

EVANGELICALS & CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER



David W. Cloud

Evangelicals and Contemplative Mysticism

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Introduction

Everywhere we look “evangelicals” are turning to Roman Catholic styles of contemplative spirituality (which in many cases were borrowed from pagan sources), such as ritualistic rote prayers, chanting, meditation, centering prayer, the use of prayer beads, Stations of the Cross, *lectio divina*, labyrinths, and “the daily office.”

The cover story for the February 2008 issue of *Christianity Today* was “The Future Lies in the Past,” and it describes the “lost secrets of the ancient church” that are being rediscovered by evangelicals. The ancient church in question happens to be the Roman Catholic, beginning with the so-called “church fathers” of the early centuries.

The article observes that many young evangelicals dislike both “traditional Christianity” and the seeker sensitive churches. Traditional Christianity is described as too focused on “being right,” too much into “Bible studies” and “apologetics materials.” Instead, the young evangelicals are lusting after “a renewed encounter with a God” that goes beyond “doctrinal definitions.” This, of course, is a perfect definition of mysticism. It refers to experiencing God beyond the boundaries of Scripture.

Christianity Today recommends that evangelicals “stop debating” and just “embody Christianity.” Toward this end they should “embrace symbols and sacraments” and dialogue with “Catholicism and Orthodoxy”; they should “break out the candles and incense” and pray the “lectio divina” and learn the “Catholic ascetic disciplines” from “practicing monks and nuns.”

Christianity Today says that this “search for historic roots” will lead “to a deepening ecumenical conversation, and a recognition by evangelicals that the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox are fellow Christians with much to teach us.”

This is a no-holds-barred invitation to Catholic mysticism, and it will not lead to light but to the same darkness that has characterized Rome throughout its history, and it will lead beyond Rome to the paganism from which Rome originally borrowed its “contemplative practices.”

The January 2001 issue of *Christianity Today* contained a lengthy description by Mennonite pastor Arthur Boers of his visit to four ecumenical religious communities—Taizé, Lindisfarne, Iona, and Northumbria--and HIS INCREASING LOVE FOR LITURGICAL PRACTICES. Boers testifies: “About two decades ago, on a whim, I bought a discontinued book by a famous Catholic priest. As a convinced evangelical Anabaptist, I was skeptical. But I was also curious. As it turned out, this book became the starting point in my recovery of a fuller prayer life through the daily office.”

The Spread of Contemplative Prayer

Contemplative prayer is sweeping through evangelicalism. The following are a mere few examples of how widely it is being promoted. It is difficult, in fact, to find an influential evangelical leader who is *not* promoting contemplative prayer.

Lighthouse Trails maintains an extensive directory of individuals, influential churches, Bible colleges and seminaries that have capitulated to the contemplative movement. See LighthouseTrailsResearch.com.

Christian Bookstores

Christian and secular bookstores have begun carrying many books promoting “this pre-Reformation form of spirituality.”

These include *The Cloister Walk*, *Book of Hours*, *The Soul Aflame*, *Evensong*, *A Book of Daily Prayer*, *The Divine Hours*, and *The Prayer Book of the Medieval Era*. There are books by an assortment of Catholic “saints” and mystics, including GREGORY OF SINAI and JOHN OF THE CROSS (early desert monastics who believed salvation is by works), TERESA OF AVILA (who had visions of Mary), JULIAN OF NORWICH (who walled herself off from society for 20 years in a tiny cell), IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (the founder of the Jesuits who were at the forefront of the brutal Counter-Reformation Inquisition), AUGUSTINE (who claimed that baptism takes away an infant’s sin and claimed that Mary did not commit sin), MADAME GUYON (who experienced what she thought was union with the essence of God), THOMAS MERTON (a Catholic Trappist monk who called himself a Buddhist and died in Thailand on a pilgrimage to Buddhist shrines), BASIL PENNINGTON (who taught that man shares God’s divine nature), THOMAS KEATING (who

promotes occultic kundalini yoga), JOHN MICHAEL TALBOT (who prays to Mary and calls Buddhist and Hindu gurus “our brothers and sisters”), and HENRI NOUWEN (who taught that all people can be saved “whether they know Jesus or not”). You will also often find *The Cloud of Unknowing* in Christian bookstores, which was written by an unknown 14th century Catholic monk who taught that the meditation practitioner can find union with God by emptying the mind of thoughts.

General Baptists

The Regular Baptists (NOT the GARBC) are also strolling on the contemplative bridge. Lighthouse Trails reports that contemplative teachers Jennifer Kennedy Dean and Larry McKain are scheduled to speak at the General Baptist Mission and Ministry Summit, July 28-30, 2008. Dean’s book *Heart’s Cry: Principles of Prayer* promotes silent contemplative practices and visualization. She says that this creates the setting “in which God can reveal to us His secrets” (p. 128). McKain is the founder and Executive Director of New Church Specialties, which is associated with New Church University. “The University is using books by an array of contemplative and or/ emerging authors to train these leaders. Some of these are: Leonard Sweet, Brian McLaren, Steven Covey, leadership guru John Maxwell, mystic proponent Jim Collins, contemplative/emerging proponent Rick Warren, and New Age meditation proponent Ken Blanchard” (“Is General Baptist Ministries Going Toward Contemplative,” Lighthouse Trails, July 11, 2008).

The General Baptist Mission’s web site encourages churches to seek “renewal and refocus through New Church University training.” Lighthouse Trails reports:

“[We] spoke with General Baptist Ministries director, Dr. Steven Gray, and we asked him to describe the relationship

between New Church Specialties and GBM. He told us that a ‘partnership’ between the two organizations had been formed. He did state that even though the New Church University is using McLaren and Sweet’s books, the General Baptist Ministries is not. But he did acknowledge that GBM is recommending books by Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. ...

“While GBM may not currently be using the recommended teachings of Leonard Sweet in their training, the General Baptist partnership with McKain and the University gives a green light to GBM churches to explore Sweet’s and Blanchard’s materials. It is Leonard Sweet who has stated that ‘the power of small groups is in their ability to develop the discipline to get people in-phase with the Christ consciousness and connected with one another’ (p. 147). So one can only wonder, is this Christ consciousness what some General Baptists will ultimately find? If they turn to Sweet, the answer is yes. We pray and hope that General Baptist Ministries will reconsider their partnership with New Church Specialties and also their affinity with Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and other contemplatives. Otherwise they may end up with a kind of thinking that brought Ken Blanchard to say: ‘Buddha points to the path and invites us to begin our journey to enlightenment. I ... invite you to begin your journey to enlightened work’ (*What Would Buddha Do at Work*) or Richard Foster to say, ‘We should all without shame enroll in the school of contemplative prayer’ (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 13).”

Vineyard Churches

On August 31, 2003, I made a research visit to the Vineyard Fellowship in Anaheim, California, and the speaker, a Vineyard pastor, preached a message on contemplative prayer. He described it as “gazing at length on something” and as “coming into the presence of God and resting in the presence of God,” as lying back and floating “in

the river of God's peace." The speaker described sitting on a couch "in the manifest presence of Jesus." He quoted St. John of the Cross, "It is in silence that we hear him." He recommended the writings of Thomas Merton, who promoted the integration of Zen Buddhism with Christianity. The Vineyard speaker described personal revelations that he has allegedly received from God, claiming that on one occasion Jesus said to him, "Come away, my beloved," and he obeyed by staying in a monastery. He used several Catholic "saints" as examples of the benefit of contemplative prayer, and there was no warning whatsoever about their false gospel, their blasphemous prayers to Mary, or any other error. In fact, he recommended that his listeners "read the lives of the saints." He mentioned St. Catherine of Siena and said that Christ appeared to her and placed a ring on her finger signifying her marriage to Him, thus giving credence to this fable. He mentioned "St. Anthony," one of the fathers of the deeply unscriptural Catholic monasticism. Anthony spent 20 years in isolation, and after that, according to the Vineyard pastor, the "saint's" ministry was characterized by "signs and wonders."

Christian Rock Festivals

One of the seminars advertised for the annual Cornerstone Festival in Bushnell, Illinois, June 30 - July 3, 2005, was "Pilgrimage: Creativity & Contemplative Prayer" led by Debra Strahan. The official program said: "Debra will be speaking daily at the Prayer Tent on traditional methods of prayer and the part creativity and art expression plays in breathing life into worship. She will speak on *Lectio Divina*, or praying the Scriptures, with an accompanying workshop using beads as a tool for concentration. Also there will be direction in processing and meditating on the installation pieces in the Pilgrimage."

Southern Baptist Convention

Contemplative practices have infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention at every level.

Contemplative mysticism has spread to its **SEMINARIES**. On a visit to Golden Gate Theological Seminary in February 2000, I noticed that most of the required reading for the course on “Classics of Church Devotion” are books by Roman Catholic authors: *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius of Loyola, *The Cloud of Unknowing* by an unknown 14th century Catholic monk, *New Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton, *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas Kempis, *Selected Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, and *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila.

Contemplative mysticism is promoted by influential pastors. Consider **RICK WARREN** of Saddleback Church, who is doubtless the most influential of all Southern Baptist pastors. He frequently quotes from Roman Catholics to promote meditation, centering prayer, and other forms of contemplative spirituality. In *The Purpose Driven Church* and *The Purpose Driven Life*, Warren advises his readers to “practice his presence” as per Brother Lawrence (of the Roman Catholic Carmelite Order) and to use “breath prayers” as per the Benedictine monks. Warren quotes from John Main (Catholic monk who believes that Christ “is not limited to Jesus of Nazareth, but remains among us in the monastic leaders, the sick, the guest, the poor”); Madame Guyon (a Roman Catholic who taught that prayer does not involve thinking); John of the Cross (who believed the mountains and forests are God); and Gary Thomas (who defines Centering Prayer as “a contemplative act in which you don’t do anything”). Warren quotes from Mother Teresa and Henri Nouwen, who believed that men can be saved apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ. Nowhere does

Warren warn his readers that these were dangerous false teachers.

Warren recommends mystic Richard Foster (*The Purpose Driven Church*, pp. 126-127) and states that the contemplative movement will help bring the church into “full maturity” and that it “has had a valid message.”

Richard Foster builds his contemplative practices unequivocally upon ancient Catholic monasticism. Foster recommends Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Francis of Assisi, Augustine, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, Dominic, John of the Cross, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Madame Guyon, Thomas à Kempis, Catherine Doherty, Meister Eckhart, Thomas Aquinas, Alphonsus de Liguori, Bernard of Clairvaux, Nenri Nouwen, John Main, Thomas Merton, John Michael Talbot, and others. There is no warning of the fact that these Catholic mystics trusted in a works gospel, venerated Mary, worshipped Christ as a piece of consecrated bread, believed in purgatory, and scores of other heresies.

Consider **ED YOUNG, SR.**, a two-time president of the SBC and pastor of one of the largest Southern Baptist congregations (Second Baptist in Houston). One of his staff members (since October 2010), **GARY THOMAS**, has written a book on contemplative prayer entitled *Thirsting for God: Spiritual Refreshment for the Sacred Journey*, in which he promotes Roman Catholic mystics such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Madame Guyon, Brother Lawrence, and Ignatius of Loyola (founder of the Jesuits), calling them “precious Christian brothers and sisters” and “spiritual soul mates.” Ed Young recommends Thomas in the highest manner, saying: “If Gary Thomas writes a book, you need to read it. It’s as simple as that. He has incredible insight into spiritual truths and is able to make those truths graspable for all audiences” (Garythomas.com). (See “Dr. Ed Young Promoting Contemplative Spirituality,” *Apprising Ministries*, July 14, 2011).

Contemplative mysticism is also promoted by state associations affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The **Grand Valley Baptist Association** of Grand Junction, Colorado, has the following contemplative books on its recommended list: *Prayerwalking* by Steven Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* by George Hunter, and *Red Moon Rising* by Peter Greig and Dave Roberts. Greig, the founder of the 24/7 prayer movement, is a strong promoter of Roman Catholic contemplative practices.

SpiritLines Newsletter, a publication of the **Baptist State Convention of North Carolina**, unabashedly promotes Roman Catholic mysticism. The newsletter is the voice of the BSCNC's Office of Prayer for Evangelization & Spiritual Awakening, which is led by Windy Minton Edwards (a "Spiritual Formation Coach"). Consider the themes of recent issues: November 2007, Christian Meditation; September and October 2007, Spiritual Retreats; March 2007, Silence. The May 2008 issue recommended *With Open Hands* by Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* by Thomas Merton, *Call to the Center* by Basil Pennington, *Beginning Contemplative Prayer* by Kathryn Hermes, and other materials by Roman Catholic contemplatives.

The January 2008 issue of *SpiritLines* recommended a "Five-Day Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat" at St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, Stoneville, NC. Retreat Leaders were Joan Ricci Hurst and Paul Supina. Hurst is on the staff of Contemplative Outreach, an organization committed to the philosophy of Catholic monk and interfaith guru Thomas Keating.

SpiritLines also recommended "The Gathering Pilgrimage" at Living Waters Catholic Reflection Center, Maggie Valley, NC. This June 2008 retreat was led by Liz Ward and promoted a wide variety of Catholic contemplative practices. Ward was formerly on the board of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, which was founded by an Episcopal priest named Tilden Edwards. He was deeply involved in

interfaith dialogue and was particularly drawn to Buddhism. He even said that Jesus and Buddha were good friends (“Jesus and Buddha Good Friends,” Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation Newsletter, winter 2000).

In the book *Spiritual Friend* (1980), Edwards said that the contemplative prayer movement is “THE WESTERN BRIDGE TO FAR EASTERN SPIRITUALITY” (p. 18).

That is exactly right, and many Southern Baptists are walking across that bridge.

Bill Hybels and Willow Creek

Bill Hybels and the Willow Creek Community Church have jumped onboard the mystical bandwagon, and Willow Creek is not only one megachurch that is located west of Chicago; it is also a network of more than 12,000 churches that hold the same philosophy. The fall 2007 issue of *Willow* magazine featured “Rediscovering Spiritual Formation” by Keri Wyatt Kent. It is a glowing recommendation for mystical practices, including monastic communities. She cites Richard Foster and other contemplative mystics. While noting that some conservatives are suspect of the new mysticism, she says that the practices have largely become mainstream.

Willow Creek’s Leadership Summit in August 2006 introduced Jim Collins to the 70,000 participating Christian leaders. Since 1982 he has been a disciple of New Ager Michael Ray. That year Collins took Ray’s *Creativity in Business* course, which “takes much of its inspiration from Eastern philosophy, mysticism and meditation techniques” and promotes tapping into one’s inner wisdom. It describes an “inner person” called “your wisdom keeper or spirit guide” that “can be with you in life” (“Willow Creek Leadership Summit Starts Today,” Lighthouse Trails, Aug. 10, 2006). Collins wrote the foreword to Ray’s 2005 book *The Highest Goal: The Secret that Sustains You in Every Minute*,

which claims that man is divine and recommends Hindu mind emptying meditation. The book quotes Hindu gurus Ram Dass, Jiddu Krishnamurti, and Swami Shantananda. Yet Collins calls it “the distillation of years of accumulate wisdom from a great teacher.” Following is a quote from the book:

“I attended a meditation-intensive day at an ashram [Hindu spiritual center] to support a friend. As I sat in meditation in what was for me an unfamiliar environment, I suddenly felt and saw a bolt of lightning shoot up from the base of my spine out the top of my head. It forced me to recognize something great within me ... this awareness of my own divinity” (Michael Ray, *The Highest Goal*, p. 28; the foreword is by Jim Collins; quoted from “Willowcreek Leadership Summit Starts Today,” Aug, 10, 2006, Lighthouse Trails).

