

I want to feel God. Genuine and Invalid Experiences (part 2) (Archimandrite Varnavas Lambropoulos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



How we should see them

1. As we've seen, there are a whole host of religious experiences. Some good, some bad. Beneficial and harmful. Revelations of God and black magic.

In all these cases, however far removed they are from each other, in terms of both time and place, however different they are, we see that they represent a unified code of testimony to the existence of a world outside or beyond nature.

We've been given genuine experiences in Holy Scripture. These are when God has spoken to people, has revealed Himself and the path of our salvation. Such revelations are:

- His appearance to Adam
- His appearance to Noah
- His appearance to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

□ His appearance in the bush, on Sinai, at the Red Sea, in the desert as a bright cloud and as a pillar of fire.

□ And, above all, His appearance as Christ in the New Testament.

There are also other, dark or suspicious manifestations, not of God, such as the intrusion of the serpent in the case of Adam and Eve.



Analogous experiences can be found in the religions of the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, Sumerians, Aztecs and so on. In these religions, too, we encounter a great many experiences which- their adherents believe- are caused by or derive from other-worldly, divine powers. Both in the traditional religions and the newer groups which we call sects, we come across a huge number of tangible, religious experiences. So we see that we're dealing with a vast ocean of such experiences.

2. All this water is, in places, turgid, in others clear; sometimes sweet, other times bitter and so on, but so fundamentally different in each case as to account for the differences between religions and the fanaticism of their adherents.

Naturally, certain questions arise:

□ Is it possible that all this water comes from a single source?

□ And if there's more than one source, each producing water of different quality, can we simply put all of them together in the same bucket? Can we see them as 'one'? For example, the meddling of the serpent (the devil) with Eve was an experience, but not the same as God's intervention with Adam. How can they fit together when they have sources which are not merely diametrically opposite, but mutually hostile?

□ Are they all from the true God or do they come from other forces? How can we be sure that a religious experience has its origins in the One True God and not in other powers? We're therefore faced with a great dilemma. A glib or easy answer serves no purpose. It has to be deeper than that.

3. So there's an imperative need for a clarification. And the purpose of this wouldn't be simply to satisfy human curiosity. We're not trying to solve crosswords or put together puzzles here. It's not a matter of idle speculation. Since this has to do with God and religion, this is clarification on which our life and death depends. Our salvation hangs upon it.

In other words, we need to make a distinction between the experiences which exude 'the fragrance of life' and those which give off 'the stench of death' (to paraphrase Saint Paul).

Which experiences bring us to truth and life? And which take us to lies and death?

Some ancient Greek philosophers did their best to assess the experiences, teachings and customs of their religion and they rejected some of them. But they weren't in a position to clarify matters completely. This is true of all of us, in fact. All we can really do is to see whether an experience is one which is related to this world or whether it's supernatural.

4. God has taken the strain of this clarification upon Himself, on our behalf, as Our Father.

This redemptive task was begun in the Old Testament and completed in the New. And, as we know, this clarification cost Him dearly. He paid for it with His death and with His precious blood. We were 'bought at a price' (I Cor. 7, 23).

5. Holy Scripture makes it absolutely clear that God is One and is the 'God of all' (Rom. 9, 5). 'For all the gods of the pagans are demons' (Ps. 95, 5). In other words, all the gods of all other religions are demons.

The distinction's clear. There are no 'grey areas' between the two. One is the Lord of Glory, the Source of the only True Light. All the rest are fallen angels, spirits of darkness, wicked demons, which have led people into the chaos of idolatry.

Idolaters, then and now, had and have fallen into a terrible quagmire where they're floundering around. For them, evil spirits were also gods, just as the good ones were. Infor many idolaters, then as now, the good god and the wicked one were two sides of the same coin. In this way, again, both then and now, they find themselves in chaos. Chaos is darkness, a state of unclarity.

6. It was this state of chaos that God Himself undertook to clarify for us. Was it easy for Him? Not at all. It was difficult for Him to guide us out of the dark labyrinth of polytheism. He had to work hard to wake us up, to help us feel, from experience, that He is the only Lord and that there's none other in heaven or on earth.

In the end, that's what's clear. There's a God Who is the sole Lord. Other than Him,

there's no god. Not in heaven and not on earth. And He revealed this to us not simply by sending messages or giving some oral or written teaching, though He did this, too.

But as a concession to our human thirst for tangible experiences, He chose a more empirical method for our instruction: open conflict with the demons.

7. He agreed to enter into open conflict with the demons. He agreed to fight against them. 'For us people and for our salvation', He consented to cross swords, before our eyes, person to person, with the spirits of darkness, simply to demonstrate to us His unassailable power. (To cross swords, of course, only in a manner of speaking). He was forced to give us hard-hearted humans a good shaking to bring us out of our stupor. Saint John Chrysostom says that we're 'thick-minded' and 'very thick-skinned', which is why we go around 'gawping and leaning towards the things of the body'.

He also says that that God is obliged to engage in open combat with the 'principalities, powers and the lords of darkness of this age, in order to light within us 'the spark of faith'.

8. What is this 'spark of faith'? In the first place, it's the clarification that there are two sources of religious experiences: one is the One, True, Almighty God; and the other is the demons, the fallen angels who fall impotently before Him, with 'fear and trembling'.

By igniting within us the 'spark of faith, God wishes to make us truly people of faith and knowledge, His light, His mouth, His preachers to declare His majestic works.

God wants to create loci of light, groups of people working for His kingdom. This is how Israel was chosen: 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light'. (I Peter, 2, 9).

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