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“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

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ON THE ROCKS IN THE SHACK *Spiritual Adultery and Ruined Relationships*

[An excerpt from Pastor Larry DeBruyn new book titled *Unshackled: Breaking Away From Seductive Spirituality*. To order the book, see details at the end of this article.]

Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. . . . And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. (Jeremiah 3:6, 8, KJV)

In his chapter “A Breakfast of Champions” (By the way, I like *WHEATIES* too!), *The Shack*’s author, Paul Young, places these words in the mouth of the Holy Spirit, *Sarayu*, as she addresses Mack, the allegory’s main character:

Mackenzie, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a *circle* of relationship, not a chain of command or ‘great chain of being’ as your ancestors termed it. What you are seeing here is relationship without any overlay of power. (*The Shack*, 122)

The Shack is big on relationships. Forty-odd times the author employs the word “relationship(s).” Like any existentialist, the author takes liberty to reinvent “the relationships between people and God.”¹ Though at times profaned, one of the allegory’s strengths is the emphasis it places upon “relationship” among and between the imaginary members of the trinity and Mack.

“Relationship” becomes most evident when “Papa” (a.k.a. “Elousia,” the black goddess) enfolded Mack—haunted by his *Great Sadness*—into his/her arms and gently invited him to “Let it all out.” (*The Shack*, 226) In this poignant moment of emotional catharsis, the story records that Mack, “closed his eyes as the tears poured out . . . He wept until he had cried out all the darkness, all the longing and all the loss, until there was nothing left.” Thus, by his “relationship” to the feminine-divine, Mack is restored to emotional wholeness, something his temperamental and churlish earthly father would have been incapable of helping him with, and by implication, any purely heavenly Father.

This may explain why Paul Young paints God in the image of the feminine-divine. He thinks the image of a mother god can offer succor and comfort to humanity in ways of which God the Father is incapable, at least according to how the author projects a father image to be. But by linking emotional healing to feminine divinity, Young appears to have borrowed from a pagan storyline. But before addressing the

link between goddess-ism and paganism, the masculinity of God as presented in Scripture deserves attention.

God “Is” Masculine

In a little book, *The Language of Canaan and the Grammar of Feminism*, Vernard Eller noted that, “the God/man relationship is to be understood primarily under three figures—each of which casts God in a clearly masculine role.”² Those three metaphors are “(a) husband and wife (or lover and beloved); (b) father and child (normally ‘children’ or ‘son’); and (c) king and people . . .”³ In these figures Eller states, “God is masculine—and must be for the figure to work.”⁴ Again, in the divine human relationship, humanity assumes the feminine role “to put it in a way that is linguistically maddening and yet biblically true.”⁵ This contradicts the dominantly feminine manner in which Young presents God.

As the Bible pictures God as masculine and His people as feminine, let’s look at the biblical metaphor of “husband and wife,” the “overlay of power” attendant thereto, and explore how any role-reversal might alter a person’s relationship to God.

Israel’s Husband

In the Old Testament, Israel is known as the “wife of Jehovah,” and in the New Testament the church as the “bride of Christ.” Intimating that He was Husband to that nation when they broke covenant with Him, the Lord predicted His relationship with Judah would be restored.

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although *I was an husband unto them*, saith the Lord” (Emphasis mine, Jeremiah 31:31-32, KJV).

Jeremiah pictures the relationship between God and the nation as that of Yahweh being the husband and Israel being His wife.⁶

The Church’s Groom

Again, Jesus told a story about a wedding in waiting. He likened Himself as the Groom. He compared the people for whom He was coming to be His Bride—a coming that, though announced and expected, was going to be abrupt and surprising (Matthew 25:1-13). The Apostle Paul develops this marriage metaphor when, after setting forth the guidelines for intimacy in marriage, he said, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32).

Thus, “husband” is a chief metaphor by which God explains His relationship to His people. The figure of marriage connotes the most intimate of “relationships”—the former involving Israel being the Lord’s *partner*, and the later the church being His *promised*. The marriage figure is richly endowed with the image of the divine masculine (initiation, wooer) and the human feminine (response, wooed).⁷ Such is the nature of divine grace. To invert the relationship creates a spiritual climate in which people initiate thereby creating their own gods and goddesses (idolatry), and make their own rules (legalism) by which they, because of their actions, expect to control God and cause Him to react favorably to them.⁸ People become manipulators instead of worshippers.⁹

Femininity and the Trinity

Can the creation of a feminine-divine image as pictured in *The Shack* impede, even damage, the relational-potential between people and God, something polar opposite from what readers testify the book has done for them?¹⁰ Can this happen when the story invites people into a surreal-spiritual world? Yes it can, for that is how imagination and idolatry relate to each other. But you might be asking, how? We would answer: By projecting femininity to the Trinity in a role-reversal that perverts what the Bible depicts the divine-human relationship to be.