Again we are reminded that the evangelical-emerging church contemplative movement has intimate and growing ties with the New Age.

Larry Crabb

“I’ve practiced centering prayer. I’ve contemplatively prayed. I’ve prayed liturgically ... I’ve benefited from each, and I still do. In ways you’ll see, elements of each style are still with me” (*The Papa Prayer*, p. 9).

“I’m glad that as a conservative evangelical who still believes in biblical inerrancy and penal substitution, I’ve gotten over my Catholic phobia, and I’ve been studying contemplative prayer, practicing *lectio divina*, valuing monastic retreats, and worshipping through ancient liturgy. I appreciate Bernard of Clairvaux’s provocative insights. I’m drawn to Brother Lawrence’s profoundly simple ways to practice God’s presence. I’m intrigued and enticed by Julian of Norwich’s mysterious appearances of Jesus” (*Real Church*, p. 41).

Chuck Swindoll

The very influential Chuck Swindoll is also centering down. In his book *So, You Want to Be Like Christ?* he promotes contemplative practices, favorably citing Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, and Dallas Willard. He calls Foster's work *Celebration of Discipline* "meaningful" and has an entire chapter on "Silence and Solitude." There is no warning that Foster builds his contemplative practice upon Catholic monasticism, with its false sacramental gospel, veneration of Mary and the Host, purgatory, outrageous asceticism, extra-scriptural revelations, etc.

Dave and Deborah Dombrowski of Lighthouse Trails describe their efforts to warn Swindoll:

"In September 2005, we were informed that Chuck Swindoll was favorably quoting Henri Nouwen and Richard Foster on his *Insight For Living* program. We contacted *Insight for Living* and spoke with Pastor Graham Lyons. We shared our concerns, then later sent *A Time of Departing* [by Ray Yungen] to him and also a copy to Chuck Swindoll. In a letter dated 10/3/05 from Pastor Lyons, we were told, 'With his schedule I doubt he will read it.' We are sorry that Chuck Swindoll has time to read Henri Nouwen and Richard Foster but no time to read *A Time of Departing*, especially in light of the fact that thousands of people will read Chuck Swindoll's book, listen to his broadcasts and now believe that the contemplative authors are acceptable and good. Incidentally, Swindoll quoted these men, not just a few times, but many times throughout the book."

David Jeremiah

David Jeremiah, in his 2003 book *Life Wide Open: Unleashing the Power of a Passionate Life*, quotes many mystics favorably, including Sue Monk Kidd (goddess worshipper), Peter Senge (Buddhist), and Catholic "saint" John of the Cross.

Seven years before Jeremiah quoted favorably from Kidd, she published *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, describing her journey from a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher to a goddess worshipper via the path of contemplative prayer.

“As I grounded myself in feminine spiritual experience, that fall I was initiated into my body in a deeper way. I came to know myself as an embodiment of Goddess. ... The day of my awakening was the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God, and God in all things” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, 2002 edition, p. 161, 163).

Lighthouse Trails reports: “Jeremiah’s church, Shadow Mountain, encourages their men to become involved with contemplative spirituality. Currently, Pastor John Gillette of Shadow Mountain encourages the use of Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*. In 2006 Jeremiah signed on with Ken Blanchard and Laurie Beth Jones in the *Lead Like Jesus* conference. Jeremiah’s 2006 book, *Captured by Grace*, discusses Henri Nouwen and includes endorsement by Ken Blanchard” (“David Jeremiah Quotes New Ager,” Lighthouse Trails, Nov. 19, 2007).

Prairie Bible Institute

“In *Mosaic* (a Prairie student run paper that shows how the students at Prairie have been very affected by contemplative/emerging spiritualities) in a December 2006 article titled ‘The Arrogance of the Evangelical Church,’ Morgan Mosselman (listed as the Commissioner of Spiritual Life and officer of the Prairie Student Union in the 2005-2006 Chapel handbook) suggests we can ‘learn from our Catholic friends’ in the area of spiritual life. Mosselman then favorably refers to a man named Simon Chan. Chan is described as ‘the world’s most liturgically minded Pentecostal.’ His book *Liturgical Theology* is a primer for the Catholic Eucharist and other Catholic means of spirituality.

In that same issue of *Mosaic*, there is an article by contemplative writer Lauren Winner (*Girl Meets God*). And in other issues, regular columnists write about and quote from other mysticism proponents such as Erwin McManus. Prairie Bible Institute's textbook lists have authors that include contemplative proponent John Ortberg, mystic promoter Jim Collins, and Richard Foster's colleague, Dallas Willard (*Renovation of the Heart*). They also have textbooks by Ruth Haley Barton (trained at the interspiritual Shalem Institute), as well as Gary Thomas (*Sacred Pathways* where he says to repeat a word or phrase for twenty minutes) and Rick Warren, both whom avidly promote contemplative" ("Will Prairie Bible Institute Ignore Contemplative Problem?" Lighthouse Trails, Nov. 18, 2007).

Radio Bible Class

The June 6, 2006, entry for the Radio Bible Class's *Our Daily Bread* is built around the book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by the late Roman Catholic Henri Nouwen. Not only was Nouwen a Roman Catholic priest but, as we have already documented, he believed that men could be saved apart from Jesus Christ.

Biola

J.P. Moreland and Klaus Issler, professors at Biola, have coauthored *The Lost Virtue of Happiness: Discovering the Disciplines of the Good Life* (NavPress, 2006). Consider the following quotes:

“Go to a retreat center that has one of its purposes the provision of a place for individual sojourners. Try to find a center that has gardens, fountains, statues, and other forms of beautiful artwork. In our experience, Catholic retreat centers are usually ideal for solitude retreats. ... We also recommend that you bring photos of your loved ones and a picture of Jesus... Or gaze at a statue of Jesus. Or let

some thought, feeling, or memory run through your mind over and over again” (*The Lost Virtue of Happiness*, pp. 54-55).

“We recommend that you begin by saying the Jesus Prayer about three hundred times a day. ... When you first awaken, say the Jesus Prayer twenty to thirty times. As you do, something will begin to happen to you. God will begin to slowly occupy the center of your attention” (*The Lost Virtue of Happiness*, pp. 90, 92).

Navigators

The Navigators have been promoting contemplative spirituality since the mid 1980s. The January/February 1984 issue of *Discipleship Journal* featured an article by Richard Foster entitled “Listening to the Great Silence.” It taught Catholic meditative prayer. The May-June 2002 issue of *Discipleship Journal* had an article on *lectio divina* by Catholic Benedictine Monk Luke Dysinger.

These examples only begin to give an idea of how widely the contemplative practices have spread within evangelical and Baptist circles.

Beth Moore

Beth Moore, a Southern Baptist who is influential with a broad spectrum of evangelical women, is also on the contemplative bandwagon. She joined Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and other contemplatives on the *Be Still* DVD, which was published in April 2008 by Fox Home Entertainment. Shortly after it was released she issued a retraction of sorts, but she soon retracted her retraction. In a statement published on May 26, 2008, Moore’s Living Proof Ministries said: “We believe that once you view the *Be Still* video you will agree that there is no problem with its expression of Truth” (www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/bethmoorestatement.htm).

To the contrary, the very fact that it features Richard Foster and Dallas Willard are serious problems!

Lighthouse Trails issued the following discerning warning:

“In the DVD, there are countless enticements, references and comments that clearly show its affinity with contemplative spirituality. For instance, Richard Foster says that anyone can practice contemplative prayer and become a ‘portable sanctuary’ for God. This panentheistic view of God is very typical for contemplatives. ... The underlying theme of the *Be Still* DVD is that we cannot truly know God or be intimate with Him without contemplative prayer and the state of silence that it produces. While the DVD is vague and lacking in actual instruction on word or phrase repetition (which lies at the heart of contemplative prayer), it is really quite misleading. What they don’t tell you in the DVD is that this state of stillness or silence is, for the most part, achieved through some method such as mantra-like meditation. THE PURPOSE OF THE DVD, IN ESSENCE, IS NOT TO INSTRUCT YOU IN CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER BUT RATHER TO MAKE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY HUNGRY FOR IT. The DVD even promises that practicing the silence will heal your family problems. ... THIS PROJECT IS AN INFOMERCIAL FOR CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE, and because of the huge advertising campaign that Fox Home Entertainment has launched, contemplative prayer could be potentially introduced into millions of homes around the world.

“[On the DVD Moore says], ‘... if we are not still before Him [God], we will never truly know to the depths of the marrow of our bones that He is God. There’s got to be a stillness.’ ... [But is] it not true that as believers we come to Him by grace, boldly to His throne, and we call Him our friend? No stillness, no mantra, no breath prayer, no rituals. Our personal relationship with Him is based on His faithfulness and His love and His offer that we have access to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ, and not on the basis of entering an altered state of consciousness or

state of bliss or ecstasy as some call it” (“Beth Moore Gives Thumbs Up to Be Still DVD,”

<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/bethmoorethumbsup.htm>).

In her book *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* (2002), Moore recommends contemplative Roman Catholics Brother Lawrence and Brennan Manning.

Of Manning she says that his contribution to our generation “may be a gift without parallel” (p. 72) and calls *Ragamuffin Gospel* “one of the most remarkable books” (p. 290). She does not warn her readers that Manning never gives a clear testimony of salvation or a clear gospel in his writings, that he attends Mass regularly, that he believes it is wrong for churches to require that homosexuals repent before they can be members, that he promotes the use of mantras to create a thoughtless state of silent meditation, that he spent six months in isolation in a cave and spends eight days each year in silent retreat under the direction of a Dominican nun, that he promotes the dangerous practice of visualization, that he quotes very approvingly from New Agers such as Beatrice Bruteau (who says, “We have realized ourselves as the Self that says only I AM ... unlimited, absolute I AM”) and Matthew Fox (who says all religions lead to the same God), and that he believes in universal salvation, that everyone including Hitler will go to heaven. (For documentation see “A Biographical Catalog of Contemplative Mystics” in our new book *Contemplative Mysticism: A Powerful Ecumenical Glue*.)

If Moore truly wants to disassociate herself from the contemplative movement, that would be a simple matter. Let her issue a statement renouncing Richard Foster and Brennan Manning and their Roman Catholic contemplative friends and unscriptural practices. But don’t hold your breath, dear readers. As of 2011 she has done no such thing.

Mark Driscoll and Acts 29

Contemplative mysticism has also infiltrated the Mars Hill Church of Seattle, Washington, where the senior pastor is Mark Driscoll, and the associated Acts 29 church planting network. In an article entitled “Obedience,” Driscoll recommends *Celebration of Discipline* by contemplative guru Richard Foster and *Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas.

Driscoll’s web site also features an article entitled “Meditative Prayer: Filling the Mind” by Winfield Bevins, an Acts 29 pastor. Bevins, too, recommends Foster and claims that “Christian” contemplative practices are different from their “pagan” counterparts in that “Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind,” whereas “Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind.” Lighthouse Trails refutes this error as follows:

“Bevins has got this very wrong, as does Richard Foster. Contemplative proponents say that, while the method practiced by Christian contemplatives and eastern-religion mystics may be similar (repeating a word or phrase over and over in order to eliminate distractions and a wandering mind), the Christian variety is ok because the mind isn’t being emptied but rather filled. But in essence, both are emptying the mind (i.e., stopping the normal thought process). That is where the contemplatives say making a space for God to fill” (“Mark Driscoll Is a Contemplative Proponent,” Lighthouse Trails, Dec. 21, 2009).

John Piper

John Piper is also on the contemplative bandwagon. At the 2012 Passion Conference in Atlanta, Piper encouraged the use of *Lectio Divina* or at least something very similar and equally dangerous.

“The theme of the conference was ‘Jesus, speak to me.’ In a very dramatic voice, he read slowly from the book of

Ephesians. In his slow, breathy manner, he concluded by reading Paul's final greetings found in chapter 6, verses 21-24. As he concluded, he closed his Bible and his eyes as he softly said, 'Be quiet, and ask the Lord to speak to you.' Silence fell over the auditorium as thousands waited to hear God speak to them.

"What was going on is called *Lectio Divina*, which is a mystic Roman Catholic monastic practice of Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation that supposedly promotes communion with God. The focus is 'not a theological analysis of biblical passages, but to view them with Christ as the key to their meaning.' ... Madame Guyon, a 17th century Catholic mystic promoter of *Lectio Divina*, said, 'The content of what you read is no longer important. The scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to him ... you are not there to gain an understanding of what you have read; rather you are reading to turn your mind from the outward things to the deep parts of your being'" (Robert Congdon, *New Calvinism's Upside-Down Gospel*, pp. 18, 19).

Tim Keller

Tim Keller is pastor of the Redeemer megachurch in New York City, head of the Redeemer City to City church planting network, and co-founder with D.A. Carson of The Gospel Coalition (council members include John Piper, Alistar Begg, Mark Dever, Moody Church pastor Erwin Lutzer, and Southern Baptists Russell Moore and Al Mohler). Keller has a huge influence by his writings via books and blogs, his books reaching the top 10 of the *New York Times* bestseller list even in an apostate age.

He gives the following dangerous contemplative instruction:

"Go into silence, placing yourself in the presence of God with the words, 'Here I am.' As distractions come to mind let them go by, imagining they are boats floating down a

river. Let the current take the distractions away. Don't follow the distractions. Gently return to God repeating, 'Here I am.' Let the current of God's Spirit carry you. What is this like for you?" ("Revisiting: Embrace Your Inner Monk," featuring Tim Keller, August 6, 2010, thereforemedtraveler.wordpress.com).

In his lecture series *What Is Meditation?* Keller promotes four Catholics "saints": Ignatius Loyola, Francis de Sales, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. He says, "The best things that have been written are by Catholics during the Counter Reformation. Great stuff!" This lecture series was promoted on The Gospel Coalition website.

In 2009, Keller's church taught "The Way of the Monk," encouraging Catholic monastic practices such as *lectio divina*, centering prayer, "silence," the "prayer rope," and the spiritual exercises of Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits.

Max Lucado

Max Lucado threw his hat into the contemplative ring with the publication of *Cure for the Common Life*. In this dangerous book he promotes the Buddhist-Catholic monk Thomas Merton who taught panentheism and universalism.

Merton was "a strong builder of bridges between East and West" (*Twentieth-Century Mystics*, p. 39). The *Yoga Journal* made the following observation:

"Merton had encountered Zen Buddhism, Sufism, Taoism and Vedanta [Hinduism] many years prior to his Asian journey. MERTON WAS ABLE TO UNCOVER THE STREAM WHERE THE WISDOM OF EAST AND WEST MERGE AND FLOW TOGETHER, BEYOND DOGMA, IN THE DEPTHS OF INNER EXPERIENCE. ... Merton embraced the spiritual philosophies of the East and integrated this wisdom into [his] own life through direct practice" (*Yoga Journal*, Jan.-Feb. 1999, quoted from the Lighthouse Trails web site).

