

Romantic Panentheism, a Review of *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp

By Bob DeWaay

We live in a theological age (postmodern) where the rational and cognitive are questioned and replaced by the sensual and mysterious. Many churches promote the idea of worshipping God with all five senses. Feelings trump clear Biblical exegesis, systematic theology, statements of faith, and any other rational approach to Christian theology. Into this milieu comes a book that takes romanticism to a new level, using sensuality to invoke religious feelings and ostensibly true devotion. The book is *One Thousand Gifts* by Ann Voskamp, a Canadian farmer's wife.

Written entirely in the present tense, using an approach to the English language that takes numerous liberties for the sake of creating poetic feeling (like using adjectives when the rules of grammar demand an adverb and consistently having adjectives follow rather than precede the nouns they modify), Voskamp weaves a tale of discovering devotion to God through encounters with nature and art. In her experience, Voskamp found the secret to joy through what she calls *eucharisteo* ("giving thanks" transliterated from the Greek).

My purpose is not to begrudge Voskamp her religious feelings, nor to disagree with the basic thesis that Christians ought to give thanks to God in all things, but to object to the pantheistic worldview revealed in the book and the romanticism that accompanies it. First we will explore those two ideas.

Panentheism

Panentheism is the belief that God is in everything. It is to be distinguished from pantheism that teaches that God *is* everything. The very popular Emergent movement is panentheistic as is New Age theology. Since God is in everything, then God can be discovered and understood through encounters with nature. Voskamp shows that she knows what is wrong with pantheism, but unwittingly (or perhaps not so unwittingly) replaces it with panentheism:

Pantheism, seeing the natural world as divine, is a very different thing than seeing divine God present in all things. I know it here kneeling, the twilight so still: nature is not God but God revealing the weight of Himself, all His glory, through the looking glass of nature.¹

Her statement is not a valid implication from passages such as Psalm 19 and Romans 1 that speak of general revelation. For one thing, nature is fallen and does not reveal “all His glory” (Christ does that) and what can be discerned about God through nature is not saving knowledge, but condemning knowledge. Romans makes that clear:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:20-23)

Pagan nature religions do not provide messianic salvation. Paul claims that salvation comes only through the gospel (which comes to us through special, not general revelation). The confusion between these two categories is shown throughout Voskamp’s book. For example: “And every moment is a message from the Word-God who can’t stop writing His heart” (Voskamp: 86). The pagans live in the same time-space world that we do and do not thereby have infallible, inerrant, and binding revelation from God. They live in darkness. Seeking messages from God through the moments in this world will lead to pagan mysticism and not anything that is clearly and bindingly revealed by God. Voskamp claims that the ability to see God in everything is the key to getting such messages.

Voskamp would likely recoil from the notion that she is promoting pagan nature religion or mysticism. But she does put Christians on the same footing as the pagans by taking them on a journey with her to find God in nature and art. The concepts about God that are distinctively Christian in her book are borrowed from special revelation (the Bible) and brought with her on her journey of discovery. But she never makes a distinction between general revelation and special revelation and by integrating the two so seamlessly, elevates nature to the status of saving revelation. Since God is supposedly in everything, then God can be found in everything.

Panentheism is found throughout *One Thousand Gifts*. Since so much of the current evangelical world is being seduced by panentheism, we need to understand what is unbiblical about it. Many are confused and think that panentheism is logical implication from the Christian concept of omnipresence (that God is everywhere). This confusion has left the door open for the New Age to enter the church. That God is not limited spatially (there is nowhere where He is not – Psalm 139:7-10) is a valid, Biblical concept. But panentheism describes an ontological, not spatial category. Ontology is the study of being. It is the study of what something is in its essential nature. Panentheism teaches that God's essence or being is in everything. This is not the doctrine of omnipresence (though it would affirm it). If God in His essence and essential being is found in everything, then there is nothing unique about Christ (which is precisely the New Age claim). Biblically, nature does not reveal God and His glory in the same way Christ does. Nature reveals God obliquely and only in a condemning, not saving, way. Christ reveals God in His divine nature and speaks God's inerrant words. Jesus spoke inerrant, binding words that will be our judge on the last day (John 12:48). The moon does no such thing.

As an example of her panentheism, Voskamp describes an experience where she finds salvation by gazing at a full moon in a harvested wheat field:

Has His love lured me out here to really save me? I sit up in the wheat stubble, drawn. That He would care to save. Moon face glows. We are head to head. I am bare; He is bare. All Eye sees me (Voskamp: 115).

