

Revelation, Part 4: "Pergamum and Thyatira"
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Text: Revelation 2:12-29

In the 1960's, a movement emerged led by prominent spiritual gurus from India who promised young seekers that what they peddled was what these youth were looking for.

It was an era of rebellion in which young people rejected what they perceived as the hypocritical lifestyles of their parents who were one way in public but another way at home.

These youth wanted something that was real — something they could feel, something that they could rely on that would not change with the changing times.

While some youth joined the Jesus Movement, others flocked to exotic swamis with long hair, flowing robes and flower garlands. They read books like *The Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. They attended lectures about Transcendental Meditation and the Science of Creative Intelligence. These lectures promised supernatural experiences of deep peace, relaxation and stress relief, while expanding consciousness and accessing the realm of the source of creative intelligence.

There was just one catch: You had to be *initiated* into the practice of the technique of transcendental meditation — "T.M." for short. The initiation involved bringing a dozen flowers and several pieces of fresh fruit to a trained T.M. teacher, who would conduct a "puja," a ceremony in which these items would be offered as a sacrifice to Guru Dev, the deceased teacher and mentor of the movement's leader, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The T.M. teacher tells the new initiates that T.M. is not a religion. However, they call the ceremony a "puja," and when I looked up the definition of puja, it was defined as "the act of worship."

A picture of Guru Dev was prominently placed on a make-shift altar flanked by the flowers, and the fruit was offered and placed in front of the picture in a ceremonial gesture of gratitude for the giving of the mantra that the new inductee would now use to achieve higher states of consciousness and deep relaxation. After the puja, the T.M. teacher gives one of the pieces of fruit

that have been offered to the picture of Guru Dev to the new initiate to eat. This is, in fact, prompting the unsuspecting person to eat food offered to idols, which Jesus clearly condemns in Revelation, Chapter 2.

This ceremony is passed off as a normal way to show gratitude and a harmless ceremony from Indian culture. But in reality, it was deception.

Non-Christians and Christians who do not read the Bible might have been convinced that this ceremony was harmless, but anyone who was familiar with the Scriptures of the Christian Bible would recognize that this was a practice in which sacrifices were being made to demonic forces through the medium of the photo of a deceased man who practiced and taught occult practices.

Jesus referred to such practices in our text for today as learning "the deep things of Satan." (Rev. 2:24) Both the church in Pergamum and the church in Thyatira had some people within their ranks who ate food that had been sacrificed to idols and committed ritual fornication. Jesus called them to repent, and he charged those who were a part of these churches as guilty of tolerating their behavior.

Jesus warned that if the violators in Pergamum did not repent, he would make war against them with the "sword of his mouth," which is to say that they will be judged and punished by the word of God, which convicts them of their sin. Jesus also promises that those who would overcome the temptations would be well rewarded: a white stone with a new name for the faithful ones of the church in Pergamum, and the authority to rule over the nations would be given to the steadfast faithful of the church of Thyatira, who endured to the end. They would also receive the morning star.

Again, Jesus invites everyone to listen to these pronouncements and to take heed to them, not just the members of those named churches.

In the case of the church at Thyatira, Jesus commended all of their good works of love, faith, service, and patient endurance. He even stated that their last works were greater than their first, which gives them credit for having achieved more than the church at Ephesus, which he charged with the failure to continue to do the first works that reflected the loving compassion of their ardent faith at the beginning of their faith journey. The church in Ephesus had abandoned their first love, but the church in Thyatira continued in love, faith, service, and patient endurance. Even having done all of that, the fact that they tolerated sin in some of their members caused

Jesus to warn them that they needed to repent, or else they would be punished.

In post-modern times, one would think that eating food offered to idols would not be a common occurrence in our country. But, occult practices in general and transcendental meditation, in particular, have spread across our nation like weeds, and have become tools used even in elementary schools, as well as colleges, commercial businesses and organizations. They can even be found in some churches that offer classes in meditation and yoga, "baptizing" these Eastern occult practices that open up the chakras of the body for hidden occult activity of which innocent people are unaware.

Jesus warns us against such practices, and clearly tells us in Revelation that he hates such practices and punishes those who do them, as well as those who tolerate them to be done in their churches.

The "take-away" from all of this is that we must be clear about what is and is not acceptable in the Church of which Jesus Christ is the Head. We cannot afford to be ignorant of the origin and meaning of the practices in which we participate.

Many of our traditional celebrations are full of symbols that originated in pagan practices, including the Christmas tree and the Easter egg. There has been so much incorporation of pagan symbols and even pagan rituals into the practice of Christianity down through the centuries that the general public in our culture does not realize how far away we have moved from authentic Christian worship.

Christ would free us from all of the added confusion of pagan symbolism. He calls us to the simplicity of a Christ-centered life of truly loving God and neighbor. It is a radical idea, but its worth the try. Amen.