Merton was a student of Zen master D.T. Suzuki and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. The titles of Merton's books include *Zen and the Birds of the Appetite* and *Mystics and the Zen Masters*. Merton said: "I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is in the West. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can" (David Steindl-Rast, "Recollection of Thomas Merton's Last Days in the West," *Monastic Studies*, 7:10, 1969, http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/dsr_merton_recol2.htm).

Merton adopted the heresy that within every man is a pure spark of divine illumination and that men can know God through a variety of paths:

"At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God. It is like a pure diamond blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody. I have no program for saying this. It is only given, but the gate of heaven is everywhere" (*Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton*, 2007, DVD).

Merton said that monks of all religions are "brothers" and are "already one." At an interfaith meeting in Calcutta, India, in 1968, sponsored by the Temple of Understanding, Merton said:

"I came with the notion of perhaps saying something for monks and to monks of all religions because I am supposed to be a monk. ... My dear brothers, WE ARE ALREADY ONE. BUT WE IMAGINE THAT WE ARE NOT. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are" ("Thomas Merton's View of Monasticism," a talk delivered at Calcutta, October 1968, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1975 edition, appendix III, p. 308).

Merton used the terms God, Krishna, and Tao interchangeably.

In June 2009, I visited the Abbey of Gethsemani, where Merton lived and where he is buried. Many books were on display that promote interfaith unity. These include *Zen Keys* by Thich Nhat Hanh, *Bhagavad Gita* (Hindu scriptures), *Buddhists Talk about Jesus* and *Christians Talk about Buddha*, *Meeting Islam: A Guide for Christians*, and *Jesus in the World's Faiths*.

For Lucado to quote Merton and to refer to him in a positive way is inexcusable and is evidence that he has made a total commitment to contemplative mysticism, regardless of what lame excuses he might make.

Lucado also quotes New Age mystic Martin Buber's *The Way of Man*. Lucado promotes Buber's New Age heresy that every man has a "divine spark." He further quotes Catholic "saint" Thomas Aquinas and Richard Foster, the most prominent popularizer of Catholic mysticism today.

Lucado tries to package Catholic contemplative mysticism as an innocent and Scriptural evangelical practice. He even says it is not "mystical," but this is false as we have proven in our book *Contemplative Mysticism*.

Philip Yancy

Philip Yancy promotes the contemplative movement in his book *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (2006, updated 2010) He quotes the Buddhist-Catholic monk Thomas Merton, goddess worshiper Sue Monk Kidd, pantheist Meister Eckhart, David Steindl-Rast (who denies the substitutionary atonement of Christ), and Richard Rohr (who worships as New Age "cosmic" Christ). Yancy also quotes Catholic "saint" Teresa of Avila and the heretical Catholic contemplative text *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which promotes a mindless communion with "God."

Lee Strobel

The following is excerpted from “Veritas Seminary Conference Teacher,” Lighthouse Trails, May 5, 2011:

“Lee Strobel is one of the most well-read Christian authors today. ... Strobel is also a strong supporter of his son’s (Kyle Strobel) very contemplative ministry called Metamorpha. On the Metamorpha website, Lee Strobel is listed as a ‘supporter’ of Metamorpha. Strobel’s public support of Metamorpha will bring much attention to Kyle’s ministry and in turn pointing many unsuspecting people toward contemplative spirituality. Certainly having his father listed as a ‘supporter’ will give much credibility in the eyes of many Christians to Kyle Strobel’s work. Incidentally, also on the Metamorpha site, it lists InterVarsity Press as a ‘sponsor’ of Metamorpha, and Biola’s Institute of Spiritual Formation is named as a “partner.” To give even more recognition to his son’s organization, Lee Strobel mentions *Metamorpha*, the book by his son, on his own website. ... Metamorpha is called ‘an online community for Christian spiritual formation’ and lists several contemplative practices, including repetitive prayers, lectio divina, and Ignatian exercises. Recommended books on the site are a who’s who of contemplative prayer proponents such as Dallas Willard, Thomas Merton, Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Adele Calhoun, Thomas Kelly, and several others. ... There is no question that Kyle Strobel is following the contemplative path. He resonates with numerous mystics whom Lighthouse Trails has critiqued in the past, as well as emergents like Leonard Sweet and Dan Kimball. ... in his book, *Metamorpha* Kyle gives credit to Biola professor and contemplative advocate John Coe for helping him come to his present spiritual understanding. Coe is the founder of Biola’s Institute of Spiritual Formation where contemplative prayer is openly promoted. ... It seems a paradox that Lee Strobel is a ‘supporter’ of an extremely contemplative ministry and yet also a speaker for conferences at Veritas Evangelical Seminary, which

carries a statement on its website that states it rejects contemplative spirituality. How can this be? If Lee Strobel supports contemplative spirituality, why is he teaching students on the Calvary Chapel campus at Veritas? Both Veritas and Calvary Chapel have made statements in the past that they reject contemplative mystical spirituality. But by including a contemplative supporter for teaching, doesn't that neutralize those previous statements?"

Charles Stanley

Three issues of Charles Stanley's *In Touch* magazine have featured contemplative mysticism.

In the October 2011 issue Stanley promotes meeting God in "the silence," where the contemplative is to "do nothing but make yourself available to the Lord" and "sense His presence.

"... solitude is a deliberate choice to spend time with God and give Him your undivided attention. ... My first suggestion is to find a silent place that's free from distractions. Once you're there, the next step is to **DO NOTHING** but make yourself available to the Lord, In that moment, God is not necessarily expecting you to read through a prayer list or study a devotional. Simply invite Him to meet with you in the stillness and speak to you through His Word, however He chooses. Depending on your point of need, He may speak words of encouragement or instruction, or simply surround you with His love. Don't be discouraged if **SENSING HIS PRESENCE** doesn't happen right away. With time you'll **EXPERIENCE IT** in ways that are transforming and unforgettable. ... Solitude helps us develop an abiding sense that He's there with us every step of the way, guiding our conversations and activities. ... most importantly through solitude we become intimate with God, and nothing in this world compares with knowing Him deeply" ("Ask Dr. Stanley," *In Touch*, Oct. 2011).

What Stanley is recommending is not biblical meditation; it is blind mysticism that is borrowed from Rome's dark monastic past. Stanley is not explaining how to get alone with God without distractions and study and meditate on Scripture and pray. He is explaining how to sit in silence and DO NOTHING and expect God to meet me in that context. When he mentions God speaking through "His Word," he is not referring to Scripture but through an experience. To seek an "experience" with God is the opposite of walking by faith (which comes only through God's Word the Bible, Romans 10:17) and is a recipe for spiritual delusion. If I were to follow Charles Stanley's recommendation to seek God in "the silence" and expect Him to reveal Himself to me in some experiential way, how would I know that it is God that is speaking? The Bible warns repeatedly about the danger of being deceived by the devil, who transforms himself into an angel of light (e.g., 2 Corinthians 11; 1 Peter 5:8). God's Word instructs the believer to be sober and vigilant against spiritual deception at all times. Every thought and experience must be carefully tested by Holy Scripture.

A January 2011 *In Touch* article entitled "The Craft of Stability: Discovering the Ancient Art of Staying Put" by Cameron Lawrence recommends the contemplative monastic community Rutba House which is the home of contemplative author Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *In Touch* admits that Rutba's principles are borrowed from St. Benedict's "rule of life" ("Contemplative Spirituality Lands on Charles Stanley's *In Touch* Magazine ... Again," Lighthouse Trails Blog, June 20, 2011). That should be reason enough to reject Rutba House, but *In Touch* has only praise. The *In Touch* article endorses Wilson-Hartgrove even though his books teach Roman Catholic contemplation and are praised by emergent heretics such as Brian McLaren, Phyllis Tickle, Tony Campolo, and Richard Rohr, all of whom deny the traditional Bible doctrine of the blood atonement and believe that it is possible to be saved apart

from personal faith in Christ. In his book *The Wisdom of Stability*, Wilson-Hartgrove promotes the Catholic-Buddhist Thomas Merton and New Age Catholics Teilhard de Chardin and Joan Chittister (who says we must become “in tune with the cosmic voice of God”).

In January 2010 *In Touch* published an article by Joseph Bentz about two contemplative proponents, Anne Lamott and Sara Miles, the latter being a practicing lesbian who has lived with her lesbian partner for many years (“Letter to Charles Stanley,” Lighthouse Trails, Jan. 18, 2010). In a 2007 interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Miles said that “the Bible is a collection of documents that is remade every time somebody reads it” and ridiculed the idea that we can say “the Bible says this or that thing is good or bad.”

Donald Whitney

Donald Whitney is a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* is a bridge to contemplative mysticism.

Though Whitney himself emphasizes the supremacy and authority of Scripture, he favorably and repeatedly quotes mystics Richard Foster and Dallas Willard who have moved far beyond biblical simplicity.

Richard Foster is praised as follows at the very beginning of Whitney’s book by J.I. Packer, author of the Foreword:

“Ever since Richard Foster rang the bell with his *Celebration of Discipline* (1978), discussing the various spiritual disciplines has become a staple element of conservative Christian in-talk in America. This is a happy thing” (J.I. Packer, Foreword, *Spiritual Disciplines* by Donald Whitney, p. 9).

A happy thing? What a foolish statement by a man who was alleged to be a great biblicist. It reminds us of the terrible deceptiveness of the apostasy of these last days and how that it has permeated “evangelicalism.”

Packer was deceived by his ecumenical affiliations, just as God's Word warns in 1 Corinthians 15:33. By 1989 he was making statements such as the following:

"[The charismatic movement] must be adjudged a work of God. ... Sharing charismatic experience ... is often declared ... to unify Protestants and Roman Catholics at a deeper level than that at which their doctrine divides them. This, if so, gives charismaticism great ecumenical significance" (*Calvary Contender*, July 15, 1989).

Packer signed the heretical 1994 "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document. Thus it is no surprise that he thought the spread of Richard Foster's Catholic mysticism was "a happy thing."

Apparently Donald Whitney thinks the same thing or he would not have printed Packer's statement prominently in his book.

Later in his book, Whitney himself praises Richard Foster and his "great contribution," as follows:

"Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* has been the most popular book on the subject of the Spiritual Disciplines in the last half of the twentieth century. The great contribution of this work is the reminder that the Spiritual Disciplines, which many see as restrictive and binding, are actually the means to spiritual freedom. He rightly calls the Disciplines the 'Door to Liberation'" (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, p. 22).

When one pastor inquired as to why Whitney quoted Foster, he replied that "since it was not an academic book, I didn't want the emphasis to be critical" and that he wrote the book before Foster founded the ecumenical Renovare and "tipped his hand on some other matters" (review of *Spiritual Disciplines* on Amazon by Tim Challies, Feb. 7, 2005).

That this is a smokescreen is proven by five facts:

- (1) Foster founded Renovare in 1988, three years before Whitney published the first edition of *Spiritual Disciplines*.
- (2) Foster's 1978 book *Celebration of Discipline*, which is

repeatedly cited by Whitney, is filled with the promotion of dangerous Roman Catholic mystics--such as Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia, Teresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence, Dominic, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Merton--as well as their heretical practices, such as breath prayer, centering prayer, "entering the silence," even out-of-body experiences. In other words, Foster had "tipped his hand" for all to see by the late 1970s. (3) In later editions of his book (2001, 2012) Whitney has not removed the references to Foster or warned his readers about the man's heresies in spite of the fact that he has been challenged on this point. This is something he could have done if he were truly concerned about this matter and if he cared about the influence his recommendation could have on his readers. (4) Whitney hasn't even pretended to justify his recommendation of Dallas Willard, who is at least as dangerous as Richard Foster.

Further, as we have documented in *What Is the Emerging Church?* Willard believes that "it is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved" ("Apologetics in Action," *Cutting Edge* magazine, Winter 2001). He rejects the infallible inspiration of Scripture, saying, "Jesus and his words have never belonged to the categories of dogma or law, and to read them as if they did is simply to miss the point" (*The Divine Conspiracy*, p. xiii). Willard is confused about salvation, asking the strange question, "Why is it that we look upon salvation as a moment that began our religious life instead of the daily life we receive from God" (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*). He rejects the traditional gospel of Christ's blood atonement (*The Divine Conspiracy*, pp. 44, 49). In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, which promotes Roman Catholic-style contemplative mysticism, Willard includes the endorsement of Sue Monk Kidd, a New Age "goddess." (See "From Southern Baptist to Goddess Worship" at the Way of Life web site.) Willard promotes the Catholic-Buddhist-

Universalist Thomas Merton and an assortment of heresy-laden mystic “saints.” Willard claims that God is not concerned about doctrinal purity. In fact, he says that God loves theologians of all types.

This is a man that Whitney quotes repeatedly and favorably.

Further, Whitney himself recommends the practices of “the medieval [Catholic] mystics,” which is one of the cardinal errors that Foster-Willard are guilty of (p. 65). Consider the following statement that Whitney cites with complete approval from Carl Lundquist:

“The medieval mystics wrote about nine disciplines clustered around three experiences: purgation of sin, enlightenment of the spirit and union with God. ... Today Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*, lists twelve disciplines--all of them relevant to the contemporary Christian...’ If Lundquist is right, as I believe he is...” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, pp. 65. 66).

It is unconscionable that Whitney doesn’t warn his readers that these mystics were committed to Rome’s damnable sacramental gospel and venerated Mary and that their “disciplines” were pathetic attempts by spiritually-blind men and women to find light in the midst of gross darkness.

Further, Whitney promotes the practice of silence, journaling, and spiritual direction.

The “silence” recommended by Whitney is not merely to get alone with God and His Word in a quiet place. He writes:

“Other times silence is maintained not only outwardly but also inwardly so that God’s voice might be heard more clearly,” and, “The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, p. 184).

Whitney quotes A.W. Tozer as follows:

“Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God’s presence

envelopes you ... Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it” (Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, p. 199, quoting from *The Best of A. W. Tozer*, 1978, pp. 151-152).

This is blind and dangerous mysticism, and Whitney misuses Scripture to prove the alleged importance of this “silence,” such as Jesus praying alone and Paul in Arabia and Moses in the desert. None of these cases support the practice of sitting in silence and trying to hear “God’s voice” internally apart from simply meditating on Scripture.

To be alone with God in a quiet place and to meditate on His Word is NOT the same as sitting in silence and trying to hear God’s voice internally. One is scriptural and profitable; the other is mystical and dangerous.

The great danger of contemplative mysticism, which is sweeping through evangelicalism and the Southern Baptist Convention and is now nearing the borders of IFB churches, is that it puts the practitioner in danger of being loosed from the anchor of the Bible and put in touch with deceiving spirits. It has often led to a radical ecumenical mindset and even beyond to universalism and panentheism and idolatry.

Moody Press

In 2011 Moody Press published *Prayers for Today: A Yearlong Journey of Contemplative Prayer*. It is based on the writings of Catholic mystics such as Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa, and Meister Eckhart, theological modernist Harry Fosdick, and other heretics.

Liberty University

Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, founded by the late Jerry Falwell and currently led by his son, has been moving into the realm of contemplative prayer for several years.

In February 13, 2007, Lighthouse Trails reported that David Wheeler's course *Foundations In Youth Ministry II* uses Mark Yaconelli's book *Contemplative Youth Ministry*.

