

A Sermon on Prophetic Harm

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for July 23rd, 2023 (and beyond)

Last month I read "The Christian Agnostic" by theologian Leslie D. Weatherhead. I recommend it. Though we never met, I do believe I understand Weatherhead well. He died in 1976 when I was a three-year-old child on another continent. One area not covered extensively in his book is the area of prophecy and his brief references are somewhat contradictory which I believe is intentional in light of the overall subject per the title. It will be up to you to decide how much Weatherhead's book inspired today's sermon. David Dunaway (a friend of COPE Ministries) recommended Weatherhead's book to me. This is in part a meditative sermon.

MEDITATIVE QUESTIONS

What's the harm in telling people that when they die everything old is new again and even better than remembered even when romanticizing one's own memories?

[Sample Response: It makes death sound very appealing especially where or when one's life is particularly unsatisfactory at any given time.]

What's the harm in telling people paradise will be restored and there will be everlasting life, love, and peace when Jesus returns which will only happen if the world ends first in some kind of pandemic followed by famine resulting in war and ultimately death?

[Sample Response: People who actually believe that will seek to bring it about in some way. One reason is they take the bible out of context and do not know that John the Baptist is believed to be the second coming of Elijah. Weatherhead takes Jesus' resurrection as a ghostly apparition showing his soul survived the death of his body which is why only some saw him after he died and finds reincarnation more reasonable than an arguable zombie apocalypse where dead humans, from over 100,000 years and up to a million ago depending on who you ask, just all rise up intact from their graves to enjoy paradise restored in whatever bodies they were buried in at the time along with Jesus' revived remains. At some point the villain never dies franchises like "Halloween" and "Friday the 13th" feel like they are mocking that bastardized belief as well they arguably should.]

Oh, did I forget to mention that paradise is just too awesome for words and everything you could ever dream or imagine to be pleasant and comfortable? (That only happens if you die and/or everyone dies.)

[Sample Response: It sounds like a typical western Christmas with feasts and gifts every individual is happy to receive and enjoy while surrounded by those with whom each feels most comfortable. But, for those that conflate paradise (on earth) to heaven (ethereal realm per Weatherhead et al), paradise sounds like heaven or how many envision it. But, if we all reincarnate then we all return to paradise if paradise is on earth and some earthly experiences are quite heavenly while others are more hellish than even Dante imagined.

So, is Jesus returning alive and well where we get to be by his side where all are corporeal/materialized on earth or do we join Jesus in an ethereal realm without seeking his return to this one? Consider the internal questions ones on which to meditate too. Is it Jesus' choice when and where to reincarnate, if at all? Would he be annoyed by those trying to force the issue? Would that make them the real anti-Christ? I believe at least false prophets which, Jesus warned about and then was shuffled aside and arguably repackaged, if not rebranded.]

Where's the harm in that? (Oh, and Jesus is so cool because he's your ticket in no matter what which is why it is so important that we prepare him room.)

[Sample Response: The issue is that if you don't like God's creation as it is, that suggests God isn't perfect nor a perfect creator or that God intended everything to be as it is now and you are the problem because you aren't satisfied with God. Where God is an abstract archetype of absolute truth and all the virtues for an easy reference to the best of qualities humans have identified as good, beneficial, or lending to universal expansion of comfort and joy, God is a simple shorthand reference for reinforcing commitment to truth and virtue or encouraging the same. Where God is the provider or to be seen as the provider to everyone, communism is the natural development of that because we are all God's children and even though he reportedly favored Abel to Cain, a perfect father (heavenly or not), would not tempt to jealousy a son so desperate for his approval and would recognize the value of Cain's labor/tribute. The inequality built into the Cain and Abel story is eradicated by Jesus' opposition to hypocrisy and commitment to self-examination to avoid said hypocrisy. We're either equal in the eyes of God or we're not and if not, that's no way to win everyone over if looking to convert/"save" everyone. This is why so many affluent people claim they are blessed and feel it isn't vanity to say so, just evidence that they are chosen and therefore better than those who are not yet saved/equally blessed.]

What's wrong with that? (The more miserable everyone is the closer to God they become because death is the way.)

[Sample Response: It explains how suicide cults using holy scripture can convince people they're right. Some Christians say suicide is already forgiven or that only God can judge it: <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA143/can-one-who-commits-suicide-be-saved> And, the Catholic Church now says: "We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives (2283). Individuals who commit suicide are usually suffering from some kind of psychological or emotional condition that overwhelms them and impairs their ability to fully understand and freely choose their actions, and therefore they would not necessarily be culpable for their action." Source: <https://www.catholic.com/qa/what-happens-to-people-who-commit-suicide> But, the hard and fast rule is that suicide is a mortal sin. "According to the theology of the Catholic Church, death by suicide is a grave matter. The Church holds that one's life is the property of God, and to destroy that life is to wrongly assert dominion over God's creation, or to attack God remotely."

Source: Barry, Robert (2017). Breaking the Thread of Life: On Rational Suicide. Routledge. pp. 20–22, 190. ISBN 9781351530798. via https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_views_on_suicide#cite_note-Barry2017-9]

Is everything pre-determined so that prophecy can be reasonably believed or do we have free will?

[Sample Response: I'd hate God if I thought rape, murder, genocide, and slavery were all part of God's plan. So, in order for me to love God or even entertain God's existential potential, I must believe in free will and self-determination. And, I must believe that God loves freedom which is why it is a virtue where lack of recognizing the equal rights of every individual to freedom results in loss of your own to the extent you failed to so recognize.]

Is this really how you interpret scripture?

[Sample Response: It's how I explore and discuss it with consideration of various interpretations and how they've played out over time. And, to the readers that didn't write this one, it's a #StrawMan argument depending on perspective or a genuine question as to your own understanding of scripture. The "really" makes it a #StrawMan argument as it suggests that is how you so interpret, otherwise not a #StrawMan and simply a final meditative question.]

If you walked down the sidewalk and saw "You are going to die" spray painted every few feet, then were told by a few passersby that you were going to die today, would you believe the message was for you? If you dwelled on it and were distracted by it, which resulted in your being seriously injured, would you believe it was prophetic but not exact since you survived? Would you see it as a coincidence if something bad occurred like a serious injury? If a close loved one died today, would you believe the message must have been an omen about their death? If nothing bad happened and you woke up tomorrow as usual, would you just assume the graffiti was childish and the passersby were prone to reading out loud? Under the circumstances, would you feel you should commit suicide to make the prophecy come true or would you do so if you had total faith in the ominous arguable prognostication?

[Sample Response: If I believed everything was pre-determined and that the messages were omens or signs pointing to my death that God intended for me personally and individually because it was part of God's plan, I would not commit suicide unless that was God's plan which I don't find evident by the graffiti and could have misheard the passersby believing they said "today" when they were just reading the graffiti. Either way, I wouldn't find that to be reason to do it myself. As I stated, I believe in free will and that freedom is a virtue. Some translate "Tao" to mean "way" and others translate "Tao" to mean "Truth". Truth is the way and evidence matters which is why God provides plenty of it.]

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.