

Checkin' Out My Walk

29 - Laodicea - *Spiritual Formation Movement & Its Deceptive Tentacles* - Part I

"Once there were two Church choices, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, but in recent decades Christianity has been redefined giving rise to unprecedented quasi-Christian spiritual philosophies and practices. Claiming to be "revivals" are these the counterfeits Jesus warned would occur before His return? (Luke 18:8)

Many "Christian" leaders are introducing innovative teachings based on new Bible translations and paraphrases that alter the timeless truths of Holy Scripture. A more progressive spirituality, with roots in eastern mysticism, is replacing faith in God's Word. This "New Christian Spirituality" poses as a more relevant "New Gospel" for today's Postmodern culture that prefers subjective and emotional feelings, rather than absolute truths." It has a different gospel and is targeting thousands of the younger generation with a so-called hip, cool, experiential spirituality. Much of this is embracing the mysticism of Roman Catholicism with its ecumenical philosophy of uniting people from all faiths to work together and bring about a new world of peace and harmony. This complements New Age thinking and the utopian ideals of many world religions who all await their religious leaders and dreams of world domination. This new spirituality in the church is bringing about the rise of today's "Christianized" occultism. It's stretching its tentacles around the souls of unsuspecting youth, setting them up for the lie that subjective emotions of "power" and "experience" are "feelings" to be held higher than an objective walk in the Christian Faith, based in Truth found in the Pure Word of God. The Holy Bible is presented as unattainable truth: "stuffy", "dry" and "churchy". . The Bible warns of great heresy and apostasy in the church of the last days. It foretells of false teachers, prophets, doctrines of lying spirits and their signs and wonders. For 2000 years, since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the Bible has been attacked. Alongside the Apostolic Church, based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles, counterfeit Christian heretics, apostate denominations and false movements have proliferated. Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, "There's nothing new under the sun".

Spiritual formation, an intentional Christian practice, has as its goal the development of spiritual maturity that leads to Christ-likeness. Common Christian spiritual practices= (prayer, the study of scripture, fasting, simplicity, solitude, confession, worship, etc.) The Spiritual Formation Movement has infiltrated, to some degree, nearly all evangelical denominations.

1. It is a move *away* from the truth of God's Word to a mystical form of Christianity.
2. It seeks to lure evangelicals into ancient Catholic and Orthodox contemplative practices in order to draw closer to God, experience His presence and hear His voice apart from Scripture.
3. It is based on the premise: If we do certain practices or disciplines, we can become shaped more like Jesus.
4. Proponents of spiritual formation erroneously teach: Anyone can practice these mystical rituals and find God within themselves.

5. Many proponents of the current spiritual formation movement believe the spiritual disciplines transform the seeker by his entering an altered realm of consciousness.
6. Many of the leading voices in the spiritual formation movement stress the need for more intuitive interpretations of spirituality. In order to embrace this mystical form of spirituality, contemplatives are willing to compromise at virtually every turn. Foundational Biblical doctrines are shrugged off as secondary.
7. Methods never found in the Bible as the true means of spiritual growth and of knowing God, are emphasized. You are encouraged to incorporate a wide variety of extra-biblical spiritual practices, such as contemplative prayer, silence, meditation, creative expression, and yoga.
7. Some of the most popular methods of spiritual formation have been lifted from Catholicism, new age mysticism, or other religions and rebranded with biblical-sounding terminology.
8. The spiritual formation movement is characterized by such things as centering prayer, contemplative prayer, contemplative spirituality, and Christian mysticism.
- Warning: Any kind of subjective spirituality that draws your focus away from the Lord and His truth can have disastrous results, derailing your spiritual growth and cutting you off from God's plan for your sanctification.

Truth: All true spiritual growth starts with the preeminent role of God's Word in the lives of His people.

The means of spiritual growth is the subject of MUCH debate.

Is Scripture alone enough for my spiritual growth?

Are there activities and disciplines that will stimulate and advance that growth?

I Tim. 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

What is Centering Prayer? It is a silent initial step to receive a Contemplative Prayer. Both of these are part of the tradition of lectio divina, a form of Christian meditation.

The Four R's of Lectio Divina

Lectio (Reading)

Take your time and read the passage. Get a sense of what it is saying. Read the passage a second time. Listen for any words or phrases that strike you, and listen in your heart.

Meditatio (Reflecting)

Read the passage again, slowly. As you pause on the words or phrases that strike you, take time to consider what the word, phrase, or passage means, particularly in your life.

Oratio (Responding)

Read the passage again, slowly. Consider now how God has spoken to you in this passage and respond back to Him. You may want to consider how this passage is asking you to act differently.