"Yaconelli, the son of the late Mike Yaconelli (founder of Youth Specialties), is a strong advocate for contemplative. On Mark Yaconelli's website, under Practices and Processes, Yaconelli lays out some 'guidelines' for centering prayer and recommends Thomas Keating and Basil Pennington, both of whom promote panentheism (God is in all things and people). In another course by Dr. Wheeler, he is using a book by Doug Fields (Saddleback Youth Pastor)" ("Liberty University Uses Contemplative/Emergent Textbooks," *Lighthouse Newsletter*, Feb. 13, 2007).

The course *Evangelism and Christian Life* has a "Course Bibliography" that is "a who's who of contemplative prayer (Foster, Willard, Warren, and Boa, etc.)."

Cornerstone University

Cornerstone University has been promoting Roman Catholic contemplative prayer since at least 2005. In 2006, the school's Spiritual Formation resources page and recommended reading list included such dangerous authors as Brian McLaren, Donald Miller, Richard Foster, Jim Wallis, Brennan Manning, Robert Webber, and Dallas Willard.

Brian McLaren was a chapel speaker in 2005, in spite of the fact that he does not believe that the Bible is the infallibly inspired Word of God and does not believe in the traditional biblical doctrine of Christ's blood atonement, among many other heresies.

Cornerstone University was founded in 1941 as the Baptist Bible Institute at Wealthy Street Baptist Church under the pastorate of the fundamentalist leader David Otis Fuller. The school's name was changed to Cornerstone in 1994 in conjunction with a change in direction, though it remained

in the orb of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches.

In the early 2000s the school's stance on music changed. In 2004 it lifted its 63-year ban on dancing. Ashley Reiman, one of the student leaders who worked to have the ban rescinded, told the Grand Rapids Press, "I'm so pumped. I think it's great. I love dancing." Ashley got into trouble with the school two years ago when she "went clubbing in Florida" on Spring Break.

Joseph Stowell

Joseph Stowell was president of Moody Bible Institute until 2008, when he took the presidency of Cornerstone University. He also works with Radio Bible Class.

Stowell is a promoter of Roman Catholic contemplative prayer. In a February 2012 blog (RenewRefreshRefocus) he recommended Leighton Ford's *The Attentive Life*.

Following is a review of this dangerous book:

"[Ford] equates his attentive practices with centering prayer as explained by Roman Catholic mystic Thomas Keating, 'We wait quietly in God's presence, perhaps repeating a 'sacred word,' [mantra] and let go of our thoughts. ... Centering prayer is not so much an exercise of attention as intention' (p. 179; cp pp. 11-13, 24, 129, 176, 190).

"Secondly, the methods recommended for the attentive life come primarily from Roman Catholic mysticism: the Benedictine Prayer Hours, monasticism (p. 21), labyrinths (pp. 51-52), lectio divina (pp. 65, 93-96), use of spiritual directors (p. 66), praying the Jesus Prayer (p. 77), centering prayer (pp. 129, 176, 179), the examen (p. 197), Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises (p. 197), with a dose of Quakerism (p. 26, 124) and Celtic 'thin places and prayers,' thrown in (pp. 159, 211).

"Finally, virtually all of Ford's spiritual heroes are mystic: Douglas Steere (a Quaker), G.K. Chesterton, Julian of

Norwich, Henri Nouwen, Simone Weil, Gregory Nazianzus, Vincent Donovan, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mother Teresa, Eugene Peterson, St. Fursey, Lesslie Newbigin, Dallas Willard, Jesuit poet Gerald Manley Hopkins, Anthony Bloom, Kierkegaard, fourth century monk John Cassian, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, Alice Fryling, St. Francis, Hilary of Tours, Marcus Loane (Archbishop of Sydney, Australia), Carlo Carletto, David Steindl-Rast, Bishop A. Jack Dain, Quaker Thomas Kelly, Hwee Hwee Tan and Catherine of Siena.

“In addition, Ford makes strange statements that border on pantheism (p. 91), describes God as ‘pure energy’ (p. 177) rather than Spirit and talks about being able to see Christ in our faces (pp. 194-196).

“To say all of this is disturbing is an understatement. What little value might be contained in *The Attentive Life* is completely negated by the unbiblical practices and teachings found throughout this book. It is astounding that a man who once preached the gospel of Christ could have drifted so far” (Gary Gilley, review of Leighton Ford’s *The Attentive Life*, June 5, 2009, Lighthouse Trails).

The Taizé Approach

The mystical movement is strongly influenced by Taizé (pronounced teh-zay). This is a religious community that was formed in southeastern France during World War II by Roger Schutz, a Swiss Protestant pastor who went by the name of “Brother Roger” and who led the community until his death in 2005. Its goal is to work for world peace and ecumenical unity.

The Taizé monastic order includes some 100 allegedly “celibate brothers” from different countries and denominations, including Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed.

While the Taizé community itself is very small, the Taizé philosophy has influenced churches throughout the world. Tens of thousands of congregations in the U.S. and elsewhere hold Taizé prayer services and sing Taizé songs.

Taizé is a major force for non-doctrinal ecumenism. Each year tens of thousands of people make a pilgrimage to Taizé. These include Protestants, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, and others. The Roman Catholic connection is very strong. Schutz participated in the Second Vatican Council, and Pope John Paul II visited Taize in October 1986. In 2006, at John Paul II’s funeral, Schutz was given Eucharistic communion by the hands of Joseph Ratzinger, who a few days later became Pope Benedict XVI. Since Schutz’s death (he was stabbed to death by a deranged woman during a Taizé service), the organization has been led by a Roman Catholic priest named Alois Loeser.

The Taizé services are non-dogmatic and non-authoritative. There is no preaching. “It does not dictate what people must believe. No confessions of faith are required. No sermons are given. No emotional, evangelical-style testimonials are expected. Clergy are not required.” Schutz described the philosophy of Taizé as, “Searching together--

not wanting to become spiritual masters who impose; God never imposes. We want to love and listen, we want simplicity” (“Taizé,” *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, Sept. 20, 2002).

This is blind mysticism loosed from the authority of Scripture.

In fact, Taizé’s non-doctrinal ecumenical Christianity is fueled by mystical practices. A “shadowy medieval” atmosphere is created with the use of such things as candles, icons, and incense (*Vancouver Sun*, April 14, 2000). The goal is to bring the “worshipper” into a meditative state, “to a place beyond words, a place of just being.” There is a lot of repetition, with “one-line Taizé harmonies repeated up to 15 times each.”

Schutz taught that truth is found through mysticism. In 1995 he told a group of 100,000 young people in Paris, “We have come here to search, or to go on searching through silence and prayer, to get in touch with our inner life” (“Brother Roger, 90, Dies,” *New York Times*, Aug. 18, 2005).

Taizé is heavily involved in the same social-justice issues that are popular with youth today in secular society (e.g., environmentalism, AIDS, African poverty, anti-nuclear proliferation, military disarmament).

The Taizé philosophy is spreading quickly throughout evangelicalism.

Richard Foster

Richard Foster's writings have been at the forefront of the contemplative movement since the 1970s. No one has done more than this man to spread contemplative mysticism throughout Protestant and Baptist churches.

Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*, which has sold more than two and a half million copies, was selected by *Christianity Today* as one of the top ten books of the 20th century. (For this report I obtained multiple editions of *Celebration of Discipline*, plus three other books by Foster, as well as dozens of other books on contemplative prayer.)

The Quaker Connection

He grew up among the Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends), was trained at George Fox College, has pastored Quaker churches, and has taught theology at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, and at George Fox. One website calls him "perhaps the best known Quaker in the world today."

The Quaker connection is important, because one of their peculiar doctrines is direct revelation via an "inner light." This is defined in a variety of ways, since Quakerism is very individualistic and non-creedal, but it refers to a divine presence and guidance in every man. There is an emphasis on being still and silent and passive in order to receive guidance from the inner light. Other terms for it are "light of God," "light of Christ," "inward light," "the light," "light within," "Christ within," and "spirit of Christ."

George Fox used the expression "that of God in everyone." In his journal Fox said, "I was glad that I was commanded to turn people to that inward light, spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation, and their way to God; even that divine Spirit which would lead them into all Truth, and

which I infallibly knew would never deceive any” (*The Journal of George Fox*, revised by John Nickalls, 1952, p. 35).

Another prominent Quaker, Robert Barclay, called this “the light of the heart” and said “there is an evangelical and saving Light and grace in all.”

Isaac Pennington said, “There is that near you which will guide you; Oh wait for it, and be sure ye keep to it.”

The inner light teaching is said to be based on John 1:9 -- “*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*” Yet this verse does not say that there is a divine light in every man. It merely says that Christ gives light to every man. The epistle of Romans tells us more about this. There is the light of creation (Romans 1:20), the light of conscience (Romans 2:14-16), and the light of the Scripture (Romans 3:2). When men respond to the light that they have, they are given more light (Acts 17:26-27).

Because of the fall, man’s heart is darkened and foolish (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18).

The inner light teaching was exalted above reliance on the Bible. Martin Meeker says, “... the early Quakers’ reliance on the Bible as a source of spiritual knowledge and inspiration was secondary to their belief in the Inner Light as the primary path to salvation and communication with God” (*The Doctrine of the Inner Light*).

George Fox would say to his listeners:

“You will say, Christ saith this and the Apostles say this, but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?”

Fox claimed that he received the doctrine of the inner light without help from the Scriptures (*The Journal of George Fox*, revised by John Nickalls, 1952, pp. 33-35).

This is an unscriptural and very dangerous position that opens the door for every sort of heresy. The Scripture is able

to make the man of God perfect; obviously, then, nothing more is needed (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The early Quakers misinterpreted 2 Corinthians 3:6, claiming that the “letter” referred to the Scripture in general.

“Along these lines, we might note that early Quakers tended to give an expansive reading of 2 Cor. 3:6, which states that God has made us ‘ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.’ This verse, if ‘letter’ is taken to mean ‘Scripture,’ obviously places strong limits on the use of Scripture while extending preference to Spirit, at the very least. One thus is not surprised that it is a favorite of early Quakers, appearing as an allusion in the postscript of the Letter from the Elders of Balby, cherished by many contemporary Friends” (Stephen Angell, “Opening the Scriptures, Then and Now,” QUEST, Fall-Winter 2007-2008).

If the “letter” of 2 Corinthians 3:6 refers to the Scripture in general, it would mean that Paul was exalting “the Spirit” above the Scripture. It would mean that the Scripture is not the sole authority for faith and practice, but it is only one authority and that men are free to follow their inner lights.

This is a gross misinterpretation of the passage. In truth, 2 Corinthians 3 contrasts the Law of Moses with the Gospel of Grace, the Old Covenant with the New.

2 Corinthians 3:7 leaves no doubt about this, which tells us that the “letter” that killeth is “*the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones.*” That refers, of course, to the Law of Moses given on Mt. Sinai. It was a covenant of death because it requires of fallen sinners what they cannot perform, which is perfect holiness. It was not given to provide a way of salvation but to show men their sinful, lost condition (Romans 3:19-20).

To interpret the “letter” of 2 Corinthians 3:6 as a reference to the Scripture in general also contradicts the fact that verse 11 says the “letter” has been “done away.” Obviously the

Scripture has not been done away with, but the Law of Moses has. Its purpose was to act as a “schoolmaster” to lead men to Christ and once it performs that glorious function its work is finished (Galatians 3:24-25).

It is easy to see how the Quaker philosophy paved the way for Foster to accept Catholic mysticism. It did this by its emphasis on an “inner light” and its tendency not to judge things in an exacting manner with the Bible.

Other Quakers have followed the same path, and some, like Mary Conrow Coelho, have followed it all the way to the New Age. Conrow believes in evolution, the oneness of the universe, and the unity of man with God, and she traces her New Age mysticism to deep third generation Quaker roots and its inner light teaching:

“The adults in our Quaker community spoke often of the Inner Light, the seed of God, the indwelling Christ. [Thomas Kelly] said, ‘It is a Light within, a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us’” (“Of Leadings and the Inner Light: Quakerism and the New Cosmology,” <http://www.thegreatstory.org/QuakerMetarelig.html>).

(Richard Foster quotes Thomas Kelly favorably and frequently in his books, and the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* quotes Kelly as saying: “Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center.”)

From its inception Quakerism was a heretical movement that downplayed the Bible and exalted personal revelation, and Foster is a product of that heresy even though he is on the “evangelical” side of Quakerism.

In this light it is not surprising to find him promoting Roman Catholic mystics who exalted their tradition and mystical revelations above the Scripture.

Salvation Not Clear

One thing that is glaring in its absence from Foster's books on spiritual living is a clear biblical testimony of salvation and a clear exhortation for his readers to be born again.

When he does mention salvation, he speaks of it in a confused manner.

He says, for example, that reconciliation has already been achieved in Christ.

“In some mysterious way, through shedding his blood Jesus took into himself all the evil and all the hostility of all the ages and redeemed it. He reconciled us to God, restoring the infinitely valuable personal relationship that had been shattered by sin” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 42).

This is not true. Though the redemption price has been paid, sinners are not reconciled until they individually put their faith in the gospel (John 3:16, 18, 36).

Foster also speaks of salvation as a process.

“One more thing is needed, namely, our response of repentance--not just once but again and again. Martin Luther declares that the life of the Christian should be one of daily repentance” (*Prayer*, p. 42).

We must understand that the previous statement is made in the context of a discussion of salvation. Foster makes no clear distinction between the one repentance for salvation (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9) and continual repentance for sanctification (2 Cor. 12:21). Foster's statement describes either universalism or sacramentalism, but it is not the once-for-all new birth doctrine of the New Testament.

Further, Foster describes salvation in terms of an emotional experience and in association with baptism. In *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Foster tells of a non-Christian who attended one of his contemplative seminars. Part way through the course the following event transpired.

“Throughout the weekend the Spirit of God rested tenderly upon the entire group, so much so that on Sunday afternoon this same gentleman asked quietly, ‘Would you pray for me that I might know Jesus the way you know Jesus?’ What were we to do? None of the normal responses seemed appropriate. We waited in silence. Finally one young man stood up and gently placed his hands on the man’s shoulders. I have never forgotten his prayer. I felt like taking off my shoes--we were on holy ground. Strange as it may seem, he prayed a commercial. He described a popular advertisement of the day for NesTea in which different people, sweltering from the summer sun, would fall into a swimming pool with a thirst-quenching sense of ‘ahhh!’ on their faces. He then invited this man to fall into the arms of Jesus in the same way. The gentleman suddenly began to weep, heaving deep sighs of sorrow and grief. We watched in reverent wonder as he received the gift of saving faith. It was a tender, grace-filled moment. Later he shared with us how the prayer touched a deep center in his past relating to his baptism as a child” (pp. 48, 49).

While it is true that the Bible describes salvation in terms of drinking and eating of Jesus, the scene described by Foster is confusing at best. What was this man trusting? What was he receiving? He mentions his infant baptism. Had he come to believe that his baptism had brought him into a saving relationship with God that he was only now learning to enjoy? What Jesus was he trusting? What gospel? What was the nature of his faith? The Bible warns that the devils believe in God. Only a certain kind of faith is saving faith. Foster doesn’t clarify any of this. His doctrine of salvation is exceedingly murky at best. When the unbeliever asked the group to pray for him, why didn’t they share with him the gospel? They didn’t need to pray about what to say. They didn’t need to hesitate. Jesus has already commanded us to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Why did they preach a NesTea commercial rather than the gospel?