Eller comments upon the biblical relationship between God and His people: “It is not wide the mark to say that, in Yahwism, the human race plays the role that goddesses play in the religions of dual-gendered deity.”¹¹ He continues to say:

This means that the biblical faith has built into it a much higher anthropology than is possible to any the pagan faiths—and let it be said, an anthropology that not only fully *includes* women but actually is *biased toward* the feminine. Consequently, we ought to be very cautious about falling for the temptation our biblical predecessors so valiantly resisted, namely, moving the feminine principle into the godhead and thus jeopardizing the great anthropological (and feminist) advantage scripture had already given us.¹²

The above quotation may need clarification on one point; that goddess-ism is something “our biblical predecessors . . . valiantly resisted.”¹³ The fact of the matter is—the vast majority did not valiantly resist the temptation posed by female idols. Only a remnant did (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4-5). The Old Testament is littered with examples of idolism in which worshippers projected their gods to be goddesses. The Lord tells Jeremiah that, “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and *they* pour out libations to other gods in order to spite Me” (Jeremiah 7:18, NASB). The name “queen of heaven” may refer an aggregate of feminine deities extant in the ancient world—Isis (Egyptian), Astarte (Phoenician), Ishtar (Assyrian and Babylonian), Ashtoreth (Canaanite), Anat (Canaanite), and others. The implication of

such a relational role-reversal lies at the base of demonic experiences, idolatrous practices, and false religion.

“Goddess-ism” in Ancient Israel

Though feminine idols permeated the religions of ancient civilizations, and though its ideology may have secretly simmered amidst the Israelites since their Egyptian captivity (Ezekiel 20:7-8), goddess-ism seems to have gone public in Israel when introduced by King Solomon. In an abrupt turnabout, the same king who had constructed and dedicated the Temple that would house Yahweh’s glorious presence (1 Kings 6:1-38; 8:1-9:9), built worship centers “before Jerusalem” to house, among others, images to the Sidonian goddess Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:1-8; 2 Kings 23:13). In his later life, and for reason of possessing hundreds of wives and concubines, Solomon’s sexual desires turned his heart unto other gods and goddesses. The king’s sensuality led him into idolatry.

More than a Metaphor

Solomon’s personal involvement with and public initiation of idolatry at the end of his reign influenced Israel’s and Judah’s spirituality for generations to come. The common biblical description of Israel playing the harlot with the pagan (i.e., earthly) idol-gods of the surrounding nations is more than a metaphor.¹⁴

Ritual Prostitution

As religion, the feminine goddess *Asherah* (or, Ashtoreth) was fully a part of Baal worship, she being the female consort of Baal.¹⁵ This male-female divinity (i.e., Baal-Asherah) typifies the pagan idolatry where, as one study Bible notes, the “deities symbolized generative power, [and] their worship involved prostitution.”¹⁶

As ritual, the intent behind religious prostitution was perhaps threefold: one, that worshippers could derive pleasure as they indulged their selfish lusts; two, that by engaging in the primal act by which the continuum of life is perpetuated, they could, in acts of imitative magic, somehow stimulate “the womb of mother earth” to open up thereby increasing the fertility of their flocks and crops; and three, that they could, for reason of ecstasy derived from the sexual liaison with a body representing a god or goddess, experience their personality, however fleetingly, become mystically fused with the divine.¹⁷

Thus, ritual prostitution involving males and females became a common occurrence at the many high places constructed “before Jerusalem” and throughout the nation (Jeremiah 3:6).¹⁸ At this juncture, we should note a call from some that, in advocating New Age/New Spirituality, “We must allow ourselves whatever time it takes to reestablish the consciousness of the Sacred Prostitute.”¹⁹

In spite of the outward repression of idolatry by reforms like those initiated by the youthful King Josiah (*circa* 622 B.C., 2 Chronicles 34:1-7), it has been noted that the idolatrous cancer “was deep and flourished quickly again after a shallow revival.”²⁰ Not even the Babylonian Captivity would cure the nation of its fascination for and playing the harlot with the imagined gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations. In

fact, the solution to this spiritual pollution awaits the coming of the One who will cure Israel and the world of spiritual harlotry forever (Zechariah 12:10; 13:2; See Micah 4:1-2).

Obviously, *when* the image of God is changed into gods and goddesses (Romans 1:23), *when* poly-gendering generates polytheism, *when* the sacred-sexual on earth is believed to mirror the sacred-sexual in heaven (As above, so below),²¹ *when* sacred prostitutes become representative incarnations of the gods and goddesses, and *when* sex becomes a sacrament linking of the human to the divine, the dynamic of “relationship” with God changes.²² Sensuality controls spirituality, and divine mystery is reduced to vulgar lust (See Leviticus 18:1-19:4; 1 Peter 1:15).

