

Sinister Spirit

Tracing the Spirit of Antichrist Through Current Events

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Appendix B.1

Montanism

Mysticism has plagued the church from its inception. Because of this, it is not surprising to find large Christian denominations today which have succumbed to the mystical. “Mysticism,” as defined by Merriam-Webster.com, is “The belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight).”¹ The methods used to receive these subjective experiences cannot be found in Scripture, and sometimes they contradict the clear teachings of the Bible. Instead of trusting in the sufficiency of Scripture, these denominations have sought new revelation from God. Instead of depending upon the rules of proper Bible interpretation, they have chosen to depend upon their feelings to determine the meaning of Scripture. Instead of building upon the foundation established by Jesus Christ and His apostles, they have fancied themselves to be extensions of the apostles. As such, they have lain a new foundation for the church.

The first of these secondary apostles was a man by the name of Montanus. The dates for the founding of Montanus’ ministry vary. The reason for this discrepancy is that all writings of Montanus and his followers were eventually destroyed by the early church. As we will soon see, the church considered the teachings of Montanus to be heresy and actively fought against them. Consequently, we are today left with precious few records. Nevertheless, it is generally believed that Montanus began his ministry around 156 A.D.

It is important to realize that the Bible had only been completed sometime between 54 and 96 A.D. The apostle John most likely wrote the book of Revelation between 81 and 96 A.D.²—only 75 years or less before the ministry of Montanus. During his ministry, there were probably still some alive who had lived during the lifetime of the apostles. Realizing that this is not a time far removed from the ministry of Christ

¹ “Mysticism,” Merriam-Webster.com.

² The historians Irenaeus, Clement, and Eusebius all write that the Roman emperor Domitian exiled the Apostle John to the island of Patmos, and that after Domitian died, John was allowed to return home. Domitian ruled from 81 to 96 A.D.

and His apostles, we can be confident that their teachings were still fresh in the hearts and minds of the early church. With this in mind, let us consider what the historian Eusebius reports about Montanus:

A recent convert, Montanus by name, through his unquenchable desire for leadership, gave the adversary opportunity against him. And he became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the Church handed down by tradition from the beginning. Some of those who heard his spurious utterances at that time were indignant, and they rebuked him as one that was possessed, and that was under the control of a demon, and was led by a deceitful spirit, and was distracting the multitude; and they forbade him to talk, remembering the distinction drawn by the Lord and his warning to guard watchfully against the coming of false prophets? But others imagining themselves possessed of the Holy Spirit and of a prophetic gift, were elated and not a little puffed up; and forgetting the distinction of the Lord, they challenged the mad and insidious and seducing spirit, and were cheated and deceived by him. In consequence of this, he could no longer be held in check, so as to keep silence.

9 Thus by artifice, or rather by such a system of wicked craft, the devil, devising destruction for the disobedient, and being unworthily honored by them, secretly excited and inflamed their understandings which had already become estranged from the true faith. And he stirred up besides two women, and filled them with the false spirit, so that they talked wildly and unreasonably and strangely, like the person already mentioned. And the spirit pronounced them blessed as they rejoiced and gloried in him, and puffed them up by the magnitude of his promises. But sometimes he rebuked them openly in a wise and faithful manner, that he might seem to be a reprover. But those of the Phrygians that were deceived were few in number. And the arrogant spirit taught them to revile the entire universal Church under heaven, because the spirit of false prophecy received neither honor from it nor entrance into it.

10 For the faithful in Asia met often in many places throughout Asia to consider this matter, and examined the novel utterances and pronounced them profane, and rejected the heresy, and thus these persons were expelled from the Church and debarred from communion.³

Eusebius is a well-respected historian. In his account of Montanus, Eusebius is careful to note why the church opposed his practices. As mentioned above, those living during the time of Montanus were not far removed from Christ and His apostles. Their teachings were still fresh in the minds of the people. Consequently, Eusebius records that when Montanus began to claim new revelation from God, they were quick to remember the warning of Christ to guard themselves against the coming false prophets. Further, they recognized that

³ Eusebius, *Ante Nicene Fathers*, "Chapter XVI The Circumstances Related of Montanus and His False Prophets," Source: Early Christian Writings, "Anonymous."

the prophecies of Montanus were not in accord with God's historical tradition of delivering prophecies to His people. They realized that whatever Montanus was doing, it was not coming from God.

Eusebius describes Montanus' prophecies as "ravings" and "babblings" from a man who was in a "sort of frenzy." Montanus was displaying a lack of self-control which was another obvious sign that Montanus' prophecies were not coming from inspiration by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:31–32, and 40 says, *"For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ... But all things should be done decently and in order."* Clearly, Montanus was not in control of his own spirit but rather "became beside himself." His conduct was not one of order but rather a "frenzy." Scripture is clear that inspiration from the Holy Spirit does not overpower a person's ability to control himself, and He will always produce an orderly and decent word from the Lord. This was not true of Montanus. Instead, the historian Neander records that, "He fell into certain states of ecstatic transport, in which, no longer master of his own consciousness, but made the blind organ, as he fancied, of a higher spirit, he predicted, in oracular, mystical expressions, fresh persecutions of the Christians ..."⁴

Following the exhortation of Scripture in Titus 1:10–11, and 13, the church rebuked Montanus and refused to allow him to prophesy and teach, *"For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ... This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,"* Nevertheless, Montanus won over a following and began a cult that is known today as Montanism.

