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The Celestine Prophecy: An Adventure

James Redfield

New York: Warner Books, 1993

Several decades ago, Scott Peck's book *A Road Less Travelled* became a best seller and a guidepost for a new spirituality in the 60s. That book made little reference to the Christian tradition but instead led the baby boomer generation to embrace a selection of ancient religious aphorisms blended with the new psychology, a kind of "blessed individualism" for the New Age.

Today, another best seller is seeking to become the new guidepost to carry these baby boomers in their spiritual quest. *The Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield (1993) appeals to the same readers by placing the baby boomer generation at centre stage in history. Redfield's mythical story is constructed around an archaeological discovery of nine prophecies or insights that had been lost in the Peruvian mountains of South America for thousands of years. The key to unveiling these prophecies, the manuscript predicts, is a sudden "awakening of consciousness in the sixth decade of the twentieth century". This is like including your child's name in their bedtime story. It hooks the baby boomers into swallowing the trite religious substance in the remainder of the book. *The Celestine Prophecy* weaves many New Age ideas into a larger sacred story, much like the Book of Acts. It meets a need for the older New Age generation to feel "plugged in" to history.

One might dismiss this book as a simplistic but innocuous offering of "cotton candy" to the spiritual child inside modern adults. But Redfield is not content to ignore the Christian tradition. On the contrary, this story makes a frontal attack on the Christian church. He suggests that the church has been suppressing the evolution of human spirituality by attempting to control the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of people in every culture. *The Celestine Prophecy* presents a damning picture of the Christian tradition in that it paints all of Christendom on the same canvas as the Spanish inquisition. The result is that, in this time of spiritual renewal, many are led to keep their distance from the church. Many unchurched continue to view the church with great suspicion, preferring instead to try and satisfy their need for "fulfilment" in ego-centred, spontaneous experiences that reinforce their desire for a private faith, free of any need for commitment and community.

Meanwhile, the casualties of secular life increase; they are people who feel "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). Christian congregations engaging in outreach will find many who are open to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet, we can not wait for them to come through the church doors. Many of these folks are turned off the church by literature like *The Celestine Prophecies*, or perhaps even personal anecdotes from people who have felt undone by earlier encounters with church.

Unfortunately, there are many who continue to reject our faith community because the church has not properly communicated the gospel to them. We, the church, need to accept our lumps for these miscommunications in the past. But, more importantly, we need to recognize what we are up against and learn how to proclaim the gospel anew to a hurt, harassed and helpless generation. The popularity of *The Celestine Prophecy* is another wake up call for the church to reach out and engage those fragmented lives in our midst. They are looking for connections to God and the larger human story. We have a real story to tell.

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Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach

Wayne E. Oates

Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991
109 pp. \$9.95

Like a great Fire House Chili, this book is best appreciated only after one has stewed over it for a while. Although the reading is not difficult, it takes time to contemplate and assimilate the concepts Oates sets before us for consideration.

In writing this book Oates basically had three objectives. The first was "to demonstrate the function of temptation in the formation of character". The second was "to develop a holistic perception of the biblical and psychological perspectives of temptation" and the third was "to present an appreciation of the spirituality that is quietly present in the work of psychotherapists in their perspectives of temptation".

Having worked in the field of psychotherapy before entering the ordained ministry, I have a keen appreciation for the lack of communication and understanding between psychotherapists and members of the clergy. One of the gifts Oates' book presents us with is a conceptual foundation for building a bridge of understanding between these disciplines. By providing an insightful description of temptation from both theological and psychological perspectives, Oates gives us a common ground upon which we can share our concerns and insights in terms we can both understand and appreciate. This, without a doubt, will be of great help to those who, in the course of their ministry, find themselves dealing with people in the secular helping professions.

As helpful as this might be though, I find Oates' theological interpretation of temptation even more helpful for my day to day work as a parish pastor. In the grand tradition of Karl Menninger, Oates introduces his