And while we are talking about Richard Foster and the gospel, if he believes the true gospel of the grace of Christ without works, why does he constantly and uninhibitedly promote Catholic mystics who hold to a sacramental gospel? If he doesn't believe Rome's gospel of process salvation, why does he never warn about it plainly?

Personal salvation is foundational to prayer and Christian living. It is criminal to write books on these subjects for broad public consumption and not make salvation absolutely clear.

Roman Catholic Mysticism

Foster advocates Roman Catholic mysticism with absolutely no qualms, building his contemplative practices unequivocally upon this heretical foundation.

He recommends Ignatius of Loyola, Francis of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Genoa, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, Dominic, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Madame Guyon, Thomas à Kempis, Catherine Doherty, Meister Eckhart, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen, Francis de Sales, Alphonsus de Liguori, Bernard of Clairvaux, John Henry Newman, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, G.K. Chesterton, André Louf, Henri Nouwen, Dorothy Day, Karl Rahner, John Main, Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, Brennan Manning, John Michael Talbot, and many others.

Foster's recommendation of these Roman Catholic mystics is not half-hearted. In the introduction to the 1998 edition of *Celebration of Discipline*, he says that they taught him spiritual depth and substance (pp. xiii, xiv), and he calls them "Devotional Masters of the Christian faith." Of the *Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, Foster says, "... it is a school of prayer for all of us" (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 59).

There is no warning of the fact that these mystics trusted in a works gospel, venerated Mary, worshipped Christ as a piece of consecrated bread, believed in purgatory, and scores of other heresies. (For extensive documentation of this see the chapters “A Description of Catholic Monastic Asceticism” and “A Biographical Catalog of Contemplative Mystics” in the book *Contemplative Mysticism*, which is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life Literature, www.wayoflife.org.)

Bible Not Sole Authority

Like his Roman Catholic friends, Foster’s foundational error is in not exalting the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. Nowhere in *Celebration of Discipline or Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* does he instruct his readers that the Bible alone is God’s infallible revelation and that everything must be carefully tested by it. This should be the very starting point for books on Christian spirituality and worship, but it is glaring in its absence. Foster encourages his readers to find revelation beyond Scripture through meditation, dreams, and personal prophecies.

Foster describes how Francis of Assisi found spiritual guidance. When he was puzzled as to whether he should devote himself exclusively to contemplative practices or also to engage in preaching missions (which is plainly answered in Scripture), he sent word to two “trusted friends” and accepted their replies as the very will of God. Foster says that Francis “was seeking a method that would open the gates of heaven to reveal the mind of Christ, and he took it as such” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, pp. 154, 155). Nowhere does Foster chide Francis of Assisi for depending on the word of man rather than the Scripture.

Neo-Orthodox Approach

Foster's approach to Scripture is a neo-orthodox, existentialist one. It is not by accident that he quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer frequently and non-critically. (He also quotes the other two fathers of neo-orthodoxy, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.)

"This is not a time for technical word studies, or analysis, or even the gathering of material to share with others. ... Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, '... just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation'" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 26).

Yet the Bible is not merely a love letter. It is much more. It is the infallible Word of God, and we are commanded to "analyze" it. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Ken Silva of *Apprising Ministries* exposes the error of Foster's approach:

"The idea expressed above by Bonhoeffer of accepting Scripture subjectively as spoken to you is completely in line with the flawed view of the text of the Holy Scripture spread by neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth. In neo-orthodoxy the Scripture only becomes the Word of God when the Holy Spirit illuminates it. We can sum up this wrong idea this way: 'The Bible is a divine mailbox in which we receive letters from Heaven.' But no, it isn't. The Bible itself--in full--is the letter, the message, from God.

"In his book *Reckless Faith* Dr. John MacArthur hits the target dead on as he shows why neo-orthodoxy is a perfect fit for contemplative mysticism as well as why it's a necessity for it to flourish:

"Neo-orthodoxy is the term used to identify an existentialist variety of Christianity. Because it denies the

essential objective basis of truth--the absolute truth and authority of Scripture--neo-orthodoxy must be understood as pseudo-Christianity. ... Neo-orthodoxy's attitude toward Scripture is a microcosm of the entire existentialist philosophy: the Bible itself is not objectively the Word of God, but it becomes the Word of God when it speaks to me individually. ...

“Thus while neo-orthodox theologians often sound as if they are affirming traditional beliefs, ... they relegate all theology to the realm of subjective relativism. ... Mysticism is perfectly suited for religious existentialism; indeed, it is the inevitable consequence. The mystic disdains rational understanding and seeks truth instead through the feelings, the imagination, personal visions, inner voices, private illumination, or other purely subjective means’ (MacArthur, *Reckless Faith*)” (Ken Silva, “Contemplative Mysticism in the Southern Baptist Convention,” April 30, 2008, http://www.apprising.org/archives/2008/04/contemplative_m.html).

Instead of seeing the Scripture as divinely inspired and profitable in every part as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, and therefore studying it diligently in order to rightly divide it as 2 Timothy 2:15 commands, neo-orthodoxy sees the Scripture as inspired only as it speaks to me experientially through a mystical approach.

School of Contemplative Mysticism

Foster invites his readers to “enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 13), promoting thoughtless centering prayer, visualization, guided imagery, the repetition of mantras, silence, walking the labyrinth, even out of body experiences.

Foster says, “Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 15).

Apparently Foster got some criticism for this statement, because in the next edition of *Celebration of Discipline* he omitted it and tried to contrast Eastern meditation with Christian meditation with the following words:

“Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind. The two ideas are quite different” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1988, p. 20).

This sounds nice and tidy, but it contradicts the practice of Catholic contemplation. In reality, both Eastern meditation and Catholic meditation are an attempt to empty the mind in order to arrive at a transcendental experience. Consider the following quotes from the mystics that Foster heartily recommends:

Thomas Merton: “... the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. IT IS WORDLESS. IT IS BEYOND WORDS, AND IT IS BEYOND SPEECH, and it is BEYOND CONCEPT” (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1975 edition, p. 308).

The Cloud of Unknowing: “I URGE YOU TO DISMISS EVERY CLEVER OR SUBTLE THOUGHT no matter how holy or valuable. Cover it with a thick cloud of forgetting because in this life only love can touch God as He is in Himself, never knowledge” (chapter 8).

John Main: “Recite your prayer-phrase [mantra] and gently listen to it as you say it. DO NOT THINK ABOUT ANYTHING. As thoughts come, simply keep returning to your prayer-phrase. In this way, one places everything aside” (*The Teaching of Dom John Main: How to Meditate*, Meditation Group of Saint Patrick’s Basilica, Ottawa, Canada).

Teresa of Avila: “All that the soul has to do at these times of quiet is merely to be calm and MAKE NO NOISE. BY NOISE I MEAN WORKING WITH THE INTELLECT to find great numbers of words and reflections with which to thank God. ... in these periods of quiet, the soul should

repose in its calm, and learning should be put on one side” (*The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, chap. 15, pp. 106, 107, 108).

Foster’s attempt to set Catholic contemplation apart from pagan mysticism cannot be sustained.

Foster encourages his readers to go deep into their inner world of silence and explore it:

“[W]e must be willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation. In their writings, all of the masters of meditation strive to awaken us to the fact that the universe is much larger than we know, that there are vast unexplored inner regions that are just as real as the physical world we know so well. They tell us of exciting possibilities for new life and freedom. They call us to the adventure, to be pioneers in this frontier of the Spirit” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 13).

Amazingly, he says that these practices are not only for believers but also for unbelievers.

“We need not be well advanced in matters of theology to practice the Disciplines. Recent converts--for that matter people who have yet to turn their lives over to Jesus Christ--can and should practice them” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 2).

Since the contemplative practices are supposed to enable the practitioner to commune with Christ within himself, how could an unsaved person “practice them”? This is evidence of Foster’s Quaker belief in an “inner light” in every man.

Some might protest that I have only focused on the more controversial parts of Foster’s teaching and have ignored the truth contained therein. I will admit that Foster’s books contain some true insights about traditional biblical prayer that in another context could be helpful, but this is ruined by his promotion of Catholic mysticism, Jungian dream interpretation, healing of memories, and other heresies. Anyone that uses his writings is in imminent danger of being snared by error.

And though he does give many lessons about traditional biblical prayer, he considers this a shallow level of Christian living. To reach the truly “deep” levels, he urges believers to aspire to move beyond normal conversational prayer. He quotes C.S. Lewis:

“I still think the prayer without words is the best--if one can really achieve it. ... [But to] pray successfully without words one needs to be ‘at the top of one’s form’” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, p. 156).

In reality, contemplative practices are beyond the bounds of Scripture and are completely “off the deep end.”

Visualization

Foster encourages the exceedingly dangerous practice of guided imagery and visualization:

“The inner world of meditation is most easily entered through the door of the imagination. We fail today to appreciate its tremendous power. The imagination is stronger than the conceptual thought and stronger than the will. ... In his autobiography C.G. Jung describes how difficult it was for him to humble himself and once again play imagination games of a child, and the value of that experience. Just as children need to learn to think logically, adults need to REDISCOVER THE MAGICAL REALITY OF THE IMAGINATION. ...

“Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* constantly encouraged his readers to VISUALIZE THE GOSPEL STORIES. Every contemplation he gave was designed to open the imagination. He even included a meditation entitled ‘application of the senses,’ which is an attempt to help us utilize all five senses as we picture the Gospel events. His thin volume of meditation exercises with its stress on the imagination had tremendous impact for good upon the sixteenth century.’ ...

“Take a single event like the resurrection, or a parable, or a few verses, or even a single word and allow it to take root

in you. Seek to live the experience, remembering the encouragement of Ignatius of Loyola to apply all our senses to our task. ... As you enter the story, not as a passive observer but as an active participant, remember that since Jesus lives in the Eternal Now and is not bound by time, this event in the past is a living present-tense experience for Him. Hence, YOU CAN ACTUALLY ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST IN THE EVENT, BE ADDRESSED BY HIS VOICE AND BE TOUCHED BY HIS HEALING POWER. It can be more than an exercise of the imagination; IT CAN BE A GENUINE CONFRONTATION” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, pp. 22, 23, 26).

Note that Foster recommends Carl Jung, who followed a demonic spirit guide, as well as Ignatius of Loyola, who founded an organization dedicated to blind obedience to the pope at the very height of the murderous Inquisition. The “spirit realm” to which these men connected through meditative practices was the realm of darkness.

Foster recommends Loyola’s practice of visualizing a personal encounter with Jesus, which is presumptuous foolishness. We don’t even know what Jesus looks like and we are not supposed to. Faith is simply believing God’s Word (Romans 10:17). Faith is not putting oneself into the biblical account and letting one’s imagination run wild.

(For more about visualization and the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises see “Ignatius of Loyola” in the book *Contemplative Mysticism*, chapter “A Biographical Catalog of Contemplative Mystics.”)

Interpretation of Dreams

Foster promotes the interpretation of dreams, which is not surprising in light of his recommendation of Carl Jung.

“In learning to meditate, one good place to begin is with our dreams, since it involves little more than paying attention to something we are already doing. ... If we are

convinced that DREAMS CAN BE A KEY TO UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO THE INNER WORLD, we can do three practical things. First, we can specifically pray, inviting God to inform us through our dreams. ... Second, we should begin to record our dreams. ... That leads to the third consideration--how to interpret dreams. The best way to discover the meaning of dreams is to ask. 'You do not have, because you do not ask' (Jas. 4:2). ... Benedict Pererius, a sixteenth-century Jesuit, suggested that the best interpreter of dreams is the '...person with plenty of experience in the world and the affairs of humanity, with a wide interest in everything human, and who is open to the voice of God'" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, pp. 23, 24).

Though God did speak from time to time to the prophets of old in dreams, the New Testament does not encourage God's people to seek revelation in dreams nor does it instruct us in how to interpret dreams. Foster takes James 4:2 out of context applying it to the interpretation of dreams, though it has nothing to do with such a thing. He quotes a Jesuit heretic who held a false gospel of sacramentalism. The fact is that we do not need dream revelations for we have the perfect and sufficient "voice of God" in the Scriptures. It is "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed" (2 Peter 1:19).

Dream interpretation is one of the things that led Sue Monk Kidd astray as she pursued the contemplative path. She came to believe that God was speaking to her through weird dreams, and those dreams led to self-deification and goddess worship! (See the chapter on "Dancing with Demons.")

With God in Outer Space

Foster even urges the contemplative practitioner to commune face to face with God the Father.

“A fourth form of meditation has as its objective to bring you into a deep inner communion with the Father where you look at Him and He looks at you” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 27).

Foster says that this amazing feat can be accomplished via visualized out of body experiences.

“In your imagination, picture yourself walking along a lovely forest path. ... When you are able to experience the scene with all your senses, the path breaks out onto a lovely grassy knoll. Walk out into the lush large meadow encircled by stately pines. After exploring the meadow for a time, lie down on your back looking up at blue sky and white clouds. IN YOUR IMAGINATION ALLOW YOUR SPIRITUAL BODY, SHINING WITH LIGHT, TO RISE OUT OF YOUR PHYSICAL BODY. Look back so that you can see yourself lying in the grass and reassure your body that you will return momentarily. IMAGINE YOUR SPIRITUAL SELF, ALIVE AND VIBRANT, RISING UP THROUGH THE CLOUDS AND INTO THE STRATOSPHERE. Observe your physical body, the knoll, and the forest shrink as you leave the earth. Go deeper and deeper into outer space until there is nothing except the warm presence of the eternal Creator. Rest in His presence. Listen quietly, anticipating the unanticipated. NOTE CAREFULLY ANY INSTRUCTION GIVEN ... Do not be disappointed if no words come; like good friends, you are silently enjoying the company of each other. When it is time for you to leave, audibly thank the Lord for His goodness and return to the meadow. Walk joyfully back along the path until you return home FULL OF NEW LIFE AND ENERGY” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, pp. 27, 28).

Foster thus claims that the believer can go into outer space and receive direct revelation from Almighty God! Who needs the Bible and who needs faith when we can actually meet Christ in the center of our being, talk face to face with God

the Father, and have personal revelations from Almighty God?

(The previous passage was quietly dropped out of subsequent editions of *Celebration of Discipline*, but to my knowledge Foster has never renounced the practice. My e-mail to him about this was not answered.)

This technique is occultic. It is exactly what I was taught by Hindu gurus in the early 1970s.

In *Out on a Limb* New Ager Shirley MacLaine describes an out-of-body journey to the moon that follows the same playbook!

Consider the following description of what Brian Flynn was taught when he was training to be a psychic before his conversion to Jesus Christ:

“Carolyn then instructed us to lie on the floor, close our eyes and imagine we were lying in a field of wildflowers on a beautiful summer’s day. The wind was calm, and the smell of flowers awakened our senses. As we were lying in the field, she asked us to now leave our bodies and look down upon ourselves. Carolyn then guided us to raise our souls to the heavens and to leave our earthly bodies behind. When we reached what we believed to be the outer edges of the universe she told us to ask for a message from the universe and what we needed to know at this time. ‘Listen to the voice inside you. Ask what it is you need to know to help you release the burdens you carry,’ she said softly” (Flynn, *Running against the Wind*, 2005, p. 50).

There is no significant difference between the psychic practice and Foster’s so-called contemplative practice. When we go outside the realm of the Bible we put ourselves in the way of spiritual harm and deception.

