michael Horton summarizes 1st Century Gnosticism as:

"While Gnostic writings are extremely esoteric and mystical, they exhibit an inward obvious thread of individualism and an inward focus which is generally characteristic of mysticism. As in Greek Platonism, the subject (the knower) has priority over the object (the known), and the path to spirituality is through inwardness, meditation, and self-realization. Gnostics believed that whatever happened to them in their own private experience was the final court of appeal." ¹

Early Christian Version

The early Christian version of Gnosticism diverted the attention of believers from the centrality of Jesus and the facts of the gospel message. These first century New Agers were not interested in a faith which was based on the historical facts of the gospel. Rather, they promoted direct encounters with the spirit world by means of mystical experiences. This knowledge could not really be taught but had to be experienced and it was only the initiated who could attain the elite

level of special and hidden knowledge. Believers were pressed to go beyond the teaching of Paul to further experiential levels on their way to reaching Paradise itself. The imagery of ladders and climbing mountains have always been favorite Gnostic symbols and the medieval church borrowed these ascent images. Thus, we find spiritual ascent themes in John of the Cross's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and Jane Lead's "The Ascent of the Mountain of Vision".

Each rung of the ladder or each mystical step up the mountain is man's attempt to search for and reach the very presence of God. Gnostics, be they those of the first century, the monastic mystics of the pre-Reformation Middle Ages or the current super anointed apostles, who boast of guided tours of paradise, ascend by levels up the Holy Hill of the Lord. Indeed others may call this going from the 'outer court' through the 'holy place' and finally entering the 'holy of holies'. In reality it all amounts to pressing onward to the manifest presence of God to gain what Luther described as a "glimpse of God in the nude", seeking to find paradise by an inward trip rather than kneeling at the foot of the cross. It is a spiritual attempt to climb up the down staircase. This spiritual mountain climbing is the basis of most non-Christian spiritualities and only in authentic Christian teaching does God Himself descend His Holy Hill and meet man at the bottom rung at a place called Golgotha. No! We are not climbing Jacob's ladder. Even in Jacob's experience at Bethel, it was angels that descended this heavenly staircase while Jacob himself slept. God does not hide Himself until we ascend the various levels of mystical experience. Indeed God Himself descended from glory to seek and to save the lost right here on planet earth!

Rick Joyner Version

Rick Joyner is the most obvious Gnostic in the church today. He has many companions, but he alone epitomizes a pure Christian Gnostic mentality. Joyner was converted in 1971. He has asserted that from this time on he had an "ability to foresee future events and occasionally could look at people and know details about them."² Nevertheless, he acknowledges he left the ministry in 1980 and "drifted from the Lord" until 1987.³ In a vision first presented in four parts in successive issues of his *The Morning Star Journal* and then published in the book, *The Final Oquest*, Joyner presented his vision of his ascent up the mystical

mountain. Along the way he converses with angels and discovers doors leading to secret knowledge that will revolutionize his Christian experience. He also finds the 'Garden of God' and is invited by angels to taste of the tree of life. He also encounters many believers and personal friends who have gone on before and when he finally reaches the top he meets Jesus himself. It is much more ambitious than some of the first century Gnostic Gospels that were content to give further revelations of Jesus' silent years from 1- 12. etc. By any historical standard *The Final Quest* is an aggressive attempt at Gnostic writing.

Joyner proposes that there are different levels of revelation. Level one is prophetic "impressions". Level two is described as "conscious illumination" which he says was the level the apostles used when they wrote the New Testament documents. Level three is an even higher level which he calls "open visions" which are viewed externally like the clarity of a movie screen. Finally, the fourth and highest level he describes as the "trance". It is on this highest level of inspiration that Joyner claims he received his dreams and visions. In other words he claims a higher level of inspiration than the Apostles when they wrote the Gospels and Epistles. Joyner describes these levels of revelation in *The Final Quest*, pg 9-10.

Joyner leaves no doubt that he is thoroughly Gnostic. One of the Ancient Gnostic teachings is that God actually dwells within the soul of man and is a spark of divinity deep within the soul that must be sought and experienced. In Joyner's trip up the mountain an angel tells Joyner: "The Lord dwells within you. You have taught this many times, but now you must live it for you have eaten of the tree of life. The angel then began to lead me back to the gate. I protested that I did not want to leave. Looking surprised, the angel took me by the shoulders and looked me in the eyes. This was when I recognized him; It was Wisdom. 'You never have to leave this garden. This garden is in your heart because the Creator Himself is within you'.⁴

Tricia Tillin, quoting from *The Secret of the Illuminati*, by Elizabeth Van Buren (an Occultist), discovers a similar mentality:

"The Mystery Religion is the One from which all the great religions of the world have obtained their basis, though not the dogmas which were added later. More important than any other teaching is the one that states that only by his own efforts can man attain to Paradise, for this holy place is with himself." (Tricia Tillin, The New Thing, <http://www.banner.org.uk/res/newthing.html> pg.9)

