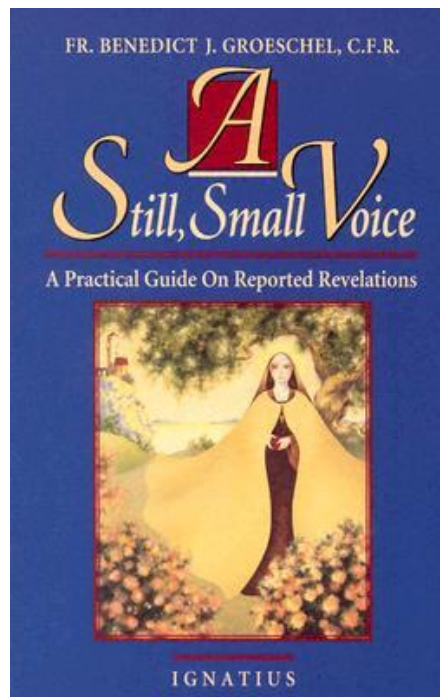




A Still Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations

Benedict J. Groeschel

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Father Groeschel, the highly respected author, psychologist, spiritual director and leader of renewal in the religious life, has written a brief but comprehensive practical guide for all those interested in private revelations, the reports of visions and other extraordinary religious phenomena that are so widespread in these times. Because of the intense interest in extraordinary religious experience that ranges from Medjugorje to the New Age, Groeschel's book is an urgently needed resource that gives practical norms to everyone on how to evaluate these claims. Drawing on spiritual classics and Church documents not readily available, he summarizes the Church's perennial wisdom on this topic.

He also offers an alternative to unusual and extraordinary ways of knowing the things of God, which is a normal everyday opportunity open to all called "religious experience"—the action of grace operating in the context of a human life that can become a powerful source of virtue and holiness. Father Groeschel skillfully directs the reader to the humbler and safer path which discerns God's presence in prayer, Scripture, the sacraments and love of neighbor. The great example of this path to holiness is St. Thérèse de Lisieux who, though having very few extraordinary experiences, was filled with a profound awareness of God's presence and said, "To ecstasy, I prefer the monotony of sacrifice."

A Still Small Voice: A Practical Guide on Reported Revelations Details

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Martin Moleski says

I turned to this little book to help me evaluate Heaven is for Real, both the book and the movie.

His second of four rules to aid discernment was an eye-opener: "No private revelation comes directly from God and therefore none can be assumed to be inerrantly true." Groeschel shows through many examples that saints whom we honor as imitators of Christ are not necessarily infallible, despite their mystical graces and holiness of life.

St. Catherine Labouré, who gave the world the miraculous medal, actually predicted the bloody disturbances of the French Commune forty years before they occurred and with the precise date. However, she made several other predictions that were wrong. When confronted with these errors, she simply apologized for getting the facts of the revelation wrong. She obviously did not know what to say, since she had thought she had got the message right. This admission of simply "getting it wrong" on the part of this simple visionary is something one should never forget. (34)

I believe Colton's recovery was a miracle; I believe God spoke to him personally in images and language perfectly accommodated to the understanding of a four-year-old boy; I believe we have a lot to learn about how to express our anger at God without fear; but I don't agree with his father's presentation of the contents of his son's vision or dream as "the truth" (153), without any further qualification. Groeschel advises that "the possibility of distortion, error, or even innocent self-deception needs to be grasped in its entirety" (109). His cautionary tales of the Church's 2000-year experiences with visionaries help to make this understanding possible.

Alicia says

This book is a must-read for anyone who believes in divine revelations, doesn't believe in divine revelations, and anyone in between. Father Groeschel writes in an easy to understand format all about reported revelations and how the average person can discern whether to believe or not. This practical book keeps readers from giving revelations more credit than they deserve. I know I will refer back to this book many times in the future!

Jackie Dean says

Excellent overview!

I enjoyed this bok very much. It has helped me to be much more cautious in my journaling with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Jamie Howison says

I got interested in this matter of "reported revelations" after reading Randall Sullivan's book "The Miracle Detective," in which a largely secular Rolling Stone reporter finds himself quite swept up in the Marian appearances at Medjugorje. Sullivan points to this book by Groeschel as being a sane and solid approach to the question, and I'd have to agree. Measured, thoughtful, theologically informed in the great Catholic tradition, Groeschel is thoughtfully open-minded, yet generally very careful in his approach. His key insight is that "religious experiences" are neither flashy nor rare; they are the stuff that many of us experience in small yet transforming ways, in the day-to-day of life. As for things like Medjugorje? He remains deliberately agnostic, without being dismissive.

There is a bit of a preoccupation with "A Course in Miracles," which was very popular at the time this book was published. This occasionally side-tracks the larger picture Groeschel seeks to paint, particularly when it comes to the entirely unnecessary Addendum. I suppose at the time it seemed very much a necessary addition, but now it actually makes the whole book feel a bit dated and reactionary, which in fact it isn't.

A bit of a specialist read, but enjoyable all the same.

Lisa says

I love Benedict Groeschel, but this book was pretty much him telling us to read other books if we're interested in private revelation.

One of my favorite moments was when he talked about a very good book that had come out recently called Fire Within

This book helps us keep the perspective that the deposit of faith is complete, religious experiences help us live our faith daily, and revelation is not necessary, but can be a special grace.