Other Occultic Practices

Foster recommends other occultic practices.

One is channeling the light of Christ through visualization. Consider his description of how he taught visualizing prayer to a little boy:

“Imagination opens the door to faith. If we can ‘see’ in our mind’s eye a shattered marriage whole or a sick person well, it is only a short step to believing that it will be so. ... I was once called to a home to pray for a seriously ill baby girl. Her four-year-old brother was in the room and so I told him I needed his help to pray for his baby sister. ... He climbed up into the chair beside me. ‘Let’s play a little game,’ I said. ‘Since we know that Jesus is always with us, let’s imagine that He is sitting over in the chair across from us. He is waiting patiently for us to center our attention on Him. When we see Him, we start thinking more about His love than how sick Julie is. He smiles, gets up, and comes over to us. Then let’s both put our hands on Julie and when we do, Jesus will put His hands on top of ours. WE’LL WATCH AND IMAGINE THAT THE LIGHT FROM JESUS IS FLOWING RIGHT INTO YOUR LITTLE SISTER AND MAKING HER WELL. Let’s pretend that the light of Christ fights with the bad germs until they are all gone. Okay!’ Seriously the little one nodded. Together we prayed in this childlike way and then thanked the Lord that what we ‘saw’ was the way it was going to be” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 37).

This is not biblical prayer; it is occultism. Mind Science practitioners and New Agers have promoted this type of thing for a century.

Biblical prayer is not the attempt to accomplish something through the power of our minds. It is talking to God and asking Him to accomplish things. There is a vast difference between these two practices, as vast as the difference between God and the Devil.

Foster recommends that parents pray for their sleeping children after this fashion:

“Imagine the light of Christ flowing through your hands and healing every emotional trauma and hurt feeling your

child experienced that day. Fill him or her with the peace and joy of the Lord. In sleep the child is very receptive to prayer since the conscious mind which tends to erect barriers to God's gentle influence is relaxed" (*Celebration of Discipline*, p. 39).

There is not the hint of support in Scripture for this practice. To attempt to bypass "the conscious mind" is occultism.

Foster's descent into occultism is further evident by his recommendation of "flash prayers" and "swish prayers":

"Flashing hard and straight prayers at people is a great thrill and can bring interesting results. I have tried it, inwardly asking the joy of the Lord and a deeper awareness of His presence to rise up within every person I meet. Sometimes people reveal no response, but other times they turn and smile as if addressed. In a bus or plane we can fancy Jesus walking down the aisles touching people on the shoulder and saying, 'I love you...' Frank Laubach has suggested that if thousands of us would experiment with 'swishing prayers' at everyone we meet and would share the results, we could learn a great deal about how to pray for others. ... 'Units of prayer combined, like drops of water, make an ocean which defies resistance'" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 39).

This depicts prayer as an occultic entity rather than a simple communication addressed to God.

Foster also recommends a practice called "palms up, palms down." The practitioner is instructed first to hold his palms down in order to "release" his worries and concerns, such as anger, lack of finances, or fear of an upcoming event.

"Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you, just say, 'palms down.' Release it. YOU MAY EVEN FEEL A CERTAIN SENSE OF RELEASE IN YOUR HANDS" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1998, p. 31).

Then the practitioner is to turn his palms up in order to "receive from the Lord."

“Perhaps you will pray silently: ‘Lord, I would like to receive your divine love for John, your peace about the dentist appointment, your patience, your joy.’ Whatever you need, you say, ‘palms up.’”

There is not a hint of support for such a thing in Scripture, but this practice is found in New Age and pagan religions.

Palms up, palms down is used in walking the labyrinth (http://www.lessons4living.com/three_fold_path.htm).

It is used in Nia Technique to channel energy fields (http://www.nianow.com/teachers/continuingedu/sharingthejoy/0606/t_tip.html).

It is used in Tai Chi to manipulate the flow of the occultic chi energy (<http://groups.ku.edu/~kungfu/instructions/instructions.htm>).

Sufi dervishes hold one palm up and one palm down while whirling in order to channel their mystical experiences. I have observed this in Turkey.

Union with God

Foster has adopted the contemplative doctrine of union with God. To the question, “What is the goal of Contemplative Prayer?” Foster answers:

“To this question the old writers answer with one voice: UNION WITH GOD. ... Bonaventure, a follower of Saint Francis, says that our final goal is ‘union with God,’ which is A PURE RELATIONSHIP WHERE WE SEE ‘NOTHING’” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, 1992, p. 159).

The “old writers” are old Catholic writers, but the Bible nowhere describes or encourages such a practice. The believer’s complete relationship with God is an accomplished fact in Christ.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein

with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:6-10).

We receive Christ by faith in the gospel, and Paul says that we are to walk in Him in the same way. It is a walk of faith. We walk “from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). God gives the believer many wonderful “experiences” along the way, but we are not to seek after experiences; we are to be content with knowing Christ by faith.

The believer is complete in Christ and his “union” with Christ, is an accomplished fact. It is not something we have to pursue through mysticism.

Further, the believer’s relationship with Christ in this world is not an experience of “seeing nothing.” It is, rather, an experience of knowing the Saviour through faith in His written Word and through the power of the indwelling Spirit. It is an objective, mindful experience. As former Catholic priest Richard Bennett says, “Seeing ‘nothing’ [is] just an Evangelical rehashing of Catholic irrational superstitious myth.”

Promoting Heretics

God’s Word commands us to mark and avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the apostolic faith (Romans 16:17), but Foster ignores this and draws his material from a bewildering assortment of heretics.

The following are just a few of the many examples we could give of the man’s disturbing, dangerous, and unbiblical habit of quoting heretics in the most recommending manner.

For a starter, as we have noted, he asks his readers to join hands with Catholic “saints” and mystics (all of whom are committed to a gospel of works and many of whom are

pantheists, panentheists, and universalists). (See the chapter “A Biographical Catalog of Contemplative Mystics” for studies on Francis of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius of Loyola, Catherine of Genoa, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, Dominic, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Madame Guyon, Thomas à Kempis, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Bernard of Clairvaux, Karl Rahner, John Main, Mother Teresa, Thomas Merton, Brennan Manning, John Michael Talbot, and others cited by Foster.)

Foster quotes **ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI** (he spells his name Luguori) at least three times in *Celebration of Discipline* (1978, pp. 132-134). Liguori was one of the greatest worshippers of Mary the Roman Catholic Church has ever produced. His book *The Glories of Mary* (1750) is simply blasphemous. Note the following quotations:

“... though the sinner does not himself merit the graces which he asks, yet he receives them, because this Blessed Virgin asks and obtains them from God, ON ACCOUNT OF HER OWN MERITS” (*The Glories of Mary*, edited by Eugene Grimm, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1931, p. 73).

“IT WAS THEN BY THIS GREAT OFFERING OF MARY THAT WE WERE BORN TO THE LIFE OF GRACE; WE ARE THEREFORE HER VERY DEAR CHILDREN, SINCE WE COST HER SO GREAT SUFFERING” (p. 59).

“This was revealed by our Blessed Lady herself to St. Bridget, saying, ‘I am the Queen of heaven and the Mother of Mercy; I AM THE JOY OF THE JUST, AND THE DOOR THROUGH WHICH SINNERS ARE BROUGHT TO GOD’ (p. 43).

“Let us, then, have recourse, and always have recourse, to this most sweet Queen, IF WE WOULD BE CERTAIN OF SALVATION ... LET US REMEMBER THAT IT IS IN ORDER TO SAVE THE GREATEST AND MOST

ABANDONED SINNERS, who recommend themselves to her, that Mary is made the Queen of Mercy” (pp. 43, 44).

Foster heavily promotes the Catholic Trappist monk **THOMAS MERTON**, recommending many of his books and quoting from him frequently, at least 15 times in *Celebration of Discipline*, not giving the slightest warning about the man. Foster says that Merton “has done more than any other twentieth century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood” (*Spiritual Classics*, pp. 17, 21). He calls Merton’s *Contemplative Prayer* “a must book” and *What Is Contemplation* “an excellent introduction to contemplative prayer for everyone.” In *Meditative Prayer*, Foster gushes that “Merton continues to inspire countless men and women.” Foster includes an entire chapter by Merton in his book *Spiritual Classics*.

Foster does not tell his readers that Merton was at the forefront of interfaith dialogue, that he claimed to be both a Buddhist and a Catholic, that he had powerful mystical experiences while meditating before Buddha idols, and that he was a universalist. Nowhere did Merton say that Buddhists and Hindus and Sufis worship false gods or that they are hell-bound because they do not believe in Jesus. When writing about Zen Buddhists, Merton always assumed that they were communing with the same “ground of Being” that he had found through Catholic monasticism.

Foster recommends the universalist mystic **MEISTER ECKHART**, quoting him at least two times in various editions of *Celebration of Discipline* and saying, “Today Eckhart is widely read and appreciated, not so much for his theological opinions as for his vision of God” (*Spiritual Classics*, p. 206). How can Eckhart have had a proper vision of God when he believed that God is everything and that man is divinity?

Foster recommends the universalist **DOROTHY DAY**. He has an entire chapter by and about her in his book *Spiritual Classics*. Day wrote:

“Going to the people is the purest and best act in Christian tradition and revolutionary tradition [she is referring to Marxism] and is the beginning of world brotherhood. Never to be severed from the people, to set out always from the point of view of serving the people, not serving the interests of a small group or oneself. ... It is almost another way of saying that we must and will FIND CHRIST IN EACH AND EVERY MAN, when we look on them as brothers” (Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*).

Foster promotes **KARL RAHNER**. There is a chapter by him in *Spiritual Classics*. Yet he believed in evolution and in salvation apart from faith in Christ. He spoke of the “anonymous Christian,” referring to an individual who unconsciously responds to God’s grace operating in the world, though he might even reject the gospel.

Foster promotes Benedictine priest JOHN MAIN, saying that he “understood well the value of both silence and solitude” and he “rediscovered meditation while living in the Far East” (*Spiritual Classics*, p. 155). Indeed, he did. Main learned meditation from a Hindu guru! Main combined Catholic contemplative practices with yoga and in 1975 began founding meditation groups in Catholic monasteries based on this syncretism.

Foster recommends **HILDEGARD OF BINGEN**. There is an entire chapter by her in *Spiritual Classics*. She had wild-eyed visions and wrote as the direct mouthpiece of God, yet her prophecies taught Catholic heresies, including the veneration of Mary. One of her songs was entitled “Praise for the Mother.”

Foster recommends **AGNES SANFORD**, saying, “I have discovered her to be an extremely wise and skillful counselor in these matters” and calls her book *The Healing Gifts of the Spirit* “an excellent resource” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 136, footnote 1). Foster includes an entire chapter by Sanford in his book *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* and another chapter by her in *Spiritual Disciplines*. Sanford

delved deeply into New Thought, Jungian psychology, and other dangerous fields. She said that she got her doctrine that there is a “spiritual body” within the physical body from New Thought teacher Emmet Fox (*Sealed Orders*, p. 115), who also believed that man is God. Sanford was a universalist and the founder of the dangerous field of healing of memories. She taught healing through meditation, visualization, and positive confession. She said that if she spilled hot oil on her hand in the kitchen, she would confess: “I’m boss inside of me. And what I say goes. I say that my skin shall not be affected by that boiling fat, and that’s all there is to it. I see my skin well, perfect and whole, and I say it’s to be so” (*The Healing Light*, p. 65). (For more about Sanford see the report “Agnes Sanford” at the Way of Life web site.)

Foster recommends **MARTIN MARTY**, who wrote the foreword to *Streams of Living Water*. Yet Marty is a relativist and a modernist who denies the divine inspiration of the Bible and eternal judgment in hell. Marty supports abortion and the ordination of homosexuals, and in an interview with *Playboy* in 1974 he recommended adultery in some situations.

Foster quotes **HARVEY COX**, who repudiates the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith and has described himself as a fellow traveler of the Hare Krishna movement.

Foster also quotes sympathetically and non-critically from the psychoanalyst **CARL JUNG** who rejected the Bible as mythical and communicated intimately throughout his life with a spirit guide.

Foster even recommends New Age mystics. He quotes **MARTIN BUBER**, who rejected the God of the Bible and the fall of man and believed that God is found through interaction with human society and non-doctrinal mysticism. Buber believed that the Bible is largely mythical.

Foster quotes **ELIZABETH O’CONNOR**, who was a universalist and praised the Hindu guru Krishnamurti. O’Connor believed that Christ has saved all of mankind and

is creating a new world through social-justice action. There is no need for individuals to be saved; they are already children of God and merely need to find God's will for their lives and see "the divine life throbbing in the whole of the world" (O'Connor, "Each of Us Has Something Grand to Do," *Faith At Work* magazine, Nov.-Dec. 1979).

Foster recommends the writings of **DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD** (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 62; *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 33; *Spiritual Classics*, p. 156, 251-260). He was a universalist who built the UN Chapel in 1952 as a New Age meditation center. There is a six-and-a-half ton block of iron ore in the center of the room, the polished top of which is lit by a single beam of light from the ceiling. The light depicts "divine wisdom," and the block depicts an empty altar representing "God worshipped in many forms" (<http://www.aquaac.org/un/sprtatun.html>). The iron ore also represents the metal from which weapons are made and the New Age hope that through the power of meditation world peace can be achieved. Hammarskjöld said, "... we thought we could bless by our thoughts the very material out of which arms are made."

Foster recommends **PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN**. He includes a chapter by him in *Spiritual Disciplines*. Teilhard taught that God is the consciousness of the universe, that everything is one, and that everything is evolving in greater and greater enlightenment toward an ultimate point of perfection. He called this perfection **CHRIST** and **THE OMEGA POINT**. Teilhard spoke much of Christ, but his christ is not the Christ of the Bible. For this reason, Teilhard is a favorite with New Agers. Teilhard said, "... I can be saved only by becoming one with the universe" (*Christianity and Evolution*, p. 128).

Foster also recommends the writings of pagan mystics **LAO-TSE** of China (founder of Taoism) and

ZARATHUSTRA of Persia (founder of Zoroastrianism) (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 62).

These are only some of the heretics that Foster quotes and recommends in his books!

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

Renovaré

In 1988 Foster founded RENOVARÉ (pronounced ren-o-var-ay), which is Latin, meaning “to make new spiritually.” This is an ecumenical organization that promotes spiritual renewal through contemplative exercises, charismatic practices, and other things.

Renovaré’s ecumenical thrust is radical. Its objective is “to work for the renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ in all her multifaceted expressions.” Its slogan is “Christian in commitment, international in scope, ecumenical in breadth.” Renovaré’s ministry team represents men and women “from Mennonite to Methodist, Roman Catholic to Church of God in Christ, Assembly of God to American Baptist.”

Foster describes the breadth of his ecumenical vision in these words:

“God is gathering his people once again, creating of them an all-inclusive community of loving persons with Jesus Christ as the community’s prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant. This community is breaking forth in multiplied ways and varied forms. ...

“I see a Catholic monk from the hills of Kentucky standing alongside a Baptist evangelist from the streets of Los Angeles and together offering up a sacrifice of praise. I see a people” (*Streams of Living Water*, 2001, p. 274).

In his book *Streams of Living Water* Foster “celebrates the great traditions of the Christian faith.” These are contemplative, holiness, charismatic, social justice,

evangelical, and incarnational, claiming that all are “true streams flowing from the fountain of Jesus Christ.” In emerging church fashion, he believes that these “traditions,” which represent diverse and contradictory doctrines and practices, are “complementary” and needed.