Contemplatio (Remaining)

Now take some time to simply remain in the presence of God.

Adapted from the *Catholic Youth Prayer Book*, St. Mary's Press, Winona, MN, 2006.

Centering prayer involves:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (*Jesus, Mother, Father or Peace, etc.*)
2. Sit comfortably; close eyes; silently introduce the sacred word. Repeat it silently in your mind for a set amount of time > 20 minutes until your heart seems to repeat the word itself.
3. If you become aware of thoughts, gently and silently return to your sacred word.
4. This prayer is followed by a period of opening your mind, heart and soul to the influence of God > the contemplative prayer.

Note: Although this might sound like an innocent exercise, it has no Scriptural support.

Prayer in Scripture: Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Biblical prayer is portrayed as comprehensible communication with God.

It is not an esoteric, mystical meditation meant to clear the mind of thought.

A centering prayer is more like mystical chanting than true communication with God.

What is contemplative prayer? It is not just "contemplating while you pray."

The Bible instructs us to pray with our minds.

I Cor. 14:15 I will pray with the spirit, I will pray with the mind also;

Contemplative prayer has slowly increased in practice and popularity along with the rise of the emerging church movement—a movement which embraces many unscriptural ideas and practices.

1. Begins with centering prayer.
2. Sit still; listen for direct guidance from God; feel His presence
3. It focuses on a mystical experience with God.

Truth: Mysticism does not rely upon truth or fact. It is purely subjective.

Word of God has been given to us for the very purpose of basing our faith, and our lives, on Truth (II Timothy 3:16-17). Your knowledge about God must be based on FACT.

Trusting in experiential knowledge over the God's Word leads to deception!

4. It is no different than meditative exercises used in Eastern religions & New Age cults.
5. It is "the opening of mind and heart to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions. It is the non-thinking emptying of the mind that seeks to find God in a way that is "closer than consciousness itself."
6. Contemplative mystics say absolute truth is unknowable just as God is mystically unknowable. Ultimate truth is not perceivable via the senses and mind. You experience God through silence, emptying of self through contemplation in the quiet of the mind and soul
7. Practitioners believe that one must clear the mind of outside concerns so God's voice may more easily be heard and that one may be united with the "divine spark" within.
8. Most vocal supporters embrace an open spirituality among adherents from all religions. This promotes the idea > Salvation is gained by many paths.

John 14:6 Jesus said He is the Way, the Truth & the Life.

Warning: This practice is based in occult and eastern metaphysical practices. Avoid It!

"What is contemplative spirituality?"

A. It is an extremely dangerous practice for any person who desires to live a Biblical, God-centered life. It is most commonly associated with:

- (1) The emerging church movement, which is riddled with false teachings
- (2) It is also used by many different groups that have little connection with Christianity.

B. It is primarily centered on meditation.

(1) Joshua 1:8 exhorts you to meditate. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Note: Focus of meditation > Word of God

C. Contemplative spirituality meditation focuses on nothing

- (1) Completely empty your mind > to just "be."
- (2) Helps you to open up to a greater spiritual experience.

Truth: Scripture exhorts us to transform our minds to that of Christ's mind.

Emptying your mind is contrary to such active, conscious transformation.

D. Encourages the pursuit of a mystical experience with God.

- (1) Mysticism is the belief that knowledge of God, spiritual truth and ultimate reality can be gained through subjective experience.
- (2) Emphasis on experiential knowledge erodes the authority of the Scripture.
- (3) We know God according to His Word.

II Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- (4) God does not add additional teaching or truth to His Word through mystical experiences.
- (5) Our faith and what we know about God is based on FACT.

Center For Contemplative Spirituality: "We come from a variety of secular and religious backgrounds. We each seek to enrich our journey through spiritual practice and study of the world's great spiritual traditions. We desire to draw closer to the loving Spirit which pervades all creation and which inspires our compassion for all beings."

Note: There is absolutely nothing Biblical about such goals.

Studying the world's "spiritual traditions" is an exercise in futility because any spiritual tradition other than that which exalts Christ is falsehood.

Truth: One draws closer to God through the path He has ordained-Jesus Christ and the Word.

Leaders of the Movement & Their Writings

1. In 1974, Father William Meninger, a Trappist monk and retreat master at St. Josephs Abbey in Spencer, Mass. found a dusty little book in the abbey library, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. He was delighted to discover this anonymous 14th century book presented contemplative

meditation as a teachable, spiritual process enabling the ordinary person:

To enter and receive a direct experience of union with God.