Connie Anderson says

I read "A Still, Small Voice," when it was first published over 20 years ago. Several months after the book's publication, some good friends invited me to attend a small conference about private revelation, featuring Fr. Groeschel as the only speaker. The conference, which took place at what used to be Dominican College in New Orleans, was sponsored by the Pauline Family.

Most of the attendees were active in local groups, which promoted phenomena highly popular in the area. Nevertheless, Fr. G was fearless. His warnings about "publicizing" secrets, marketing conferences/media/literature, etc. were highly prophetic.

His calm patience, when listening to an angry mom and her daughter who had attended the talks, was evident the next day. They both chewed him out, while the rest of us watched uncomfortably in line as we waited to talk with him. Ultimately, it was Fr. G's personal witness of kindness to this lady and her daughter, which made a lasting impression on me about his book!

My two children were of a highly impressionable age at the time, and I sincerely wanted to hand on the Faith to them - with all its beauty and fullness. F. G's book really helped. Most recently, it has helped prepare the way for me to more fully appreciate Pope Francis' comments on private revelation in a recent talk and, especially, in "Evangelii Gaudium."

For anyone who wants a thoughtful and well-written guide to a basic understanding on what our Church teaches about private revelation - and why, I highly recommend this book! It may come in very handy again quite soon!

Miriam says

This is my notes/outline from when I read this years back, rather than a review per se.

“paramystical phenomena”

I Clergy are rarely the ones who report or want to talk about revelations because they don't want to appear credulous or superstitious. It's better to err on the side of skepticism because the worst that can happen is that one “may have to make some apologies to the Virgin Mary—but then we have it on the best authority that she is very benevolent and understanding.”

Some denominations owe their existence to individuals claiming private revelation.

II Rules for evaluating private revelations have been formulated over the centuries by Popes and spiritual directors.

1: Keep perspective. “The consistent and authentic pursuit of a holy life leading to a loving union with God is the essential element of true religion.”

“Do you want to know the certain and direct revelation of God? Pick up a Bible and read it!”

(One may then legitimately ask: *Why do we have private revelations at all? The obvious reply is: “Ask God.”*)

III Rule 2 *No private revelation comes directly from God and therefore none can be assumed to be inerrantly true.*

IV Rule 3 Private revelation is personal and meant to be applied to the recipient's life or needs in a careful and doctrinally faithful manner.

V Discussion of how the Church investigates reported revelations.

Eg between 1931-1950 22 Marian apparitions were seriously studied and only 2 were deemed authentic.

VI Individuals' perceptions are unavoidable distorted by their personal experiences, personality, emotions, preconceptions, and education.

VII Even a devout or sincere person may unconsciously distort or fabricate religious experience to meet their unconscious hopes or expectations.

The idea of revelation appeals to people angry with their churches, to those scared and wanting the reassurance of direct communication from God, and to magical thinkers.

VIII If you hear of a private revelation, remain calm and learn as much as you can. Don't be stampeded into making a quick decision about whether believe that it was authentic or not, or panicking that the person is insane (or possessed).

IX Guidelines for Spiritual Directors. The author says to skip this if you aren't directing anyone, so I only glanced over it. Here are the general guidelines:

- be well-informed
- Be patient and gentle
- be objective
- display no admiration even if you think the revelations may be authentic

X If you think you are receiving a revelation, be cautious about assuming it is authentic, or even if it is, that you are understanding it correctly. And don't be conceited about it.

XI An Alternative to Ecstasy

The transcendent reality of God is always around us. God makes himself known in many ways.

As "an alternative to unusual and extraordinary ways of knowing the things of God. There is a normal, everyday opportunity open to those who seek God... This is the action of grace operating in the context of a human life. If we allow it, grace will elicit deeply-moving responses and become a powerful source of virtue."

The author remarks that the poem "Legend Beautiful" by Longfellow, which he learned at age 13, had a profound effect on his life. It is long, so I am adding it under a spoiler fold.

(view spoiler)

“To ecstasy, I prefer the monotony of sacrifice.” –Therese of Lisieux

Here are the other texts mentioned in this book, leaving out the ones that are about specific saints or apparitions:

Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, Encountering Mary

Fr Augustin Poulain, SJ, Graces of Interior Prayer

Karl Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi. NY Herder and Herder 1970.

Pope Benedict XIV on Heroic Virtue, De canon III:liiii, no. 15

Jan Bovenmars, Biblical Spirituality of the Heart

St John of the Cross, Ascent of Mount Carmel

Timothy O'Donnell, Heart of the Redeemer

Anthony Bloom, Beginning to Pray

Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism. NY Meridian 1974.

John Paul II, Wonders and Signs

Briege McKenna, Miracles do Happen

Benjamin Wolman, Handbook of Parapsychology.

Thomas Dubay, Fire Within.

Jurgen Moltmann, Experience of God

Helen Schucman, Course in Miracles (she was the author's psych prof at Columbia, and chapter 7 contains an interesting account of her personal and familial religious complexities; how she described her experiences to Groeschel; also the involvement in her writing of William Thetford, who after his retirement was revealed to be a CIA agent. Sadly Schucman, who had argued that suffering was not real, spent the last two years of her life in psychotic depression.)