Evangelicals: Emergent and Erotic

Believing in the wholeness and sacredness of matter and energy (i.e., the monistic and pantheistic theory that God is all, and all is God), New Ageism views that sexuality complements spirituality. Sexual people are spiritual people, and sexual experiences are spiritual experiences. Sex facilitates persons getting in touch with the mystical dynamic and rhythm of life. Being one of the most vibrant experiences life offers, it is not therefore surprising that avant-garde religionists should attempt to combine sex and spirituality. One New Age author states:

Sexual ecstasy can transport us into union with the sacred Other, whether soul, God, human beloved, or nature. Uninhibited sexual opening powerfully alters consciousness . . .²³

In a similar vein, the stunning statement of a radical Anglican priest has been noted: “Sex is the spirituality that reveals the sacramental richness of matter.”²⁴

“Sex God”

Though he makes some legitimate observations in his book *Sex God, Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality*, like a New Age teacher, Emergent Church Pastor Rob Bell connects sexuality and spirituality. Though disclaiming that men and women are, or possess the potential to become, gods, Bell does state:

in some distinct, intentional way, something of God has been placed in them. We reflect what God is like and who God is. A divine spark resides in every single human being.²⁵

To what does the “divine spark” refer? Does the “spark” refer to the soul-spirit of a person, or to sex?

To answer the questions, it must be noted that in his book Bell later stated, “Sex carries within it the power of Life . . . Something divine.”²⁶ We should note how like New Age teacher Neale Donald Walsch, Bell spells “Life” with a capital “L” and “creator with lower case ‘c,’”²⁷ and how like Eckhart Tolle, Bell views sex as “divine.”²⁸ In spelling “Life” with a capital “L” and calling sex “divine,” is the hip Bell attempting to “Christianize” the sexuality of New Age spirituality? It appears so.

In that Bell *calls* sex “divine,” *states* that our sexuality reflects “what God is like and who God is,” and *modifies* God with the attributive adjective “sex” in the title of his book, he suggests that sexuality helps define God, and that sexuality is something He possesses in common with His creatures. But calling sex divine introduces eroticism into the nature of God, which becomes an interesting make-over for God, especially in light of the fact that eroticism was an essential component of the goddess-ism endemic to the ancient and pagan Near Eastern religions.²⁹

Thus, one must question whether Bell’s sex construct elevates or degrades the image of God in man, and whether it affirms or denies the transcendence and separateness of the Creator from His creation. I myself look at it like this: If it degrades God, then it degrades man. In pagan belief, sex is the spark that ignites and perpetuates “Life” with a capital “L,” and taps into the cosmic Energy with a capital “E.” So if it is divine, why not spell “sex” with a capital “S”?³⁰ But I shudder to think of the perversity that can result from thinking that sex and God belong to the same cosmic and monistic whole—as below, so above.

Song of Solomon

Those who connect sexuality to spirituality think they find precedent for doing so in the biblical book, *Song of Solomon*. Though no evangelical, Matthew Fox presupposes that Christ and the universe are co-extensive. Together, they form a cosmic Christ.³¹ In his pantheistic monism, Fox relates sexuality to the Creation. He states:

the Cosmic Christ is encountered in human love and sexuality. Sexuality is revealed in a living cosmology as still one other theophany, one other transfiguration experience.³²

To him as well as other New Age/New Spiritualists, sexuality serves to enhance one’s sense of feeling spiritually connected to the cosmos.

Thus, Fox writes of a Christ who is present in, with, and around sex. After treating human sexuality in the biblical book *Song of Solomon*, Fox writes that, “Play lies at the essence of all sexuality re-visioned in light of a Cosmic Christ paradigm.”³³ Likewise, in his book, *Life with God*, well-known contemplative author Richard Foster states that, “the luscious imagery of Song of Solomon has forever linked the spiritual and the erotic with exquisite unity.”³⁴ New Calvinist Pastor Mark Driscoll also makes extensive use of *Song of Solomon* when he dispenses his often uncouth “sexpertise.”³⁵

However, *Song of Solomon* does not describe a love affair between people and God. The love scenes are earthbound. The book depicts the ideal, wholesome, and faithful courtship and marriage between two earthly lovers. As such, the *Song* may be understood “as a series of six major poems . . . put together in a sequence that builds from anticipation (Poems I-II) to consummation (Poem III) to aftermath (Poems IV-VI).”³⁶ Old Testament scholar David Hubbard suggested that this understanding “shies away from any *allegorical* handling of the text, since it [the text] contains no clue as to hidden or

spiritual meanings” He concludes that, “the New Testament, which does not quote or refer to it, gives no support to attempts to spiritualize the book.”³⁷ Those who connect sexuality to spirituality for reason of *Song of Solomon* do so in spite of the fact that the book contains no mention of God’s name.³⁸

Nevertheless, desperate to find some analogical reason or biblical authority to combine sensuality and spirituality, the New Spiritualists allegorize the *Song* to describe the sensuality between God and His lovers. But since the days of Origen (circa 185-254) the allegorical method of interpretation has led to many wild and fanciful scenarios. Using *Song of Solomon* to infer support for the idea of “sacred sex” is just such a fancy.