Her experience is described in salvific terms: “It’s dawning, my full moon rising. I was lost but now I am found again” (Voskamp: 118). She claims an “inner eye” that sees God in a panentheistic way: “If my inner eye has God seeping up through all things, then can’t I give thanks for anything? . . . The art of deep seeing makes gratitude possible” (Voskamp: 118). In Romans 1, “seeing” God through general revelation in a way that makes all humans culpable is true for all, not just special enlightened ones like Voskamp.

There are other troubling things about the claim that salvation can be found in seeing God in the harvest moon. One is that Voskamp implies that for her, “salvation” is being saved from an unhappy life filled with ingratitude. She never mentions God’s wrath against sin (she does mention sin but not in the context of substitutionary atonement). Another is that she completely confuses and merges general and special revelation. General revelation does not offer saving knowledge, whatever the meaning of her experience “chasing the moon” (her terminology). Yet another is that panentheism is implied here and throughout the book.

In theology we have the concepts of immanence (God is close at hand) and transcendence (God is exalted above and beyond us and the creation). Both are important in Christian teaching. These are relational and ontological categories and not spatial ones as I mentioned before. Voskamp is very confused in this regard and her confusion will likely be imparted to most of her readers. As in liberal and Emergent theology, immanence is promoted at the expense of God’s transcendence.

Consider this passage that reveals both immanence and transcendence: “*For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite’*” (**Isaiah 57:15**). That God is “high and exalted” means that the Creator is separate from His creation, is above and beyond it, and thus transcendent. God is not one of the many nature gods of the pagans. “Above and beyond” when used in this way denote God’s essence and being (ontology) not His spatial relationship to the universe.

But God is also “with the contrite.” Here we see the key to understanding immanence. It does not say that God is universally “with” all people if they only had the right “inner eye.” The Bible says “*The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the*

prayer of the righteous” (**Proverb 15:29**). “Far from” and “near” in such contexts are relational and not spatial. God hears prayers and personally relates to those who seek Him and are willing to come to Him on His terms. This relationship is available through Jesus Christ who is to be believed and trusted and is not available through the moon. God is near to all sinners spatially, because in Him they live and move and have existence (Acts 17:27). But if they refuse to repent and believe God as He has revealed Himself through Jesus Christ whom He raised from the dead, they will remain far from Him in a relational sense (see Acts 17:30-32). The moon cannot resolve the problem of the sinner’s lost condition, but the Son will if they seek him (Acts 17:27).

Voskamp’s panentheism is not compatible with Christian theism. This worldview is very popular in today’s culture, inside and outside the church, but it is not from God. It is a departure from the faith once for all delivered to the saints. My notes taken as I read Voskamp reveal panentheism on many pages (16, 31, 54, 89, 109, 110, 112, 118, 119, 124, 137, 138, 185, and 195). It is no exaggeration to say that the entire book is written from a panentheistic perspective. She even finds Christ in everyone, including the lost encountered in the inner city: “A long night doing what we’ve come to do, to bless Christ in the other” (Voskamp: 185). The Bible claims that only believers are indwelt by Christ through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Voskamp’s panentheism spills into universalism as it does in Emergent and the New Age. It colors everything she teaches.

Romanticism

Romanticism arose in the early 19th Century as a reaction against the Enlightenment and rationalism. The idea was that truth could be found in feelings, art, and the intuitive rather than through empirical investigation and the rational. At the conclusion of my book on the Emergent Church, I suggested that Emergent was a new Romanticism.ⁱⁱ I was able to express that idea to Doug Paggit personally, and he did not offer disagreement, but silence. I am quite sure that the assessment is accurate. Romanticism, old and new, has a common enemy which is the Enlightenment.

Voskamp is not so concerned about the Enlightenment or other philosophical considerations, but displays Romanticism throughout her book. In fact it could be mistaken for a romance novel with God the desired lover. Here is an example:

I long to merge with Beauty, breathe it into lungs, feel it heavy on skin (she also eschews personal, possessive pronouns). To beat on the door of the universe, pound the chest of God . . . No matter how manifested, beauty is what sparks the romance and we are the Bride pursued, the Lover pursuing, and known or unbeknownst, He woos us in the romance of all time, beyond time. I ache for oneness (Voskamp: 119).

The Bible speaks of the Bride of Christ (the church) but does not describe the universal call of the gospel in sensual terms of a lover pursuing His love interest (who may have no interest in return). God is commanding sinners to repent. The gospel calls for repentance and faith, not romantic feelings looking for satisfaction.

