

An Instructive Disclaimer

It seems to me it would be wise for us to discuss a little bit about discernment and balance when it comes to reading or listening to writings (such as mine) that speak "in the first person," as though, God, Himself, were speaking.

People, in general, have an odd tendency to accept at face value too much of what they read. For instance, we might come across something that sounds good and/or beautiful and say, "That is for me right now!" Of course, it is not impossible that God could be speaking to us right then, using what we have just read . . . but we need to be careful. Some parts of what we read might confirm – or even identify -- something God is working in our heart . . . but we must use godly wisdom to discern content and intent before we seize a new "treasure." We can too easily be deceived by blindly taking into ourselves "just anything" that "seems" to be "the voice of God."

What we are reading/hearing could be something of enlightened spiritual understanding or even a bona fide "gift of the Holy Spirit." It could, however, only be the result of human reasoning, however exalted or intricate . . . or it could be cultic or even occult in origin. There are many "Jesus" figures floating around but we want only the One True God! This warning is not meant to frighten us but to alert us to be wisely discerning . . . as we get help from the scriptures and the Church which stewarded those scriptures, from the Holy Spirit and from well-seasoned fathers and mothers in the time-honored truths of our Christian faith.

Some time ago, someone wrote me with an honest question that struck to the heart of her then-present predicament. She had read, in one of my emailed installments, words which seemed to suddenly bring a directional beacon of light and hope in her deeply difficult situation and even seemed to suggest a decision in what direction her life might need to take. In speaking to her need for spiritual direction at that time, I will – in the interest of this present discussion -- share here what I told her.

What seems to be your "bottom line" question -- "Can I take these words, phrase by phrase, as a personal word of knowledge, wisdom or prophecy or a foretelling for me in a given situation?" -- represents the very edge of the concerns I have always had in sharing these writings which were given to me personally, though meant for the church at large. MOST GENERALLY, I WOULD HAVE TO SAY, TO YOUR QUESTION, "NO."

However, I do also have to say that not long ago I saw a particular situation in which just the opposite actually seemed to be the

case with one of my readers. The Lord obviously used a certain writing to comfort, stabilize and encourage her through the miraculous discovery and successful endoscopic removal of an inoperable and life-threatening brain tumor. Though the writing, as a whole, was powerfully beneficial to her, she was particularly astounded when a doctor used exact and unusual phrases that were in the writing I had received nearly twenty years before but had shared with her just prior to her critical time of need.

I have had other people write me giving particulars of how a writing brought timely hope, encouragement and peace in less dramatic instances. Still, there was no element of foretelling of events or particular personal direction for decision making by a writing being applied to a person's day to day affairs. I do not believe these aspects are within the scope of my writings. It seems, instead, that perhaps the descriptions of the Holy Spirit gifts of "prophecy" and "word of wisdom" (as in I Corinthians 12 - 14) better approach the characteristics of my writings.

It is obvious that my writings are subjective in nature even though most of the content is objective, revealed truth found in the Bible . . . hence, the many cited scripture references as well as ones that come to mind in the reader's memory as he/she reads. The "first person" voice is the tricky part and what makes a healthy discernment sometimes difficult. It helps immeasurably if the reader has a good working knowledge of the Bible.

As I began to receive and record the writings in the fall of 1978 I was struck with a very great sense of godly fear of "putting words into the mouth of God." Over those early months -- and as I sought spiritual counsel from my pastor and his wife on this matter -- I realized that instead of "my putting words into God's mouth," He was actually putting His words into my mouth! There is a vast difference. With this realization, however, also came a grave responsibility . . . to sift and judge what I was receiving. Other people were soon to be exposed to the writings and I knew I would be held accountable to God and to others for their being as accurate to God's truth and as non-misleading as possible.

To help insure this through the years, I submitted each writing, shortly after it was written, to my senior pastor at the time. I still have personal letters of recommendation from each of these men which lend credence to my intent and ministry through the writings as well as in my teachings. I also included several other persons in this on-going discernment process. I will ever be grateful for their patience, wisdom and input during these important years in my spiritual development.

An early nugget of established knowledge from Rev. Jack Hamilton, the first pastor who counseled me in these matters, was that even though the holy scriptures have already been written (and sealed and determined true by the Church) and God's public revelation was completed through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension and the death of the last Apostle, God does continue to give us insight into understanding more and more of that revelation to mankind. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit at work in the Church and in the hearts of believers, **understanding of His truth continues to unfold before us.** After this working principle was drawn to my attention I realized that my writings did, indeed, serve this purpose and I was greatly comforted.

Though such "prophetic writing" as mine is not to be considered even close to having the importance of scripture, it can, if found worthy, help to make scripture -- and the God of scripture -- "come alive" in our understanding . . . in our personal lives . . . in the present day.

Imagine my delight when, decades later, I discovered this very thought within the covers of the new CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH! (C.C.C. pp. 22-24, paragraphs 65-73; for greater context: pp. 13-38, paragraphs 26-141)

<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church>

Frequently, therefore, I must recall the Lord's initial instruction to me: that I am to share my writings with others as led because they are meant for all His people:

As I have commanded you to do before, even so again I tell you -- gather together what I have given you in words this way for I would have you always to remember My words to you that you, yourself, might gain from them and that others may be comforted and exhorted by them.

from "Rise . . . Gather . . . Proclaim" in *This is My Beloved: psalms of communion*,
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It has been my experience that when the Holy Spirit speaks to a reader from my writings it is as though a divine arrow pierces to the very core of his/her inner being. The Lord and His work are thereby instantly recognized and taken to heart. Thus, there seems to be a prophetic entrance (*I Corinthians 14:3*) into the reader for a specific reason.

We know that there is no "time" as we know it, with the Lord. He "lives in eternity" yet He relates to us right where we are at any given moment. He knows the end from the beginning and to Him, it all fits together. His plans and purposes have never and will never fail. Our "times" are in His keeping. We also observe that what is of/from Him often has an eternal quality or essence about it. Over the years, people have commented to me that my writings seem to be timeless -- as applicable now as when they were written and they could have

been applied during almost any time in history. (This is obvious in the above story of the lady with the brain tumor.)

Whenever a person is touched by my work, I am amazed and humbled. I simply stand aside in silence to see the Lord working through these powerful words I feel He has given me over the years. I can claim no credit for them, other than writing them down and being their steward -- to give as meat "in due season" to those who are in need and/or hungry for more of God.

I repeat: The standards for scriptural integrity must remain very high. Because it is easy for error to creep into such subjective writing by even the most well-meaning and seemingly well-grounded person, I am acutely aware that my responsibility before God is great . . . not only to be His good steward but also to be as faithful to Him and to be as faithful-to-the-truth a scribe (*Matthew 13:52*) and teacher (*James 3:1-2*) as I can be . . . under God and by His help.

To this end, I ask the prayers of all who read and of all who have gone before us, bearing the sign of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(adapted from "Epilogue ..." *Along Garden Pathways: story of a pilgrim,*
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