

What is the difference?

What is the difference between the psychic and the spiritual? It is a question which, probably, most of us have often been asked. First we must understand how we intend the word 'spiritual.' The spiritual may be used in contrast to the physical, but I shall not be using it in that way. Used in that sense the question of moral worth would be irrelevant. The Archangel Gabriel and the devil (both being pure spirits) would be equally spiritual. I shall be using the word here in the ordinary New Testament sense.

Thus St Paul writes (Romans 8.6), 'to be spiritually minded is life and peace.' It is that sense that I use the word spiritual. There is no contrast here with the physical, for Paul is clearly speaking to those in physical bodies. The spiritual person is the one who lives in the power of the Holy Spirit and who bears in his or her life the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness, forbearance, meekness, self-control.

Psychic

The word 'psychic' has reference to paranormal phenomena: telepathy, psychometry, clairvoyance, tongues, healing, prophecy, etc.

People with psychic gifts may be deeply spiritual but this by no means follows. They may equally be rogues; or perhaps controlled by demonic forces. It depends on whether psychic powers are used selfishly for personal ends or benevolently for the glory of God. Much psychic activity is morally neutral; the bending of spoons, for example: the psychic power works independently of whether the agent is a rascal or a saint.

Gospel passages

Two Gospel passages are worthy of attention. In Matthew 7.21-23, we read how Jesus said: 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of Heaven When the day comes, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Out of my sight; your deeds are evil!"' Jesus makes it clear that the capacity to work miracles is in itself no guarantee of goodness.

The second passage is Luke 10.17-20, which reads: 'The seventy-two came back jubilant. "In your name, Lord," they said, "even the demons submit to us." Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall, like lightning, from heaven Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but that your names are enrolled in heaven.'"

Jesus bids his disciples to rejoice, not on account of remarkable powers, but because their names are written in heaven.

The devil is an example of a being of immense psychic power whose spiritual rating is zero. Jesus is an example of a person of the deepest spirituality possessing great psychic power. This power is made evident in such instances as seeing Nathaniel meditating under the fig tree; discerning the past life of the woman at the well; knowing from a distance that Lazarus had died; healing; exorcism etc. But in him the psychic was totally subsumed in the spiritual. It was never used for personal ends, but that God might be glorified.

We are all psychic

Everyone is psychic to a certain degree; indeed every emotion, whether positive or negative, has a psychic charge. Communication in ordinary speech is in part a psychic phenomenon. But relatively few are psychic in the specialist meaning of the word as used here. Such are generally known as sensitives. Psychic powers may be developed but this is a dangerous thing to set out to do. However, it usually happens that as a person grows spiritually, psychic powers do develop naturally without attention being paid to

them, and this is safe and, further, beneficial because it is the spiritual by which the life is ruled. Even so, the degree of the psychic in a spiritually minded person depends very largely on that person's psycho-physical make up and not necessarily on the depth of his or her spirituality. Thus in the realm of the psychic a rogue could be a giant and a saint a dwarf. Whereas, in the realm of the spiritual, gianthood would belong to the saint and dwarfdom to the rogue.

Development

It must always be desirable that those with psychical gifts should develop their spirituality, since it is upon the spiritual that salvation depends. Whether it is desirable for psychic gifts to be developed alongside the spiritual is best left to the Holy Spirit in the ruling of one's life.

The following from Dr Martin Israel makes a valuable summary:

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are essentially psychic in nature (and in no way to be belittled on that account), but the harvest of the Holy Spirit is genuinely spiritual, by which I mean leading one to an encounter with God. Psychical gifts are excellent provided they are spiritually, and not egoistically, directed.

Why be suspicious?

It is unfortunate that many Christians are suspicious of the psychic. The word itself is morally neutral signifying neither good nor bad. It is the character of the one who uses psychic gifts, determining the end to which they are put, which makes them a force for good or evil.

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The Churches' Fellowship

for Psychological and Spiritual Studies



Occasional Leaflet 5

The Spiritual and the Psychic

by the Revd Robert Llewelyn

(The Revd Robert Llewelyn, formerly Chaplain at the Julian Shrine in Norwich, was a Vice-President of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological and Spiritual Studies)

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