Voskamp's romanticism is enhanced by her skill at describing things in a most sensual manner. The sensual terminology is designed to create a mood, a feeling, a sense of romantic mystery that longs for discovery and fulfillment. Those like me, who relish theological concepts clearly described to be understood and discerned, will be horribly frustrated by the book. The point is not ideas to be judged true or false, but feelings to be relished. For example:

The full life, the one spilling joy and peace, happens only as I come to trust the caress of the Lover, Lover who never burdens His children with shame or self-condemnation but keeps stroking the fears with gentle grace (Voskamp: 146).

This sensuality finds its apex in the last chapter of the book which begins with this sentence: "*I fly to Paris and discover how to make love to God*" (Voskamp: 201). As a true Romantic, she finds the ultimate intimacy (her term) through various experiences in Paris. I will deal with that in a section about mysticism. For now I will point out that the

term “intimacy” is not found in the Bible. It is a sensual term that enhances the romantic appeal of Voskamp’s book.

The sensual terminology of *One Thousand Gifts* permeates the book. There is a whole chapter inspired by a soap bubble in a sink, one about driving across a bridge, and the aforementioned one on gazing at the moon. For those who have not read the book, I offer an example of over-wrought sensual (in the broad sense of appealing to one’s senses) terminology:

April sun pools into a dishwater sink, liquid daylight on hands. The water is hot. I wash dishes. On my arms, just below the hiked sleeves, suds leave delicate water marks. Suds glisten. And over the soaking pots, the soap bubbles stack. This fragile tension arched in spheres of slick elastic sheets. Light impinges on slippery film. And I only notice because I’m looking for this and it’s the rays falling, reflecting off the outer surface of a bubble . . . off the rim of the bubble’s inner skin . . . and where they meet, this interference of light, iridescence on the bubble’s arch, violet, magenta, blue-green, yellow-gold. Like the glimmer on raven wing, the angles, the hues, the brilliant fluid, light on the waves (Voskamp: 62).

This is indicative of how the entire book reads. Sensuality pervades throughout. Romanticism values feelings and experience over truth and concrete data. If washing dishes can be turned into a romantic experience, the job becomes something special, as does life. Voskamp offers her readers an escape from the mundane through seeing beauty in all things.

God and Time

Voskamp’s point in the soap bubble chapter is to teach the theological error that time is the essence and nature of God. She gains that idea through wrongly interpreting the self-designation of God as I AM to be proof that time is of the essence of God so therefore God is to be found in the present (Voskamp: 69, 70). Her ideas are remarkably

similar to Eckhart Tolle's (New Age pantheist) ideas taught in his books *The Power of Now* and *The New Earth*.ⁱⁱⁱ Tolle speaks of "Presence, and I AM" as realities to be discovered by enlightened ones. Voskamp writes: "Time is where God is. In the present. I AM – His very name" (69). God's point in revealing Himself to Moses was not that God is in the present. God is the eternal existent One whose being is not contingent on anything outside of Himself. Finding God is the present is the point driven home by Eckhart Tolle and is not a Biblical idea.

Voskamp makes other statements that are in serious theological error: "I hardly breathe . . . time is only of the essence, because time is the essence of God, I AM" (Voskamp: 69, 70).^{iv} The theological debate about God's relationship to time is very complex. There is a common teaching that God is timeless (based on the idea of God's changelessness and the fact that time involves change). But that time is God's essence is not an implication of I AM terminology and is theologically false. Tolle teaches a concept called "being present" which to him is linked to consciousness of deity. Voskamp has a similar idea: "When I'm present, I meet I AM, the very presence of a present God" (Voskamp: 70). What would it mean to be "not present"? Evidently "being present" for Voskamp has to do with some sort of consciousness that is not always true.

God's relationship to time is a worthy topic, however a very difficult and complex one. But Voskamp is not really interested in theology understood cognitively, but rather in romantic feelings about God. Her chapter on time, based as it is on the soap bubble, is about feelings and discovery, not theological conceptions:

I am a hunter of beauty and I move slow [*sic*] and I keep the eyes wide, every fiber of every muscle sensing all wonder and this is the thrill of the hunt and I could be an expert on life full, the beauty meat that lurks in every moment. I hunger to taste life. God. (Voskamp: 71)

This is about seeing (an art for the spiritually enlightened) God in the moment and in all things (panentheism). It is not really about God's relationship to time, but about our attentiveness and awareness that will cause us to see God (Voskamp: 77). God's

relationship to time is a romantic notion for Voskamp, not so much a theological one. This should be pleasing to postmodern readers who despise systematic theology.