“Goddess-ism” in *The Shack*

In *The Shack*’s relaxed, give-and-take, and schmoozing atmosphere created by Young, the author injects sensuality into Mack’s relationship with the feminine-divine. On two separate occasions—once with the sensual *Sophia* (the personification of *Papa’s* Wisdom), and then later with *Sarayu* (the Holy Spirit)—Mack seemingly experienced *kundalini*-like ecstasy.

According to Yoga teaching, *kundalini* describes a mystical experience or orgasm of soul when a zap of energy enters the body. This experience, which can happen spontaneously, is named *kundalini* (Sanskrit for “snake” or “serpent power”; named as such because of the Hindu belief that like a “sleeping serpent,” it lies coiled within the body ready to strike at any moment. Might this bear similarity to Genesis 3:1?). When the energy awakens the serpent, wham...! This powerful but transient moment of psycho-spiritual arousal is defined to include, “physical sensations . . . clairaudience, visions, brilliant lights . . . ecstasy, bliss, and transcendence of self.”³⁹

Kundalini and Chakras

Yoga teaches that in the human body there are, “vortices that penetrate the body and the body’s aura, through which various energies, including the universal life force, are received, transformed, and distributed.”⁴⁰ The entry points for the energy are called *chakras*. It is believed that there are seven such points (*chakras*) where the energy enters. They include:

The root (*muladhara*) [which] is located at the base of the spine and is the seat of *kundalini* . . . ; the sacral (*svadhisthana*) [which] lies near the genitals and governs sexuality . . . ; [and] the crown (*sahasrara*) [which] whirls just above the top of the head.⁴¹

With this description in mind, let’s look at two instances in *The Shack* to see if Mack, the novel’s main character, experienced something like *kundalini*.

Upon hearing the sensual *Sophia* ask him, during a séance-like journey into the darkness, “Do you understand why you’re here?” the story records:

Mack could almost feel her words (Clairaudience) rain down on his head first (The 7th chakra?) and melt into his spine (The 1st chakra?), sending

delicious tingles everywhere (The 2nd chakra?). He shivered (Physical sensations) and decided that he never wanted to speak again (Self-transcendence). He only wanted her to talk (Bliss) . . . (Parenthetical notes, questions, and associations mine, *The Shack*, 153)

Or consider the moment when *Sarayu*, in affirming her constant presence with Mack, told him, “I am always with you; sometimes I want you to be aware in a special way—more intentional.” Then Young records that Mack, “distinctly felt her presence in the tingle down his spine” (The 1st chakra?). (Parenthetical question mine, *The Shack*, 195)

What do you think? Did Mack, on these two occasions, once in the presence of *Sophia* and again in the presence of *Sarayu*, experience mystical and spontaneous moments of *kundalini*? The indicators suggest he did. I say that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck . . . it’s a duck!

The Immorality of Idolatry

Solomon’s introduction of an idolatry that included the feminine-divine changed the human perception of the relationship of the gods with each other, the people with those gods, and the people with people. As the apostle wrote, God “gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves” (Romans 1:24, KJV). With the projection of femaleness into god (*Asberah*, being Baal’s consort), in theory it became possible for gods to reproduce gods. So like rats, the gods multiplied themselves (i.e., polytheism).⁴² As the gods proliferated and Israel created their likenesses on earth, idols flooded the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The prophet described the apostasy:

Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and *are* soothsayers like the Philistines . . . Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not (Isaiah 2:6, 8-9, KJV; Compare Jeremiah 2:13, 20; 3:1-10, 13).

For reason of being influenced by the spiritualities of the east—a spiritual adultery which exhibited itself in the people’s sacramental liaisons in the high places with male and female prostitutes representing the gods and goddesses—Israel’s relationship to her faithful Husband “hit the rocks!”

Relationship on “The Rocks”

Idolism negatively impacted “relationship” among Jehovah’s ancient people in two basic ways—first and vertically, their relationship to the Lord was changed, and second and horizontally, their relationships to each other were affected. The people’s idolatry impacted both the religious life and social stability of the nation.

For reason of playing the harlot with foreign gods and goddesses (As exhibited in the Ten Commandments, they lived

in denial of Yahweh's hierarchical authority over them.), the Lord divorced Himself from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (i.e., the Assyrian invasion and captivity in 722 B.C., Jeremiah 3:6-11). He scattered the nation throughout the ancient world.⁴³ Like her northern sister, Judah's pursuit of "relationships" with other pagan gods and goddesses also necessitated her eviction from the land. The Babylonians carried her into captivity *circa* 586 B.C. The primal cause for evicting both Israel and Judah from the Promised Land was that both sister-kingdoms played the harlot with foreign gods. Openly and unashamedly, they committed adultery with sacred prostitutes of both sexes before their Husband-Jehovah. They did not understand the hierarchy, the authority, or the fidelity required in their relationship to the Lord (Exodus 20:3). In the Old Testament the Lord showed His people that He was not tolerant of an "open marriage" with them!