Its underlying message suggests: The way to know God is to abandon consideration of God's particular activities and attributes, and be courageous enough to surrender one's mind and ego to the realm of "unknowing," at which point, one may begin to glimpse the nature of God.

2. Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington and others began to disseminate these teachings.

3. 1978> Richard Foster wrote > *The Celebration of Discipline* which launched spiritual formation into mainstream evangelicalism. It has sold more than 2.5 million copies and was selected by *Christianity Today* as one of the top ten books of the 20th century. It says:

a. "Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it" (p. 15). Fill it with what? In Eastern religions a person empties his mind in order to become one with the universe (or the Cosmic Mind).

In Christian mysticism one empties the mind in order to become one with God.

b. Following detachment is the step of illumination, in which the newly emptied mind and heart is filled with supposed communication from God. "Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center."

c. Shares the practices of the Roman Catholic & Orthodox churches that originated with the Desert Mothers & Fathers -4th Cen. They were ordinary Christians living in solitude in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Arabia who chose to renounce the world in order to deliberately and individually follow God's call. They embraced lives of celibacy, labor, fasting, prayer and poverty, believing that denouncing material goods and practicing stoic self-discipline would lead to unity with the Divine. Their spiritual practice formed the basis of Western monasticism and greatly influenced both Western and Eastern Christianity.

d. Foster promotes visualization, guided imagery, mantras, silence, walking the labyrinth, channeling the light of Christ, healing of memories, direct experiential communion with God, even out-of-body experience, and Carl Jung's interpretation of dreams.

e. Foster advises, "In your imagination allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. . . . Reassure your body that you will return momentarily. Imagine your spiritual self, alive and vibrant, rising up through the clouds and into the stratosphere. . . . Go deeper and deeper into outer space until there is nothing except the warm presence of the eternal Creator. Do not be disappointed if no words come; like good friends, you are silently enjoying the company of each other" (p 27). This activity bears a striking resemblance to astral projection and an out-of-body experience, both occult practices that are strictly forbidden in Scripture.

f. Foster says Spiritual formation is attainable through the "spiritual disciplines" which are a means of growing in spiritual maturity and depth. It IMPLIES that without the use of these ancient contemplative methods, true spiritual formation is not possible.

4. In 1988, Dallas Willard an American philosopher known for his writings on Christian spiritual formation, wrote *The Spirit of the Disciplines* which reveals how the key to self-transformation resides in the practice of the spiritual disciplines which affirms human life to the fullest. He says, "Spiritual is not just something we ought to be. It is something we are and cannot escape."

5. 1988 > Richard Foster founded *Renovare (Renewal)*: an organization which seeks "to resource, fuel and model and advocate more intentional living and spiritual formation among Christians and those who want a deeper connection with God. To Obtain the "with-God life"

a. Renovaré is unabashedly ecumenical. "Wisdom" is gathered from Catholic, Episcopal, mystic, and Protestant sources alike, with no regard for the serious theological differences.

b. Renovaré places a heavy emphasis on mysticism to the detriment of solid theology.

The release of the Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible in 2005 has packaged the mystical thinking of Renovaré scholars into "study notes" for the Bible itself.

c. Renovaré preys upon the spiritually hungry and points them not to the cross of Christ or God's inerrant Word but to man's traditions and emotional human experience.

Col. 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. The wise and discerning Christian will examine carefully all claims of the Renovaré movement and compare each with Scripture. That which contradicts the Word of God must be rejected.

6. Thomas Merton, one of the modern fathers of centering prayer, claims that "the simplest way to come into contact with the living God is to go to one's center and from there pass into God" (*Finding Grace at the Center*, p. 28).

7. Presently> Spiritual formation is a primary teaching in the emergent church. Brian McLaren, a key leader, has acknowledged that Foster and Willard are considered "key mentors for the emerging church."

a. Brian McLaren > "Godfather" of the emergent church movement. Voted by Time as one of the 25 most influential evangelical pastors.

b. "We could look at Ghandi's life as an example of self-sacrificial love or Martin Luther King Jr's life. There would be a lot of people we could look at. So wouldn't it be better to just talk about Jesus as ONE AMONG MANY, rather than lift Him up as some extraordinary example. Because by doing that we create, we perpetuate this Christian elitism and exclusivism."

Teachings: Christian spiritual formation is a God-ordained process that shapes our entire person so that we take on the character and being of Christ himself. Properly employed...these disciplines help us attain increasing levels of spiritual maturity so that we respond to our life circumstances with the mind of Christ.