New Age Sensibilities

New Age ideas are found throughout *One Thousand Gifts*. For example she cites Pierre Teilhard de Chardin who is a darling with New Age writers: “Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see” (Chardin as cited by Voskamp: 122). It is possible that a false teacher like Chardin could have some true ideas; but Voskamp cites him (as part of the heading of a chapter) precisely at his point of error (and hers). The idea that everything is holy and nothing profane is popular but fully unbiblical. It comports with the idea of panentheism. If indeed God is in everything, then nothing is profane. Rob Bell makes the same error in *Velvet Elvis* when he claims everything is holy.^v The Bible tells us to separate the holy from the profane: “*Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean*” (**Ezekiel 44:23**). The concept of the profane and unclean is also found in the New Testament.

What is holy and what is unholy are revealed by God. That certain enlightened ones with an elevated ability to see can see everything as holy is unbiblical. Being able to have a romanticist notion that heightened feelings and sensibilities will cause everything to be holy and beautiful is Voskamp’s point, but it leads her readers astray. She cites Chardin because she shares his ideas.

New Age panentheist Matthew Fox also approves of Chardin:

Teilhard de Chardin calls the Cosmic Christ the “third nature” of Christ, meaning that it takes us beyond the fourth-century conciliar definitions of Christ’s human and divine natures into a third realm, “neither human nor divine, but cosmic.” He comments that this has “not noticeably attracted the explicit attention of the faithful or of theologians.” Clearly Chardin saw the paradigm shift that was implicit in powerful celebration of the Cosmic Christ.^{vi}

Fox describes himself as a panentheist who sees God in all things.^{vii} Ironically I was reading Fox when I was asked to review Voskamp. The similarity of their ideas is easy to see, though Voskamp may not have gotten her ideas from Fox. But why are Christian authors like Voskamp teaching panentheism and promoting New Age ideas?

Emergent writers speak of the “rhythm of God in the world,” an idea promoted by Doug Pagitt. In their thinking this rhythm is to be found and tuned into through man-invented practices.^{viii} What is important to understand is that the idea that nothing is profane and that God’s rhythm can be found in all things is panentheistic and not Christian. The Christian view is that the created order, because of sin and rebellion, contains good and evil, the holy and the profane. Satan deceives people into thinking that they can tap into something good by using the right techniques rather than listening to what God has said in the Bible.

Voskamp promotes a means of “seeing” that reminds me of Pagitt and other Emergent teachers:

I speak the unseen into seeing and I can feel it, this steady breathing in the rhythm of grace—*give thanks (in), give thanks (out)*. The eyes focus, apertures capturing Beauty in ugliness. There’s a doxology of praise that splits the domestic dark. (Voskamp: 128).

What she means is that seeing God (holiness) in all things is a special spiritual ability by those who learn how: “Contemplative simplicity isn’t a matter of circumstances; it’s a matter of *focus*” (Voskamp: 127). Voskamp cites postmodern mystic Annie Dillard favorably in regard to “seeing” in the contemplative sense (Voskamp: 127). Voskamp tells her son about “seeing” as she understands it—which is so very New Age:

“The practice of giving thanks . . . *eucharisteo* . . . this is the way we practice the presence of God, stay present to His presence, and it is always a practice of the eyes. We don’t have to change what we see. Only the *way* we see.” (Voskamp: 135).

Seeing God in all things becomes the mechanism for transcending the sorrows of the mundane and finding good feelings to overcome the bad ones. She continues to teach: “The only way to fight a feeling is with a feeling” (Voskamp: 136). Perhaps Biblical truth would be an alternative. Like all postmodern panentheists, for her the subjective rules over the objective. This is also the essence of romanticism.

The real problem is not our failure to see God in everything, but our failure to believe what God has said, and by grace obey. The grand claim of the Bible is that “God has spoken” (Hebrews 1:1, 2). The question is whether we will listen to what God has said or not. Those who are totally alienated from God and teach pagan ideas claim to see God in everything (like Echart Tolle). Voskamp offers what is also offered by the New Age panentheists. The reality is that feeling close to God is not the same as drawing near to God as discussed in the Bible. Voskamp offers romantic feelings.

A Romantic Encounter with God

Voskamp’s romanticism reaches its pinnacle in chapter 11. There she describes a trip to Paris where she has an intimate encounter with God through art and architecture. God “woos” her through this encounter and she falls in love. She writes, “I am falling in love. . . . I’m accompanied by this Voice whispering to me new words, new love—urging me, *Respond, respond*” (Voskamp: 206). The entire chapter is laced with sensual terminology.