But the breakdown of the spiritual relationship between the Lord and His people also impacted the social structure and stability of the ancient Israel. Through Isaiah the prophet, the Lord described the state of affairs: "As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause *thee* to err, and destroy the way of thy paths" (Isaiah 3:12, KJV). Hypothetically, Israel and Judah were two kingdoms *under* Jehovah. But in their idolism, the two sister-nations denied God's authority by creating their own gods and goddesses as they broke God's Law. As a result, the nation's social stability, as Isaiah communicated, lay in shambles.

The Shack's thesis—that the Trinity exists in "a circle of relationship," and that "hierarchy . . . is your [humanity's] problem, not ours"—is not only biblically inaccurate (Any concordance check of the word "authority" in the Bible will bear this out.), but also spiritually and socially utopian. Any breach in the concept of God's ultimate authority can lead to spiritual anarchy and moral chaos among God's people. If God, in the governance of family and church, doesn't rule, and consequently and correspondingly neither do the men, then the women and children will. Thus, to the Corinthians Paul wrote, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3, NASB). There can be no relationship where there is no responsibility, and there can be no accountability where there is no economy of authority. In fact, one great evidence of the Holy Spirit's filling ministry among believers is *submission* (Ephesians 5:21). Without faithful self-denial, both relationship and fellowship suffer as imperfect people live on this imperfect earth.

Conclusion

Some years ago, a rock singer asked, "What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us . . . If God had a face what would it look like?"⁴⁴ Thanks to the verbal painting of God in *The Shack*, some may think they have come to see and know the face of God, that he's just a regular sort of guy or girl in whose presence we can even casually cuss if some impulse should lead us to (*The Shack*, 140).

As we pointed out, *The Shack* is big on "relationship(s)." Apparently, to enhance the "relationship" idea for his readers, William Young felt it necessary to inject femininity into the Trinity, a femininity that Scripture neither literally nor metaphorically endorses.⁴⁵ But if the femininity of the Trinity becomes ingrained in the collective consciousness of a large number professing Christians, this goddess-ism may lead devout souls into versions and perversions of spirituality utterly opposed by God and His Word. We should remember that verbal paintings can become just as iconic as images carved from wood or melted from precious metals. As Christians, we should remember that though "we are absent from the Lord . . . we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:6b-7).

In our relationship with God, by grace He initiates and by faith we respond. So the question arises, are books like *The Shack* needed to enhance, even initiate, feelings of "relationship" with God? The answer is, not if through faith we have found spiritual completeness in Christ (See Colossians 2:10). The sovereign God will reveal His presence in us as we walk day-by-day trusting Him, obeying Him, praying to Him, witnessing to the lost, partaking in the ordinances and fellowship in a local church with other believers.⁴⁶ By grace through faith, we receive God's blessings as we become enraptured by His presence in and among us.

We will find spiritual satisfaction through the Savior, the Spirit, and the Scriptures. Through Jesus we experience *contentment* in God. He said, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35, NASB). In the Spirit we experience *companionship* with God. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16; Compare 2 Corinthians 13:14.). From the Scriptures we experience *confidence* before God. "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence which we have before Him" (1 John 5:13-14). By resting in Christ, we experience the *comfort* of God. He has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5, KJV). Such—and much more—is the experiential fruit of being reconciled and related to God, fruit that then becomes the blessing of God through us to those around us.

Sometime during first part of the 1800s, Catesby Paget wrote a hymn, "A Mind at Peace with God." The song contained these words describing the closeness to God that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ:

Near, so very near to God,
I could not nearer be;
For in the Person of God's Son
I am as near as He.

Dear, so very dear to God,
Dearer I could not be;
The love with which He loves His Son,
That is His love to me.

Now, that's relationship!¹⁷ And it's the relationship of a Bride espoused to Jesus who is "the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20). And during this time of our exclusive betrothal to Jesus, our spiritual relationship to Him is closed, not open. There must be no rival suitors.

ENDNOTES

¹ Simon Blackburn, "existentialism," *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 125.

² Vernard Eller, *The Language of Canaan and the Grammar of Feminism*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982) 37. In analyzing the literary implications of Young's creation of goddess-ism, Eller's "An Excursion on the Unity of God in the Language of Canaan," was most helpful (37-44).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. 38.

⁵ Ibid. 37.