DANGERS: GAL. 3:1-3 O FOOLISH GALATIANS! WHO HAS BEWITCHED YOU

A. UNBIBLICAL ORIGINS Despite assertions the spiritual disciplines are "God-ordained," they are in fact derived from the practices of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mystics. These practices are contrary to the truths of God's Word.

Gary Gilley (speaker for Biblical Discernment): *The Spiritual Formation Movement has rocked the Church*. Ancient disciplines, most often practiced within the monastic movement in the early centuries of Christianity, have been dusted off, repacked, and resubmitted to believers as the means whereby spiritual growth is obtained. There is increasing discussion in Christian literature, books, seminars, etc. Do we, as believers in Sola Scriptura, take our marching orders

from the written Word, or do we look to the 'white spaces' in Scripture to determine how we live? In other words, are we to turn to mystical, subjective ascetic practices, or do we rely upon the objective truth of God's Word?

Bob DeWaay contends: The Bible nowhere describes an inward journey to explore the realm of the spirit. God chose to reveal the truth about spiritual reality through His ordained, Spirit-inspired, biblical writers.

B. UNBIBLICAL VIEW OF MAN'S CONDITION

Spiritual formation teaches: Man possesses innate goodness, but his fallen state of sin is a result of "deprivation" or "spiritual starvation." Thus, the disciplines help to feed, mature and grow man's spirituality. In his *Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard states: The evil that we do in our present condition is a reflection of a weakness caused by spiritual starvation. When Jesus prayed on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," he was not just being generous to his killers; he was expressing the facts of the case. They really did not know what they were doing. As St. Augustine so clearly saw, the deranged condition of humankind is not, at bottom, a positive fact, but a deprivation. It is one that results in vast positive evils, of course, yet depravity is no less a horror because it stems from a deficiency, and people are no less responsible for it and its consequences."

Truth: Rather than having an innate ability for good, Scripture teaches that, due to the Fall, man is innately depraved (Rom. 3:11-18, 23, 5:8; Eph. 2:1) and his heart is wicked (Jer. 17:9).

C. INVENTED PRACTICES MADE BINDING UPON CHRISTIANS

Spiritual disciplines are not commanded in Scripture. To impose practices not commanded in Scripture as necessary for spiritual maturity is to undermine and deny the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Phil. 1:6 He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Phil. 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

In spite of the absence of an explicit command in Scripture to practice these disciplines, leaders continue to assert their necessity:

Foster implies that God will always speak in a positive manner. Of course this is a gross over-generalization. We know that it is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and judgment (John 16:8) and that God pronounces warnings and judgments throughout the Scriptures. Jesus Himself pronounced "woes" of judgment on the Pharisees who saw themselves as the spiritual leaders of Israel (Matt 22:13-36); He clearly called Peter "Satan" at one point and told him to get behind Him, for Peter was a stumbling block to Him (Matt 16:23).

Consider: To characterize the Lord's voice as only one of drawing and encouragement would mean we would need to ignore huge portions of the Word of God.

There are multiple instances in Scripture when God speaks negatively to His people.

About Foster's comments in the *Be Still* DVD, Pastor Larry DeBruyn writes:

Assuming God speaks Soul to soul today, what if Foster's paradigm for determining "the voice" were reversed; that the negative voice is God's, and the positive is Satan's?

It happened that way in the Garden. God warned Adam and Eve that for disobedience to God, "you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), but Satan reassuringly told Eve, "You surely shall not die!" (Gen. 3:4).

The point is: When engaging in meditative spirituality, the contemplator can never be certain who will speak, and as a consequence, the experience can become the spawning ground for myriads of flashy ideas based solely upon, "he heard this," or "she heard that."

At that juncture, Christians and the church will have turned aside "to myths" (II Tim. 4:4).

Truth: Deception is rampant, and unbiblical, mystical practices may offer people an actual spiritual experience, BUT not one that originates from the true and living God.

To ignore the boundaries of Scripture is to open oneself up to danger.

Recommended: A Time Of Departing by Ray Yungen - He has studied religious movements for the last 20 years. This book is a revealing account of a New Age spirituality that has infiltrated much of the church. It exposes the subtle strategies to compromise the gospel message with Eastern mystical practices cloaked under evangelical terminology and wrappings. Topics include: Contemplative prayer, yoga, labyrinths, reiki, Desert fathers, spiritual formation, spiritual disciplines, Purpose Drive, Emerging Church

Some Spiritual Formation Authors & Proponents:

1. Richard Foster
2. Dallas Willard
3. Thomas Merton
4. Basil Pennington
5. Larry Crab
6. Henri Nouwen
7. Ignatius of Loyola
8. Thomas A Kempis