At the October 1991 Renovaré meeting in Pasadena, California, Foster praised Pope John Paul II and called for unity in the Body of Christ” (*CIB Bulletin*, December 1991).

In Renovaré Foster works closely with Dallas Willard. Willard attended Foster’s Quaker church in the 1970s, and today he is one of Renovaré’s Ministry Team members. The Renovaré web site in March 2008 advertised an upcoming “conversation” between Willard and Foster.

Willard says that “it is possible for someone who does not know Jesus to be saved” (“Apologetics in Action,” *Cutting Edge* magazine, winter 2001, vol. 5 no. 1, Vineyard USA, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=14>).

Kingdom Gospel

Foster calls Dispensationalism a “heresy” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 46, footnote). Thus, he believes that Christians are building the kingdom of God today and that Christ’s coming is not imminent.

Dallas Willard believes the same thing. In his book *The Divine Conspiracy* he preaches a “kingdom gospel” that downplays the centrality of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. (He calls it a “theory.”) The apostle Paul said that if anyone preaches a different gospel than the one given to him by God he is accursed (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul’s gospel is plainly stated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, and it is not a kingdom gospel. It is the gospel of personal salvation through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

We have refuted the kingdom gospel error in *What Is the Emerging Church*, which is available from Way of Life Literature.

Accepting the Catholic Mass

Foster allows for Rome's abominable doctrine that the consecrated wafer of the Mass is actually the body of Christ. He says it doesn't matter to him what one believes about the "eucharist":

"Christian people of honest heart have long differed over how the life of Christ is mediated to us through the Communion feast. Complicated words are used to make important distinctions: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, memorial, and the like. ... I have no desire to unsettle the convictions of any person, irrespective of the tradition by which he or she is able to enter fully into the Communion service" (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 112).

Foster's position sounds sympathetic and kind, but it is blatant disobedience to God's Word, which commands us to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The apostle Paul received directly from the Lord the teaching that the Lord's Supper is a memorial (1 Cor. 11:23-25). Christ is not "mediated" through the Lord's Supper in any sense, and we are not authorized to allow heresies and private doctrines not supported by Scripture. Foster refuses to exercise this obligation. He is willing to allow his Catholic readers to believe that a piece of bread becomes Christ through priestly hocus pocus and that it is perfectly acceptable to pray to this piece of bread and to venerate it as Jesus, which is what all of his Catholic mystic friends do.

Pentecostal-Charismatic Connection

Foster is closely associated with the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement. He believes this movement has wonderful and important things to offer to the "body of Christ" and he accepts some of the most radical charismatic practices, including spirit slaying, holy laughter, and spiritual

drunkenness. He calls these things the “prayer of the heart” but they are actually doctrines of devils.

“Another expression of the Prayer of the Heart is what is sometimes referred to as ‘resting in the Spirit.’ It is the experience of being taken up by the Spirit’s power in such a way that the individual loses consciousness for a time. Some enter a trancelike state; others lie quietly on the ground or floor. ...

“‘Holy laughter’ is still another expression of the Prayer of the Heart. The joy of the Spirit seems to simply well up within a person until there is a bursting forth into high, holy, hilarious laughter. It sometimes is given to the individual in personal prayer, but more frequently it comes upon the gathered community. That is as it should be, for laughter is, after all, a communal experience. To the uninitiated it might appear that these people are drunk, and so they are--with the Spirit” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, pp. 138, 139).

See the book *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements: History and Error* for a biblical refutation of these practices. This is available from Way of Life Literature in print and eBook editions.

Healing of Memories

Foster believes in the heresy of the “healing of memories,” which he doubtless learned from the aforementioned Agnes Sanford.

“My first experience was with a man who had lived in constant fear and bitterness for twenty-eight years. He would wake up at night, screaming and in a cold sweat. He lived in constant depression, so much so that his wife said that he had not laughed for many years.

“He told me the story of what had happened those many years before that had caused such a deep sadness to hang over him. He was in Italy during the Second World War and was in charge of a mission of thirty-three men. They

became trapped by enemy gunfire. With deep sorrow in his eyes, this man related how he had prayed desperately that God would get them out of that mess. It was not to be. He had to send his men out two by two and watch them get killed. Finally in the early hours of the morning he was able to escape with six men--four seriously wounded. He had only a flesh wound. He told me that the experience turned him into an atheist. Certainly, his heart was filled with rage, bitterness, and guilt.

“I said, ‘Don’t you know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who lives in the eternal now, can enter that old painful memory and heal it so that it will no longer control you?’ He did not know this was possible. I asked if he would mind if I prayed for him--NEVER MIND THAT HE WAS AN ATHEIST; I would have faith for him. He nodded his consent. Sitting beside him with my hand on his shoulder, I invited the Lord Jesus to go back those twenty-eight years and walk through that day with THIS GOOD MAN. ‘Please, Lord,’ I asked, ‘draw out the hurt and the hate and the sorrow and set him free.’ Almost as an afterthought I asked for peaceful sleep to be one of the evidences of this healing work, for he had not slept well for all those years. ‘Amen.’

“The next week he came up to me with a sparkle in his eyes and a brightness on his face I had never seen before. ‘Every night I have slept soundly, and each morning I have awakened with a hymn on my mind. And I am happy ... happy for the first time in twenty-eight years.’ His wife concurred that it was so. That was many years ago, and the wonderful thing is that although this man has had the normal ups and downs of life since then, the old sorrows have never returned. He was totally and instantaneously healed” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, p. 205).

The bottom line is that this experience is strictly and profoundly unscriptural. There is not a hint of such a thing taught in the Bible.

Some are impressed with the results of such practices, but if the only standard for the truth of a practice is its effectiveness, then we are left with no certain standard, because the devil can imitate many “spiritual” things. Psychics and psychoanalysts have produced the same results that Foster achieved with his “healing of memory prayer.” Note that he does not say that the man was scripturally born again through this experience. He just became happy, and the manipulation of the emotions is easily within the realm of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Interfaith Activities

Foster is involved in the LIVING SPIRITUAL TEACHERS PROJECT, a group that associates together Roman Catholics, liberal Protestants, Zen Buddhist monks and nuns, universalists, occultists, and New Agers. Members include the Dalai Lama, who claims to be the reincarnation of an advanced spiritual entity; Marianne Williamson, promoter of the occultic *A Course in Miracles*; Marcus Borg, who believes that Jesus was not virgin born and did not rise from the grave; Catholic nun Joan Chittister, who says we must become “in tune with the cosmic voice of God”; Andrew Harvey, who says that men need to “claim their divine humanity”; Matthew Fox, who believes there are many paths to God; Alan Jones, who calls the gospel of the cross a vile doctrine and says there is no absolute authority; and Desmond Tutu, who says, “... because everybody is a God-carrier, all are brothers and sisters.”

God’s Word unequivocally reproves Foster’s activity with the commandment, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Richard Foster believes he is promoting a true spiritual revival within Christianity, but he is the blind leading the

blind. His writings are an exceedingly dangerous mixture of truth and error. Pastors and teachers need to warn their people to stay away from him, for “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

Centering Prayer

To illustrate how unscriptural and spiritually dangerous the contemplative practices are we will look at one of the most popular ones: Centering Prayer.

Centering prayer is also called centering down. It involves quieting the mind and emptying it of conscious thoughts about God with the objective of entering into a non-verbal experiential communion with God in the center of one's being and thereby achieving direct revelation from God.

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" (Foster, *Finding Grace at the Center*, p. 28).

Here is how Richard Foster describes it:

"Then we move in faith to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dwelling in creative love in the depths of our being. This is the whole essence of the prayer. ... All the rest of the method is simply a means to enable us to abide quietly in this center, and to allow our whole being to share in this refreshing contact with its Source" (*Finding Grace at the Center*, 2002, p. 32).

"... savor the silence, the Presence..." (p. 35).

"As soon as we move in love to God present in our depths, we are there ... we simply want to remain there and be what we are" (p. 39).

"We might think of it as if the Lord Himself, present in our depths, were quietly repeating His own name, evoking His presence and very gently summoning us to an attentive response. We are quite passive. We let it happen" (p. 39).

"... to enter into our Christ-being in the depths" (p. 42).

"... we want immediate contact with God Himself, and not some thought, image, or vision of him..." (p. 42).

“... open yourself interiorly to the mystery of God’s enveloping presence” (p. 48).

“... interior silence is the proximate goal of this prayer” (p. 52).

“... our theme is the center, that is, the place of meeting of the human spirit and the divine Spirit” (p. 80).

The practice is called “this union, this face-to-face encounter” (p. 15), “passive meditation” (p. 20), “a fourth state of consciousness” (p. 34), “savoring the silence” (p. 35), “this nothing” (p. 49), “the deep waters of silence” (p. 52), “deep tranquility” (p. 54).

Centering prayer is an attempt to enter into a non-thinking mode. Basil Pennington said: “In a meditation like Centering Prayer, you leave the rational mind and emotions behind, open yourself to rest in the Divine. St. Thomas Aquinas says, ‘Where the mind leaves off, the heart goes beyond’” (interview with Mary NurrieStearns published on the Personal Transformation website, <http://www.personaltransformation.com/Pennington.html>).

In *The Signature of Jesus*, Brennan Manning says centering prayer requires three steps.

The first step is to quiet down and “stop thinking about God” (p. 212).

The second step is to choose a “sacred word” and “without moving your lips, repeat the word inwardly, slowly, and often” (p. 218). The word might be “love” or “God” or something else. This is to be done until the mind is dwelling upon that one word without distraction and is carried by that practice into a non-thinking communion with God at the center of one’s being. The mantra is the key to entering the non-thinking mode. Ray Yungen explains:

“When a word or phrase is repeated over and over, after just a few repetitions, those words lose their meaning and become just sounds. ... After three or four times, the word can begin to lose its meaning, and if this repeating of

words were continued, normal thought processes could be blocked, making it possible to enter an altered state of consciousness because of hypnotic effect that begins to take place. It really makes no difference whether the words are 'You are my God' or 'I am calm,' the results are the same" (*A Time of Departing*, p. 150).

The mantra, or repetition of a word, produces a mindless hypnotic state. The actual meaning of the word quickly becomes lost to the mind, and that is the objective. The mantra allows the practitioner to put aside thinking in order to reach an altered state of consciousness called "the silence place" in which one allegedly experiences God directly.

Practitioners of eastern religions recognize the power of the mantra in entering this state. Deepak Chopra, for example, says:

"A mantra ... has little or no meaning to distract us. Therefore it is an easier vehicle for going inward than prayer or verbal contemplation" (*How to Know God*, p. 94).

Amazingly, Chopra, a New Age Hindu who believes in the divinity of man, recommends the ancient Catholic contemplative manual *The Cloud of Unknowing*. He considers the centering prayer techniques to be the same as Hindu yoga.

"There is no doubt that people resist the whole notion of God being an inner phenomenon. ... Yet its importance is stated eloquently in the medieval document known as 'The Cloud of Unknowing,' written anonymously in the fourteenth century. ... The writer informs us that ANY THOUGHT IN THE MIND SEPARATES US FROM GOD, because thought sheds light on its object. ... Even though the cloud of unknowing baffles us, it is actually closer to God than even a thought about God and his marvelous creation. We are advised to go into a 'cloud of forgetting' about anything other than the silence of the inner world. For centuries this document has seemed

utterly mystical, but it makes perfect sense once we realize that THE RESTFUL AWARENESS RESPONSE, WHICH CONTAINS NO THOUGHTS, is being advocated. ...

“We aren’t talking about the silence of an empty mind ... But the thought takes place against a background and nonthought. Our writer equates it with KNOWING SOMETHING THAT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE STUDIED. The mind is full of a kind of knowing that could speak to us about anything, yet it has no words; therefore we seek this knowingness in the background” (Chopra, *How to Know God*, 2000, pp. 94, 95, 98).

In this same book, Chopra says, “I believe that God has to be known by looking in the mirror” (p. 9). Thus Chopra is describing meditative methods whereby the individual can allegedly come into contact with his “higher self” or divinity, yet he is using Catholic mysticism to get there! And the same manual, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, is a popular manual among contemplative evangelicals.

Chopra says that mantra-induced mind-emptying centering prayer techniques result in non-verbal revelation.

This is a loud warning to those who have ears to hear.

Richard Foster says repetitious prayers such as “breath prayers” “BIND THE MIND” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, p. 124).

Tricia Rhodes, in her book *The Soul at Rest*, which is “a step-by-step journey of learning contemplative prayer,” suggests:

“Make every effort to stop the flow of talking going on within you--to slow it down until it comes to a halt” (*The Soul at Rest*, 1996, p. 28).

The third step is to return one’s mind to the sacred word when distractions come. Manning suggests ending the session by quoting the Lord’s Prayer in a rote manner. He recommends two 20-minute centering sessions per day.

The result of centering prayer is supposed to be mystical knowledge obtained through communion with God in one's being.

“For in this darkness we experience an intuitive understanding of everything material and spiritual without giving special attention to anything in particular” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 68).

“To know God in this way is to perceive a new dimension to all reality” (*Finding Grace at the Center*, p. 60).

“... we learn that our willingness to listen in silence opens up a quiet space in which we can hear His voice, a voice that longs to speak and offer us guidance for our next step” (Ruth Barton, “Beyond Words,” *Discipleship Journal*, Sept-Oct. 1999).

Lectio Divina

The term “lectio divina” is Latin and means “sacred reading.” It is a Catholic monastic method of reading the Scripture in a mystical way.

At first glance *lectio divina* (pronounced lex'-ee-o di-veen'-a) might not sound very different from a traditional devotional approach that involves reading and meditating on Scripture in communion with the Holy Spirit. But where it differs is highly significant and dangerous.

First, lectio divina does not refer to “meditation” in a Scriptural sense.

Proponents of *lectio divina* point to passages of Scripture that refer to “meditation” (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2), and the uninformed reader would be led to believe that they are describing a Scriptural practice. In fact, they are describing something very different.

Consider a description of *lectio divina*. The practitioner is taught to begin with deep breathing exercises and repetition of a “prayer word” *to enter into a contemplative state*. This refers to a mantra. The goal is to “become interiorly silent” (Luke Dysinger, “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,” *Valyermo Benedictine*, Spring 1990). Having prepared himself, the practitioner reads a portion of Scripture slowly and repeatedly, three or four times. Choosing a word or phrase that particularly “speaks to him,” he slowly repeats it, allowing it to interact with his “inner world of concerns, memories and ideas.” Next, he converses with God about the text. Finally, he rests in silence before God in thoughtless mysticism.

Catholic priest Luke Dysinger says, “Once again we practice SILENCE, LETTING GO OF OUR OWN WORDS; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.”

Notice how Thomas Merton describes the meditation performed in *lectio divina* and other Catholic contemplative practices:

“Meditation is ... a series of interior activities which prepare us for union with God” (*Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, 1960, p. 54).

“Meditation is more than mere practical thinking” (p. 55).

“... the fruitful silence in which WORDS LOSE THEIR POWER AND CONCEPTS ESCAPE OUR GRASP is perhaps the perfection of meditation” (p. 57).