⁶ In the context of God as husband and Israel as wife, we note the phrase "to go a whoring" (Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 31:16). In acts of spiritual adultery/idolatry, some of which involved physical liaisons with cultic prostitutes, both female and male, God is ever pictured, in spite of Israel's infidelities, as the faithful husband. The phrase "go a whoring" is "almost never used to describe sexual misconduct on the part of the male in the Old Testament." The reason for this emphasis is that the "term is used most frequently to describe 'spiritual prostitution' in which Israel turned from God to strange gods." See Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr., "TO GO A WHORING, BE A HARLOT," *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980) 467-468.

⁷ Illustrating the initiation-response relationship between male and female, and though in our culture this has changed and is changing, in marriage the man usually initiates (i.e., proposes) and the woman responds (i.e., either accepts or rejects the man's proposal). Idolatry represents perversion in that man, not God, initiates it.

⁸ "They attributed their lack of plenty to the discontinuance of honor they paid to the goddess." In other words, the goddess did not respond because they did not initiate. See Vine, W. E., "Queen of Heaven," *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell) 1981. Online Logos Library System.

⁹ We can only note how in the Word of Faith movement, in the game of name-it-claim-it, God becomes the responder as man becomes the initiator.

¹⁰ In the book's Front Matter, one enthusiast remarks, "Finally! A guy-meets-God novel. . .

When I read it, I felt like I was fellowshiping with God." (Mike Morrell, zoecarnate.com) I recognize that Paul Young may sincerely be attempting to promote the relational understanding between God and people. I say "may" because only God knows his intent. However, as evidenced by the connection of the cast of characters to goddess-ism, the author may have additional agendas.

¹¹ Eller, *Language of Canaan*, 40.

¹² Ibid. 40-41.

¹³ Eller, wrongly I think, remarks that, "under the pressures of Canaanite Baalism, Israel failed (or refused) to accept any hint or tinge of such dual-gendered deity." (Ibid. 40). The histories (Kings and Chronicles) and the prophets indicate this was not the case. Both Israel and Judah, as this essay shows, welcomed *Baal-Asherah* with open arms.

¹⁴ I think that the Bible's picturing of God as being masculine better represents His asexuality. After all, by themselves males cannot reproduce. The masculine gender therefore, affirms God's solitariness (i.e., monotheism) and sovereignty (i.e., authority). Infusing femininity into God deconstructs divine monotheism by imagining a mythological way for gods and goddesses to reproduce (i.e., polytheism), and divine authority by imagining a feminine counterpart equal to Him (i.e., egalitarianism). God's asexuality also possesses Christological implications. It safeguards against the Arian or New Age idea that God's Son was "birthed" in time (See John 1:1). God's solitary masculinity also voids any thought that a first "Christ" spirit (i.e., Jesus) resulted from the conjugation of primal "father and mother" gods, thereby becoming the first-born of all human spirits. As such, the only distinction between Jesus and us is that the Christ spirit came into being before us. Jesus therefore becomes our elder brother. This primogeniture myth is believed by many New Age spiritualists and cults.

¹⁵ In Canaanite religion, the goddess *Anath* was the female consort of Baal. In addition to being Baal's sister with whom he committed incest, she also served as a prostitute for other gods. As Unger wrote, *Anath* was "given the epithet 'virgin' and 'the Holy One' (*qdashu*) in her invariable role of a sacred prostitute—another illustration of the utter irrationality and moral indiscriminability of Canaanite religion." See Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954) 173.

¹⁶ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997) 1073.

¹⁷ In a chapter titled "Sex and Possession," Sargent writes: "If man is thought to rise to the level of the divine in mystical experience, it has been believed by millions of people that he can attain the same level in the ecstasy of sex." See William Sargent, *The Mind Possessed, A Physiology of Possession, Mysticism and Faith Healing* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1974) 86.

On this point I would note that in the heterosexual-conjugal act, an interpersonal union takes place that is metaphysical, mysterious and mystical. From a pagan point of view, this union could easily be considered as a spiritual linking between humanity and divinity. But Paul warned: "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh" (1 Corinthians 6:15-16, KJV).

¹⁸ "High places housed chambers where male prostitutes and harlots (*qedeshim* and *qedeshot*, Heb.) practiced cult prostitution (cf. 1 Kin. 14:23; 2 Kin. 23:7)." See W.A. Criswell, *Believer's Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997) Online Logos Library System by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

¹⁹ Deena Metzger, "Revamping the World: On the Return of the Sacred Prostitute," *Animas* 12/2 (1986), quoted by Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communication Ministries, 2006) 35.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Study Bible*, 1059.

²¹ Jesus stated that regards marriage, earth and heaven are worlds apart. As a safety net for the woman, the Levirate Law required that a brother care for his deceased brother's wife (Deuteronomy 25:25). Based upon this law, the Sadducees asked Jesus a trick question about a hypothetical situation in which the eldest brother's wife outlived six brothers who had married her to care for her, but predeceased her. In effect, the widow became a hand-me-down sister-in-law as she had been married to six of the seven brothers at one time or another. So the question was asked, whose wife would the woman be in the resurrection—brother one, two, three, four, five, or six? Jesus answered that she would

be the wife of none of the brothers, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). My point: It's presumptuous to project there's sexuality in heaven because there's sexuality on earth.