Joyner actually believes he can just write this material and everyone should just believe him. Unfortunately, many people do just believe him and his books are reprinted many times over. But where is the validation? Even the writer of the movie "OH! GOD" felt that John Denver must be tested for authenticity after his claims of speaking with God. Consequently, Denver was sequestered in a hotel room and given written questions, in Aramaic no less. But Charismatic junkies just swallow whole what Joyner and other self proclaimed prophets announce. They have no doubts that Joyner actually made the trip up the Hill of the Lord and has brought further revelation back to the church. It is either a fraud or an imagination that won't stop. I am more convinced to believe the reports of people abducted by aliens than to accept Joyner's fantasies as actual revelation from God. But even among the plethora of prophetic voices today, Joyner is only average and must be classed as a trainee pressing on toward accuracy. Joyner joined the action during Y2K but he got it wrong. He announced "[The Lord] finally did begin to speak about the issue... the most severe difficulties will come from the panic generated by the situation ... the Lord told me to observe the problems that Y2K will cause in the natural world as a reflection of the problems we have in the body of Christ."⁵

Joyner teamed with the highly acclaimed prophet, Bob Jones, during a New Years Eve service, December 31, 1997. In a tape, which is no longer available on Joyner's website, Jones predicts a number of natural calamities which would occur in 9 months time; such as California splitting apart and sinking into the sea; the breaking of the Hoover Dam; the Great Lakes dumping into the Mississippi becoming 35 miles wide and other calamities in major cities. Jones summed up things by saying: "If I lived in LA I'd get out." After Jones finishes his prophetic ramblings, prophet Joyner prophetically endorses this revelation."⁶

In a Morning Star journal, Joyner states: "Our ultimate goal is to accurately write the news before it happens ... we are still growing in this area".⁷ That appears to be a major understatement!

Some Thoughts

This growing and learning in the prophetic is a cop out. Similar ideas are found in New Age psychics. They assert that they get progressively better in their craft and that is why psychics, who have honed their craft, are more often sought after. But where in God's prophetic word is a prophecy a skill to be mastered?

Even the child Samuel never had to develop in prophetic accuracy but prophesied accurately. There is no indication that the prophets of the Lord had to have a period of in-service apprenticeship.

Although Joyner's doctrinal statement is quite orthodox, in practice he departs from it by a continuous stream of so-called prophetic revelations. Joyner apparently does not believe Jesus was bodily raised from the dead for he states: "there is a tendency to continue relating to Him (Jesus) as 'the Man from Galilee'. Jesus is not a man. He was and is spirit".⁸

Finally, the Final Quest is all about Joyner. Although he feigns humility and angels tell him that the reason for his ascent is his humility, he makes no attempt to hide the fact that angels bow to him.

Jesus supposedly congratulates Joyner for reaching the top. Jesus allegedly tells Joyner, "Just as the Lord told the thief on the cross, 'Today you will be with me in paradise' you can enter Paradise at anytime. The Lord, His Paradise, and this mountain, are all abiding in you, because He is in you ... The reason you can see me and others cannot, is not because I have entered your realm, but because you have entered mine."⁹ In language similar to Satan's aspiration to ascend to heaven ("I will ascend to heaven" Isaiah 14:13-14), Joyner encourages believers to do the same in almost the same words: "Let us understand, the Lord wants us to ascend to heaven; He wants us to sit on the mount of the assembly; He wants us to be raised above the heights of die clouds, and He wants us to be like Him".

¹⁰ Joyner relates meeting Paul in Paradise and Paul informed him "you are now our hope." ¹¹ Joyner tells of meeting a believer he knew on earth who says to him: "You are not here to just gain understanding, but to experience and be changed. The next level of rank here is many times greater than what we have. Each level after is that much greater than the previous one. It is not just that each level has an even more glorious spiritual body, but each level is closer to the throne from where all the glory comes." ¹² It appears that the angel suggests a series of new spiritual bodies as opposed to one resurrected body for each successive level.

Conclusion

In this brief article I have only selected a very few items related especially to Gnostic ascent themes. There is so much more for the reader to sample. Joyner's book and further writings are classic Gnostic tripe and have no more credibility than the many Gnostic Gospels of the first and second centuries which were uniformly rejected by the church.

End Notes

1. Michael Horton, *In The Face Of God*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996, pg. 53
2. Joyner, *The Harvest*, New Kensington PA: Whitaker House, 1989, pg. 7
3. Joyner, *Ibid.*
4. Joyner, *The Quest*, pg. 42.
5. Joyner, *A Prophetic Vision for the 21st Century*, Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1999m, pg. 49, 52.
6. Tape of the month, prepared and transcribed from the tape of the month by Josiah Friberg now found at http://www.creativityplus.com/carney_prop98dl.htm
7. Letter from Rick, *Morningstar journal* Vol. 9 #1, 1999, pg. 1
8. Joyner, *There Were Two Trees in the Garden*, New Kensington PA: Whitaker House, 1992, pg. 170
9. Joyner, *The Final Quest*, pg. 50
10. Joyner, *The Were Two Trees in the Garden*, op. cit., pg. 54.
11. Joyner, *The Final Quest*, pg. 135
12. Joyner, *The Final Quest*, pg. 90