Among those in his following, were two women named Maximilla and Priscilla. These two became the chief advocates of this new cult and assumed the roles of prophetesses. Once again, Montanism is shown to have had an aversion to sound Biblical teaching because 1 Timothy 2:12 says, *"I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."* Clearly, Scripture prohibits using two women to instruct and lead the church. Consequently, we can be certain that the prophecies of Maximilla and Priscilla were not from the Lord because God never contradicts His Scriptures. If God commanded that women were not to teach or to exercise authority over men in the church, then God will not use women to teach the church His new revelation. Neither will God choose to use two women to lead His church.

The testimonies of Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla give further evidence that God was not the author of their confusion. Montanus once said, "I am come neither as an angel, nor as an ambassador, but as God the Father."⁵ He also declared, "I am the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit."⁶ Consequently, some believe that Montanus thought himself to be God. More likely, this was Montanus' way of expressing that his words

⁴ Neander, *General history*, 206.

⁵ Eppiphaneus, *Heresies*, *xlvi. 11*, Source: Evidence for Christianity, "Church History," 5.

⁶ Didymus, *On the Trinity*, *III.41*, Source: Evidence for Christianity, "Church History," 5.

were the very words of God. Montanus believed that he had direct and special communication with God. He also believed that he would have a prominent role in the imminent appearing of the kingdom of heaven. He was certain that God had told him that the kingdom of heaven would be established on earth within his lifetime. Needless to say, this prophecy remains unfulfilled. Therefore, Montanus was a false prophet.

Similarly, Maximilla and Priscilla claimed to have direct and special communication with the Holy Spirit. Like Montanus, there is controversy over whether Maximilla believed herself to be Jesus Christ because she once said, “Hear not me, but hear Christ.”⁷ Most likely, she too was purporting to have the authority to attribute God as the author of the words that she was declaring. Nevertheless, the words of prophecy she shared did not come to pass. Therefore, Maximilla was herself a false prophetess.

Priscilla once delivered a prophecy in which the New Jerusalem would descend from heaven and be established in Pepuza. Pepuza is located in modern-day Turkey and was the hometown of Montanus. Priscilla received this prophecy in a night vision in which she claimed that Jesus slept beside her in the form of a woman clad in a bright cloth. Setting aside the affront to Christ inherent in this account, this prophecy, like so many others, was never fulfilled. Therefore, Priscilla was also a false prophetess.

False prophecies are yet another indicator that whatever was occurring within Montanism was not from God. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 says:

“But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” And if you say in your heart, “How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

Given these verses, we are compelled to conclude that Montanus, Maximilla, and Priscilla spoke presumptuously. They did not receive their prophecies from God.

The primary teaching of Montanism was that they were experiencing the fulfillment of John 14:26.⁸ The Holy Spirit had come to purify the church in anticipation of the imminent return of Christ to establish His kingdom in Pepuza, Turkey. To facilitate this, it was believed that the Holy Spirit gave special revelation which was delivered through prophets who spoke in ecstatic and trance-like states. Everyone was encouraged to fast and pray in order that they too might be blessed by becoming a vessel for God’s modern revelation. They believed that they were the extension and final recipients of the apostolic gifts. Consequently, the words

⁷ Eppiphaneus, *Heresies*, *xlvi. 11*, Source: Evidence for Christianity, “Church History,” 5.

⁸ John 14:26: But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

of prophesy that they received were to supplant the words of the apostles and even of Jesus Christ Himself.⁹ However, God does not change His Word or contradict Himself. God's revelation is sufficient for all generations. Isaiah 46:9–10 says, “[R]emember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’”

Montanus also believed that he had the gift of speaking in tongues. However, this gift seems to have been limited to Montanus. It was not bestowed upon any of his followers.

Montanism was clearly unbiblical. It defied several clear exhortations of Scripture, and it depended upon prophets whose prophecies were never fulfilled. Consequently, many of the church leaders from the surrounding area met together in the Council at Constantinople. There they declared Montanism to be a heresy and its practices to be equivalent to paganism.¹⁰ Montanism eventually dissipated, and history proved the ruling of this council to be accurate.

Nevertheless, more than 1,500 years later, Montanism again reared its head. The core practices of Montanism—the continuation of apostolic gifts, the continuation of divine revelation, emotionalism, and a lack of self-control—re-emerged in a series of religious movements which C. Peter Wagner has termed “the three waves of the Holy Spirit,” which are Pentecostalism, the Charismatic Movement, and the Signs and Wonders Movement.¹¹ Although not all within these denominations condone Montanism, many today consider them to be Neo-Montanism. There are even some within the Charismatic Movement who proudly acknowledge Montanus as integral to their lineage. Thus, Montanus, a heretic who was rejected by the church for practices which were deemed to be equivalent to paganism, can be considered the original founding father of Charismatic mysticism.

Today, this Charismatic mysticism is highly popular around the world. However, Christians must be careful. The early church rejected mysticism when it universally rejected Montanism, and their reasons were clear and Biblically based. Why is it, then that today's church is so confused and divided over this same issue? God does not change. What was unbiblical 2,000 years ago remains unbiblical today. In their pursuit of

⁹ The early church father Hippolytus wrote about the Montanists:

They have been deceived by two females, Priscilla and Maximilla by name, whom they hold to be prophetesses, asserting that into them the Paraclete spirit entered. . . . They magnify these females above the Apostles and every gift of Grace, so that some of them go so far as to say that to them there is something more than Christ. . . . They introduce novelties in the form of fasts and feasts, abstinences and diets of radishes, giving these females as their authority.

(Hippolytus quoted in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 77 (London: Oxford, 1963), Source: MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 86.)

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 88.

¹¹ Charles Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Vida Publishers, 1986), Source: Apologetics Index, “Third Wave.”

spiritual passion and relevancy, Christians must not allow their emotions to supplant the sufficiency of Scripture. Instead, today's church would do well to once again reject mysticism.