For any interested in pursuing this matter further, the Discernment Group invites you read the three-part series posted on *Herescope* titled "Spirituality and Sex," September 19, 23, 25, 2008. See (<http://herescope.blogspot.com/2008/09/spirituality-sex.html>).

²² In John's vision of end-time religion, one can wonder at the system's indebtedness to the divine-feminine as the apostle pictures the goddess holding, "a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication," and having the name, "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:4-5). One must also note the violent side of ancient goddess-ism and how this woman is pictured as drunk "with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Revelation 17:6). Of *Anath*, the incestuous goddess-sister of Baal, Unger notes that she and other ancient goddesses were "patronesses of sex and war—sex mainly in its sensuous aspect as lust, and war in its evil aspect of violence and murder." See Unger, *Archaeology*, 173. My point—ancient goddess-ism possessed a mean streak, and if it did then, it can now, for as the old saying goes, "Hell hath no fury such as that of a woman scorned." In this vein, Scripture portrays the idolatrous queen and false prophet Jezebel as a murderess and seductress (1 Kings 18:4; Revelation 2:20).

²³ Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2003) 284.

²⁴ Jones, *The God of Sex*, 47, citing Charles Pickstone, *The Divinity of Sex*.

²⁵ Rob Bell, *Sex God, Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 19.

²⁶ Ibid. 197.

²⁷ Neale Donald Walsh, *Tomorrow's God, Our Greatest Spiritual Challenge* (New York: Atria Books, 2004). Supposedly, God tells Walsh: "The words 'Life' and 'God' are interchangeable. When you understand this, you will understand the basis of the New Spirituality . . ." (69) Elsewhere, God told Walsh, "For all of life is S.E.X.—Synergistic Energy eXchange." See Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God, an uncommon dialog, book 3* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 1998) 56.

²⁸ Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now* (Novato, California: New World Library, 1999). Tolle wrote, "Adam and Eve saw they were naked, and they became afraid. . . Shame and taboos appeared around certain parts of the body and bodily functions, especially sexuality. The light of their consciousness was not yet strong enough to make friends with their animal nature, to allow it to be and even enjoy that aspect of themselves—let alone to go deeply into it to find the divine hidden within it . . ." (113-114).

²⁹ Ryken states: "In the ancient Near Eastern worldview, the sexual activity of human beings, then, is simply an earthly reflection of what takes place in the divine realm." See *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, General Editors (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 776. The dictionary's discussion of "GODS, GODESSES," is also informative (336-340).

³⁰ Any reader interested in pursuing these matters is invited to read the author's Internet article, "Evangelicals: Emergent and Erotic," available at (<http://www.frbaptist.org/bin/view/PastorsPapers/PastorsPapersTopic20090608162318>).

³¹ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1988); See also author's *Creation Spirituality* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991).

³² Fox, *Cosmic Christ*, 169.

³³ Ibid. 171.

³⁴ Richard Foster, *I Life with God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008) 113.

³⁵ "Mark Driscoll and the Sex Driven Church," *Covenant Theology*, April 29, 2009 (<http://covenant-theology.blogspot.com/2009/04/mark-driscoll-and-sex-driven-church.html>).

³⁶ David A. Hubbard, "Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon," *The Communicator's Commentary*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, General Editor (Dallas: Word Books. Publisher, 1991) 257-258. Examples of allegory are extant in the New Testament (See Galatians 4:24; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1-11; etc.).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 463. Because *Either or Song of Solomon* "do not explicitly quote or mention the name of the Lord at all presents certain challenges to Old Testament theologians," writes House. Such silence also becomes an obstacle for those who try to connect sensuality to God.

³⁹ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, "Chakra," *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991) 319.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 86.

⁴¹ Ibid. 86-87.

⁴² It is as if the deities were commanded, "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the heavens." Hindus believe there are millions of gods.

⁴³ This scattering has given rise to the myth of "The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel." But the tribes were never totally lost (James 1:1; Luke 22:30). Nevertheless, by playing the harlot, Israel forfeited her relationship with Jehovah, a forfeiture Israel's sister, Judah, did not learn from (Jeremiah 3:10).

⁴⁴ Joan Osborne, "What if God was One of Us?" Lyrics at (<http://www.lyricsondemand.com/onehitwonders/ifgodwasoneofus> lyrics.html).