At Notre Dame Cathedral, carried away by the experience, she claims to have found the holy: “This air is old, the ground, holy” (Voskamp: 207). On the contrary, the New Testament does not describe holy places, especially not Roman Catholic cathedrals filled with pagan icons and grotesque gargoyles such as at Notre Dame (which means “our lady” referring to the virgin Mary). What exactly, from a Biblical perspective, makes Notre Dame Cathedral “holy”? Are Roman Catholic buildings and statuary inherently holy? Evidently Voskamp thinks so. But then again, a romantic will see that which is good and desirable in any and all things.

There, in a Catholic cathedral which ought to invoke our objection, Voskamp, as do her role models, the mystics of the Middle Ages, finds “intimate union” with God. She describes her experience in this way:

My eyes follow the stone arches rising over us, granite hands clasped in prayer over souls. I think of all who have gone before, the hands of medieval peasants who chiseled the stone under which I now stand. I think of those long-ago believers who had a way of entering into the full life, of finding a passage into God, a historical model of intimacy with God. I lean back to see the spires. (Voskamp: 208).

As I mentioned before, the Bible never uses the term “intimacy.” We take a huge leap of faith to assume that medieval mystics found a secret to intimacy with God through means other than the gospel itself. Medieval mystical practices are not prescribed in the Bible. Yet Voskamp favorably cites Catholic mystic, Henri Nouwen (Voskamp: 205). Mystical teachers and a pagan religious site inspire Voskamp’s journey to find romantic intimacy with God.

Purgation, Illumination, Union: Mystical Union with God

Amazingly, Voskamp unabashedly teaches the path to mystical union that has its roots in ancient, pagan, Rome. This path is taught in the Catholic Encyclopedia.^{ix} This threefold path is “common to all forms of mysticism, Christian or otherwise” writes Pastor Gary Gilley who rightly warns the church about it.^x Voskamp extols the medieval mystics who were instrumental in the building of Notre Dame (Voskamp: 208). She writes about them:

I think how lives, whole generations, were laid down to built this edifice, to find a way in. But they thought the steps to God-consummation were but three: purgation, illumination, union. (Voskamp: 208)

She then describes these steps in glowing terms as she experienced them (Voskamp: 209).

New Age teacher Matthew Fox also endorses these steps and others as the means of a paradigm shift from the Christ of the Bible to the cosmic Christ:

In terms of the history of spirituality, this paradigm shift is from the three stages of purification, illumination, and union that mysticism inherited from Proclus and Plotinus (*not* from Jesus or the Hebrew Bible since neither of these thinkers was either Jewish or Christian) to the four paths of delight (*via positive*), letting go (*via negative*), creativity (*via creativa*), compassion, i.e., celebration and justicemaking (*via transformative*). Today “to enter the mysteries” means to enter the mysteries of the four paths of creation spirituality—mysteries of delight, darkness, birthing, compassion. In this section we will explore more fully how the paradigm shift can also be named as moving from the quest for the historical Jesus to the quest for the Cosmic Christ.^{xi}

Mysticism and the practices Voskamp endorses that promote it, do lead to a Cosmic Christ, that is a creation centered one rather than the Christ who bodily ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. The mystical Christ is immanent only, not transcendent. He is contacted by unbiblical, mystical means rather than through the gospel that saves us from God’s wrath against sin.

Voskamp admits that union with Christ is true for all who have repented and believed (Voskamp: 209, 210). She thereby has an understanding that was lacking for the Catholic mystics she extols. So to keep the experience and practice, she posits the union of the threefold path as a higher order experience for Christians: “An ever deepening union, one we experience on the skin and in the vein, feel in the deep pit of the being, an ever-fuller realization of the Christ communion” (Voskamp: 210). So, ordinary Christians have union, but not the deep union that mystics enjoy. This union is what she has as a sister to Brother Lawrence (Voskamp: 210). She describes the experience of union:

I remember this feeling. The way my apron billowed in the running, the light, the air. The harvest moon. I remember. The yearning. To merge with Beauty Him Himself. But here . . . Now? Really? . . . I am not at all certain that I want consummation. (Voskamp: 211)

She then describes this consummation in yet more sensual terms, as being “courted by God” (Voskamp: 211).

