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Now Concerning Spiritual Things: Authentic Spirituality in Pluralistic Contexts

by Fitzroy John Willis

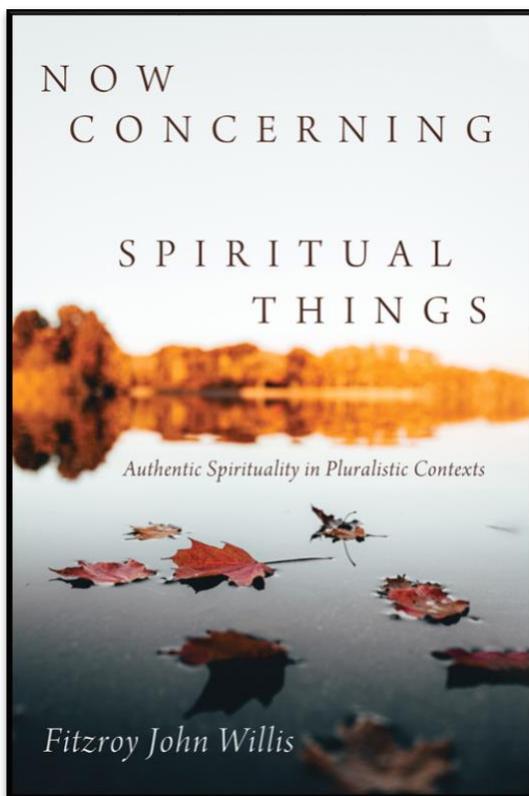
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New Title from Fitzroy John Willis

Now Concerning Spiritual Things: Authentic Spirituality in Pluralistic Contexts



In a pluralistic world of competing truth claims, how can one discern what is truly representative of God? How can we live and communicate what is authentically “spiritual?” How do we bridge the religious impasse between believers and a post-Christendom and pluralistic context where individuals may consider themselves to be spiritual, yet are offended by the person of Jesus? Can relativism be an effective means of evaluating truth from falsehood? What role should race, gender, and socioeconomic background play in society and the church?

These are just a few of the questions this book addresses in presenting a more balanced, dialogical, and biblical criterion for authentic spirituality. The insights on how to discern, live, and communicate what is authentically spiritual are significant for interreligious and ecumenical dialogue across denominations. These insights contribute a way to more effectively communicate divine truths to all, for it is conversant with various sources of knowledge about God and is accountable to feedback from these sources of truth. For example, tacit knowledge such as that derived from faith, and spiritual gifts, as well as rational, or philosophical claims to truth, along with Western, Eastern, and Southern modes of thinking, are all incorporated.

Fitzroy John Willis has been an adjunct professor of worldviews, theology, Bible, and biblical interpretation at Ohio Christian University. He teaches physical science, and has taught Bible at Landmark Christian School. He has a PhD in Christian theology from Regent University, where he also earned an MA in biblical interpretation. Additionally, he has earned an MS and a BS in biochemistry from SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn and SUNY Stony Brook respectively.



Interview with Fitzroy John Willis

Why did I write this book?

I have always been fascinated by the notion of a revelation of God. That is, the idea that an omnipotent, loving, ineffable God makes himself known. In light of who God is, I want to be able to discern, live, and communicate his truth for his glory.

Who is my intended audience?

This book is intended for a general audience. It is especially suitable for scholars, pastors, professionals, and college, upper level high school students, and all who are interested in spiritual things.

What do I hope people will take away?

God has revealed himself, and continually reveals himself to, and through, those influenced by his Spirit. Those impacted by the Spirit can discern the authenticity of divine revelatory claims. Further, God has revealed how, and has provided the ability for us to live and communicate in a manner that truly represents his will.

Communication that is authentically spiritual should be done in a contextual manner that is edifying and comprehensible to all. Such exchange of ideas does not put obstacles in the way of the Gospel of Christ, but “become all things to all people, that I (one) might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). In that way, believers and unbelievers alike can discern, understand and benefit from the revelation of God. This infers at least two understanding.

In the first place, like Jesus, the one who is authentically spiritual should be communicating, not only through their spoken words, but also through their actions. For, Jesus’ words and actions are one and the same (John 1:1). They are always consistent with each other and convey the reality of who God is. For Christians to attain this ideal, they should willingly glean from, dialogue with, and be accountable to feedback from all who are impacted by the Spirit, regardless of their life circumstances.

Another inference one can make regarding contextual communication is that it is considerate of existential and ontological realities which reveal the things of God. Rather than simply expressing only what appears to be either rational or supernatural, contextual communication expresses the phenomenological truth of Christ regardless of its source and how it is obtained.

This means, for example, that authentic revelatory claims are considerate of traditions—even as Jesus and Paul continuously appealed to the established authority of their Hebrew tradition. The truly spiritual person, unlike much of the contemporary postmodern context, then, continuously communicates considering accepted traditional understandings such as that of the Bible and confessional creeds. They, therefore, take advantage of a check against anthropocentric understandings that are contrary to the revelation of God. Being considerate of traditions also serves to affirm the value of relationships which transfer wisdom from generation to generation as classical truths are gleaned and applied to one’s context as the Spirit directs.

From this biblical, contextual, and traditional perspective, it can be surmised that to live and communicate what is authentically spiritual, one needs to have had a revelation of Jesus Christ. This could have happened either directly or indirectly through scripture, or some other means which the Lord sovereignly employs in communicating with his people and will be evident by some spiritual manifestation. Having received a revelation of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, then, empowers an individual to live and communicate what is authentically spiritual. This includes the ability to exercise Christ-like love and be edifying in all things.

Believers are more likely to be discerning of such authentic revelation because of their indwelling Holy Spirit who confers to them the ability to employ both rational and supernatural means of discernment. Unbelievers, on the other hand, though they are also able to discern the things of God, do so based only on rational criteria.

The church is therefore to be considered the sphere in which authentically spiritual living takes place. And the worship service is a means toward this end, because its purpose is to usher in the presence of God, for dialogue to take place, to the intent of transforming individuals into the image of Christ through the Spirit. Since all gifts of the Spirit evidence divine presence, in the worship service, their exercise should therefore be encouraged in all who would lovingly and orderly function in them.

From this perspective, all who have received a revelation of Jesus Christ have the responsibility of patterning their every action after the example of their Lord. They are to lovingly exercise their spiritual gifts so that all may be edified and grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the measure of authentic spirituality—for any context!

Praise for *Now Concerning Spiritual Things: Authentic Spirituality in Pluralistic Contexts*

“I certainly appreciate Fitzroy’s emphasis on the full-orbed nature of the person and work of the Holy Spirit—that the Spirit (christologically oriented) affects both Christian character and what happens in a corporate worship service. I certainly would affirm his work in the biblical texts, particularly 1 Cor 12–14. He accentuates the role of the Holy Spirit in both personal character and contribution to the community in worship in a fully inclusive manner that abrogates the various ‘isms’ in our day. A wonderful contribution.”

—**J. Lyle Story, Professor, Regent University School of Divinity**