⁴⁵ Obviously, the Father presents a masculine impression to us as does the Son. Over two decades ago, I read an opinion which, supporting feminism, stated theoretically that God's Son could have been born a daughter—this in spite of the prophet's contrary prediction (Isaiah 9:6-7). Jesus also revealed the masculine gender of the Holy Spirit (Greek *pneuma*, neuter). He said, "But when He (*ekēinos*, masculine gender), the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth . . . He (*ekēinos*, masculine gender) shall glorify Me . . ." (John 16:13-14). *The Shack's* feminization of the Spirit as *Sargyu* contradicts Jesus' masculine gendering of Him. Thus the biblical God cannot be multiplied for reason that He possesses no capacity to propagate Himself. As His creation, we possess His image but not His identity.

⁴⁶ I can only imagine how on this point, the super-spiritualists will condescendingly say, "Oh, that's so quaint and out of date. The fashions of spirituality are changing. Poor fellow . . . his brand of spirituality stands out like a polyester leisure suit of the 1960s. Does he really believe such spirituality is all there is? Give us something new to us, something novel . . . something more."

⁴⁷ As Paul the Apostle wrote, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

See order form for ordering this book.

From the Editor:

The magical word “*change*” has been on the lips of the politicians, the corporate world, the schools and even the church! Most of the denominations in the Evangelical world have undergone *transformation* in the last decade. Looking back ten years at research on the plans for AD 2000 and Beyond, we should not be surprised at the speed society is moving to bring about the *paradigm shift* on a global scale!

In early 1994, we published a newsletter on “Agents of Change”. One of the campaign promises of the Clintons at that time was that they would be “Agents of Change”.

To quote from the 1994 newsletter:

“Education is undergoing broad changes as educators try to bring children into a ‘new world’. . . . this restructuring is aimed at alienating children from their parents, country and God. A new set of values is being instilled in the minds of the children apart from and opposed to the absolutes of Scripture, thus, parents will find the disciplining of their children is becoming more difficult as the authority is shifted to the ‘new parents’ – those who hold your children most of their waking hours.” According to the Flint Journal, Jan. 10, 1994, the school curricula under the banner of *multiculturalism, environmentalism and diversity* otherwise known as *progressive education* is producing PC (politically correct) Brats. This article believed that: “We have a whole generation of children unable to make an informed and educated decision on a whole range of issues. . . because the materials are blatantly political”. It does indeed seem as if this “change” has materialized since that time.

The Agents of Change have also been especially busy targeting the church of Jesus Christ in many areas. The most recent explosion on the scene has been the bestselling book entitled *The Shack*.

After seeing this book on coffee tables of relatives, friends and being promoted in Christian bookstores, it appeared that we were dealing something that was beyond the normal. This was a book that was gripping the thoughts and souls of the unsuspecting.

Recently we had a problem with ants who were after the sugar on our pantry shelf. The solution to get rid of them was a sticky sweet substance that also contained a poison which they eagerly devoured and took back to their nest and died with their larvae.

This book, *The Shack*, is like ant poison. It has enough “sweetness” to draw in, yet enough poison to destroy you.

We are grateful to those that God has given the burden to give voice to their concerns. Pastor DeBruyn has well documented his book: *Unshackled: Breaking Away From Seductive Spirituality*.

The book will be available through this ministry in a few weeks for \$10.00. (Please see the order form and order your copy).

Ontario, California

September 18-19th this ministry will be joining with the Women on the Watch in California for the Second Annual Women’s Conference (men are also welcome). The theme of the conference is: *Behold the Bridegroom cometh, will the Bride be ready?* Speakers include: Jackie Alnor, Sarah Leslie, Cheryl Brodersen, Jewel Grewe, Holly Pivec and Caryl Matrisciana. Upon registration (see other side of this page), you will receive your meal tickets and Program Schedule. The conference starts 4:00 p.m. on Friday and goes through Saturday 9:30 p.m.

The full schedule is on the website:

www.discernment-ministries.org

Bowling Green, Ohio

Discernment Ministries will be hosting their Fall Conference October 9-10 at the Word of Truth Christian Center, 1163 Napoleon Road, Bowling Green, OH 43402 The theme of this conference is: *The New (Yet Old) Spirituality*. Speakers include: Pastor Larry DeBruyn, Dr. Martin Erdmann, Pastor John Marston, Pastor Jeffrey Whittaker, Lynn and Sarah Leslie and Jewel Grewe.

The conference starts at 9:30 a.m. on Friday and goes through Saturday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. Some of the topics will be:

- True Worship
- Everything Must Change – Changes Everything!
- Quantum Physics and the New Spirituality
- Manifest Sons & The Charismatic Movement
- Reinventing Science and the Emerging Church
- Perfectionism and Revivalism
- Separating from the Emergent
- Perfectionism and Postmillennialism
- Perfectionism and Romanticism
- On The Rocks in The Shack

There will be time allotted for Q & A

If you need further information about directions to the church, etc. contact Pastor Jerry Hunt at (419) 373-1913.

There are many hotels in the area. The conference attendees are using the Hampton Inn at 419 353-3464. The special rate of \$80.00 needs to be booked by September 8th.