Sensuality

Since this idea of consummation (union) is obviously a higher order experience she seeks and finds in Paris, it is therefore something beyond what ordinary Christians have. Voskamp is a mystical pietist.^{xii} She ponders: “I am not at all certain that I want consummation . . . And who wouldn’t cower at the invitation to communion with limitless Holiness Himself?” (Voskamp: 211). Obviously, for her “consummation” is a sensual term, that is not true for all Christians or reserved for the eschaton (and still true for all Christians). It is a higher order experience for certain Christians to be had now if they have the ability to see and experience. This experience is mediated, for Voskamp, by the romantic feelings of Paris.

The sensuality of her terminology is so very inappropriate. She cites 1Corinthians 6:17 which is a warning against fornication and is about all Christians being “joined to the Lord” and applies it to the sensual, higher order experience she is wooed to in Paris (Voskamp: 211). Since 1Corinthians 6:17 is about what is already true for all Christians, how does it apply to her invitation to some sort of sensual consummation for Christians? It does not. So she is abusing the passage to promote her pietistic, unbiblical experience. Here is her description of what happens (found in the same paragraph with the citation from 1Corinthians 6:17):

I run my hand along the beams over my loft bed, wood hewn by a hand several hundred years ago. I can hear Him. He’s calling for a response; He’s calling for oneness. *Communion* (Voskamp: 211).

This sensually described invitation to oneness and consummation is presented as a union that is a higher order experience, otherwise she would not need it and would frankly have nothing special to offer her readers. She is being “wooded” into “mystical union” (Voskamp: 212, 213). She calls this a romance (Voskamp: 213).

The sensual terms she applies are piled one upon another, painting a picture that is quite graphic and I think horribly inappropriate. Terms found just on two pages include: “wooing, intimate pursuit, passionate love, caressed, making love, embrace, union, intimate, burning of the heart, intercourse disrobed, and etc.” (Voskamp: 216, 217). She makes explicit what she is speaking of: “To know Him the way Adam knew Eve” (Voskamp: 217). This terminology goes on, page after page: “intercourse, climax, cohabit, delight wildly, union experientially, leap into Arms” (Voskamp: 218, 219).

She offers a higher order experience for Christians, described in most sensual and provocative terms. This experience is to be had now, and is not the eschatological consummation all Christians await. It helps to go to Paris and a Roman Catholic cathedral to find this experience. There is nothing in this that is Biblical. There are not two types of Christians—ordinary ones and others who have achieved the ultimate, mystical union. This sort of false thinking is what lead people into monasteries to waste their lives looking for something that evidently the gospel itself does not offer. Do we need to mimic the error of the monastic mystics?

Conclusion

As fraught with theological error that this book is, its basic premise is true: as Christians we ought to be thankful people who give thanks in all things. The Bible teaches us that. But do we need to jettison Christian theism in favor of panentheism and objective truth in favor of romantic feelings and higher order experiences to become thankful? No! God has already provided everything that pertains to life and godliness (2Peter 1:3). When Peter urged Christians to grow in their faith and in Christian virtues, he did not point to a higher order experience based on romantic feelings—he called them to remember:

Therefore, I shall always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, (2Peter 1:12, 13)

Peter also mentions sensuality and it is not good: “*For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,*” (2Peter 2:18).

There is enough sensuality in the world without us having sensual desires stirred up under the guise of a higher order religious experience in the context of a panentheistic worldview. Voskamp’s book feeds into the romantic sensibilities of its postmodern readers. But it does nothing to promote the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It pushes the church even further down the unbiblical road of mysticism that so many are already on. We need to reject this and instead return to objective, Biblical truth.

End Notes

ⁱ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 110. All further references from this book will be in brackets within this article.

ⁱⁱ Bob DeWaay, *The Emergent Church – Undefined Christianity*; (Minneapolis: DeWaay, 2009), 204.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.eckharttolle.com/> see my review of Tolle’s *The New Earth*:

<http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue114.htm>

^{iv} The ellipses are in the original and used to create a pause.

^v See <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue104b.htm> for a discussion of Bell’s misuse of the term “holy.”

^{vi} Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 83.

^{vii} Ibid. 70.

^{viii} I discuss Doug Pagitt’s idea of God’s “rhythm” here: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue99.htm>

^{ix} <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14254a.htm>

^x <http://www.svchapel.org/resources/book-reviews/4-christian-living/121-finding-our-way-again-the-return-to-the-ancient-practices-by-brian-mclaren>

^{xi} Op. Cit.; Fox, 82.

^{xii} See my article on pietism: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue101.htm>