“More often than not, we can be content to simply rest, and float peacefully with the deep current of love, doing nothing of ourselves, but allowing the Holy Spirit to act in the secret depths of our soul” (pp. 101, 102).

Richard Foster, who has had a far-reaching influence on evangelicalism’s contemplative practices, quotes Catholic mystic Madame Guyon as follows:

“Once you sense the Lord’s presence, THE CONTENT OF WHAT YOU READ IS NO LONGER IMPORTANT. The scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to him. ... You should always remember that YOU ARE NOT THERE TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU HAVE READ; rather you are reading to turn your mind from the outward things to the deep parts of your being. YOU ARE NOT THERE TO LEARN OR TO READ, BUT YOU ARE THERE TO EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF YOUR LORD!” (*Devotional Classics*).

Thelma Hall’s book on *lectio divina* is entitled *Too Deep for Words*. This describes the ultimate objective of the mystical practice.

Mike Pershon of Youth Specialities says *lectio divina* should take the practitioner to a different level of consciousness (www.cellofpeace.com/refl_lectio.htm).

Robert Webber, late Wheaton College professor, confirms the transcendental aspect of *lectio divina*:

“The goal of Lectio Divina is union with God through a meditative and contemplative praying of Scripture. ... All such attempts at verbalizing the experience necessarily fail to express the reality for the simple reason that CONTEMPLATION TRANSCENDS THE THINKING AND REASONING of meditation ... Contemplatio shifts praying the Scripture into a new language (SILENCE). This silence does not ask us to do anything, it is a call to being. Thomas Merton says, “THE BEST WAY TO PRAY IS: STOP” (*The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life*, 2006, pp. 209, 210).

Mark Yaconelli, who speaks in evangelical settings, describes *lectio divina* as follows:

“In order to practice *lectio divina*, select a time and place that is peaceful and in which you may be alert and prayer fully attentive. Dispose yourself for prayer in whatever way is natural for you. This may be a spoken prayer to God to open you more fully to the Spirit, a gentle relaxation process that focuses on breathing, singing or chanting, or simply a few minutes of SILENCE TO EMPTY YOURSELF OF THOUGHTS, IMAGES, AND EMOTIONS” (web.archive.org/web/20080724110254/http://www.ymsp.org/resources/practices/lectio_divina.html).

It is obvious that meditation and prayer, after the *lectio divina* fashion, is far removed from simply contemplating on the Scripture before the Lord, seeking better understanding of it, talking with God about it, and applying it to one’s life by the wisdom and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Second, lectio divina associates the practitioner with centuries-old heresy.

Lectio divina was invented by the heretic Origen in the third century and was adopted as a Roman Catholic practice in the Dark Ages. Origen is a dangerous man to follow.

Among other heresies, he denied the infallible inspiration of Scripture and the literal history of the early chapters of Genesis, taught baptismal regeneration and universal salvation, and believed that Jesus is a created being.

The practice of *lectio divina* was incorporated into the rules of Rome's dark monasticism. It was systematized into four steps in the 12th century by Guido II, a Carthusian monk, in "The Ladder of Four Rungs" or "The Monk's Ladder." The four steps are reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation, which are supposed to be the means by which one "can climb from earth to heaven" and learn "heavenly secrets."

Thus, *lectio divina* is intimately associated with Roman Catholicism and its false gospel. Modern *lectio divina* gurus such as Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating follow in the footsteps of ancient Catholic heretics by intertwining this practice with the heresies of Rome. Merton, for example, associates *lectio divina* with the Mass (which he describes as a "living and supremely efficacious re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice"), baptismal regeneration, meriting union with God, prayers to Mary, and salvation through works (*Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, pp. 62, 71, 72, 74, 108).

Bible believers have maintained rich devotional practices throughout the church age without resorting to something invented by heretics and developed in the bosom of the Harlot Church.

Third, lectio divina is typically used as a means of receiving personal revelation and mystical experiences beyond the words of Scripture.

Youth Specialties' *Youth Worker Journal* says of *lectio divina*, "THE GOAL ISN'T EXEGESIS OR ANALYSIS, but allowing God to speak to us through the word" (quoted from Brian Flynn, "Lectio Divina--Sacred Divination").

This refers to a mystical knowing and a transcendental revelation that supposedly exists beyond conscious thought.

Brian Flynn makes an important observation:

“The concept of allowing God to speak through His Word is perfectly legitimate. I experience that when I read or meditate on the Bible. However, in the context of this [Youth Specialties’] article the purpose is not to contemplate the meaning of a Bible verse by thinking about it but is rather meant to gain an experience from it.”

Thomas Keating says: “The early monks ... would sit with that sentence or phrase ... just listening, repeating slowly the same short text over and over again. This receptive disposition enabled the Holy Spirit to expand their capacity to listen” (“The Classical Monastic Practice of Lectio Divina”).

The danger of the *lectio divina* method is illustrated by the fact that its practitioners are taught heresy by this means. This is evident in that Catholic mystic saints have been confirmed in their heresies by this practice for the space of more than a millennium.

Consider a revelation that Basil Pennington said he received through *lectio divina*. He said that he chose Christ’s words “I am the way” from John 14:6 and repeated them during his meditation and throughout the day. At the end of the day when he was tired and wasn’t looking forward to singing evening prayers at the monastery he says the Lord spoke to him and said, “Oh yes, you are the way,” so he “went and sang Vespers and had a great time” (interview with Mary NurrieStearns published on the Personal Transformation website, www.personaltransformation.com/Pennington.html).

Note that “the Lord” allegedly took the declaration that Christ is the way and applied it to Pennington, instructing him that he, too, is the way, which is rank heresy.

We believe passionately in studying Scripture and seeking God’s illumination of it, but this is done through a process of interpretive Bible study and active contemplation (e.g., Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15), rather than

through a mystical process that seeks to go beyond the Bible's words and is intimately associated with heresy.

Former psychic Brian Flynn warns:

“By taking passages of Scripture, which have an intended meaning, and breaking them down into smaller, separate segments, often for the purpose of chanting over and over, the true meaning of the passages is lost. Rather a form of occult mysticism is practiced--with the hope and intention of gaining a mystical experience that God never intended when He gave the inspired words to His servants” (*Running against the Wind*, p. 136).

Fourth, the traditional practice of lectio divina involves the search for a “deeper” meaning of Scripture.

This refers to Origen's spiritualized meaning that is beyond the literal. Origen claimed that the Scripture has four levels of meaning. He spoke of the letter and the spirit, the exterior and the interior. While acknowledging a historical, literal meaning, he emphasized the “allegorical” sense. He likened the literal meaning of Scripture to water, whereas the deeper allegorical meaning is the wine. Following Origen, Gregory the Great interpreted the “wheel within the wheel” of Ezekiel 1:16 to mean that the allegorical meaning is hidden within the literal meaning of Scripture. This error leaves the interpretation of Scripture up to the imagination of the reader, because if the Bible does not mean what it says when interpreted by the normal-literal method, then we cannot know for certain what it does mean. This is one of the foundational errors of Roman monasticism, and it is being adopted today by evangelicals.

Thomas Keating says: “By ‘ruminating’ I mean sitting with a sentence, phrase or even one word that emerges from the text, allowing the Spirit to expand our listening capacity and to OPEN US TO ITS DEEPER MEANING; in other words, TO PENETRATE THE SPIRITUAL SENSE of a scripture passage” (“The Classical Monastic Practice of Lectio Divina”).

It is obvious that this “deeper meaning” carries one beyond the true meaning of Scripture, since it is a practice that is loved by Roman Catholics. For centuries Catholic monks and nuns have “meditated” on the Scripture via the method of *lectio divina*, but they have never come to the knowledge of the truth! It has only confirmed them in their commitment to Rome’s heresies.

Fifth, the practice of lectio divina does not include a strong warning about the potential for spiritual delusion and the danger of receiving “doctrines of devils.”

Catholic priest Luke Dysinger says, “Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity” (“Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina”).

If Dysinger, who is a modern “monk,” would practice biblical devotion in true communion with the Spirit of truth he would recognize that Romanism is heresy and would flee from it, but he is practicing contemplative practices from a position of unregeneracy and spiritual blindness and unknowing openness to deception.

Brian Flynn gives an important warning about this practice when he says:

“I was having a discussion over lunch with a pastor who taught Lectio Divina at a local seminary, and he attempted to defend the practice. He stated that in the process of reading a page of scripture over and over again a word will ‘jump out’ at you. He said that the Holy Spirit chooses this word for you. However, how do I know that this concept is true? First, there is no reference to Lectio Divina in the Bible. Secondly, how do I know what this word is supposed to mean to me? If it were ‘love’, does that mean I should concentrate on love for self, God, the world, sister, mother, brother? There is no way of knowing other than using my own imagination or desire. ... BY USING THIS PRACTICE, WE ARE TURNING THE BIBLE INTO A MYSTICAL DEVICE FOR PERSONAL REVELATIONS RATHER THAN A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE. By

taking passages of Scripture, which have an intended meaning, and breaking them down into smaller, separate segments, often for the purpose of chanting over and over, the true meaning of the passages is lost” (“Lectio Divina-- Sacred Divination”).

Sixth, the practice of lectio divina is contrary to the Bible’s instruction about Scripture study.

The New Testament does not instruct the believer to sit in silence before God or to put himself into a contemplative-receptive state. It does not instruct us to use the Scripture to try to “experience God.” It instructs us to study as a workman (2 Timothy 2:15). This is an active process rather than a passive one. In the proper practice of Bible study, the mind is fully in gear; the spirit is aggressively seeking God’s wisdom and is wary of deception; one is prayerful, seeking divine help. The wise Bible student knows that it is dangerous to isolate Scripture, so he carefully analyzes the context and compares Scripture with Scripture. He does not depend upon his own intuitions about the meaning of Scripture exclusively but consults trusted men of God and carefully uses godly dictionaries and commentaries.

Lectio Divina is not an innocent means of meditating upon Scripture. It is an unscriptural practice that has the power to draw the practitioner into fellowship with demons.

Labyrinths

On October 13, 2007, Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisburg, Virginia, dedicated its new labyrinth. It was the fulfillment of a 15-year dream by Wendy Miller, professor of spiritual formation (“Following the Path of Prayer,” *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Oct. 24, 2007).

This is only the latest example of how the Pagan-Catholic labyrinth is gaining in popularity among evangelical Protestants and Baptists.

The June 1, 2004, issue of *The Mennonite* featured an article on labyrinths. Marlene Kropf, who teaches at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, promotes labyrinths. Bethany Mennonite Church, Bridgewater Corners, Vermont, has a labyrinth in its lawn. The church’s female pastor uses it as a “personal prayer discipline.” Michele Hershberger, chair of the Bible department at Hesston College, uses labyrinths.

Simpson University in Redding, California, has a labyrinth. This school is associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

Other schools with labyrinths are Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, San Francisco Theological Seminary, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Lancaster Theological Seminary, Northwestern University, Manchester College, Eden Seminary, Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Abilene Christian University.

Even some Southern Baptist churches are building labyrinths. The Weatherly Heights Baptist Church in Huntsville, Alabama, built a permanent labyrinth of stones on its grounds in 2004.

The labyrinth is a circle with a twisting path that winds its way to the center and which is used for prayer and

meditation. The International Labyrinth Society says it is a “tool for personal, psychological and spiritual transformation.”

Used by pagan religions for centuries before the coming of Christ, the labyrinth was “Christianized” by the Roman Catholic Church as part of its desperate search for spirituality apart from the Bible.

Native Americans called it the Medicine Wheel; Celts called it the Never Ending Circle; it is called the Kabala in mystical Judaism (www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth).

The most famous labyrinth was built into the floor of the Roman Catholic Chartres Cathedral in France in the 13th century. It has been duplicated at the Riverside Church in New York City and Grace Cathedral (Episcopal) in San Francisco, both hotbeds of theological liberalism and New Age philosophy.

The three stages of the labyrinth testify to its paganism. (This description of the stages is from the Grace Cathedral web site.) The stages are Purgation (“a time to open the heart and quiet the mind”), Illumination (“a place of meditation and prayer”), Union (“joining God, your Higher Power, or the healing forces at work in the world”).

Lauren Artress, a canon at Grace Cathedral, founded Veriditas, The World-Wide Labyrinth Project, with the goal “to facilitate the transformation of the Human Spirit.” Observe that Human Spirit is capitalized, testifying to the New Age view that man finds divinity within himself. Artress says that she discovered the labyrinth in 1991 through Jean Houston’s Mystery School Network, a psychic New Age organization.

The following quote by Houston leaves no doubt as to her philosophy:

“As we encounter the archetypal world within us, a partnership is formed whereby we grow as do THE GODS AND GODDESSES WITHIN US” (<http://skepdic.com/houston.html>). Exercises at her Mystery School Network

“include psychophysical work, psychospiritual exploration, creative arts, energy resonance, movement and dance, altered states of consciousness, ritual and ceremony, high drama, high play and mutual empowerment.”

Artress says: “My passion for the labyrinth has never let up! I think this is because I get so much from it. I also can teach everything I want to teach through the labyrinth: meditation, finding our soul assignments, unleashing our creativity, spiritual practice, psycho-spiritual healing; you name it! IT HAS THE EXACT COSMIC RHYTHMS EMBEDDED WITHIN IT. I sense that THIS DESIGN WAS CREATED BY GREAT MASTERS OF SPIRIT, who knew the pathway to integrating mind, body and spirit” (Interview with Arts and Healing Network, September 2003).

It is obvious that the labyrinth is an effective tool for New Age meditation, and as such its usage is exploding. There are more than 125 in Ontario alone.

The labyrinth is even being adopted by psychologists for mental health care. St. Joseph’s Healthcare in Hamilton, Ontario, has two labyrinths.

That the same pagan-derived practice would be adopted by evangelicals is a loud testimony of evangelicalism’s apostasy and its frightful communion with “doctrines of devils.”

There is nothing like a labyrinth in the New Testament Scriptures. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray in Matthew 6, He did not even hint at a labyrinth-type prayer. Rather His instructions were very straightforward and simple:

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is

in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

God forbids His people to adopt things from the devil's program and to associate with pagan things such as labyrinths.

“And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:15-17).

Silence vs. The Silence

There is a vast difference between biblical contemplation and the Roman Catholic contemplative prayer that is sweeping through evangelicalism. It is the difference between “silence” and “the silence.”

The silence of biblical contemplation refers simply to a quiet place in which the soul can effectively seek the Lord. In Scripture it is called seeking the Lord (Psalm 105:3; Isaiah 55:6), waiting on the Lord (Psalm 69:6), meditating on the Lord (Psalm 104:34), meditating on God’s Word (Psalm 1:2). In these times, when most of us use computers and smart phones and our waking hours are filled to the brim with distracting busyness, it is important to have daily periods of silence for spiritual devotion. During these times we don’t sit with an empty mind and DO NOTHING; rather we open the Bible and read and meditate on it and we pray IN WORDS to God the Father through Jesus Christ the one Mediator by the wisdom and direction of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, “THE silence” of contemplative prayer refers to pursuing God beyond the Bible, beyond thinking. It refers to putting aside thoughts through mechanisms such as mantras.

It has been popularized by contemplative gurus such as Richard Foster and Dallas Willard and is promoted by many evangelical leaders today, including Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Beth Moore, Mark Driscoll, Max Lucado, Ed Young, Sr., Gary Thomas, Philip Yancy, Lee Strobel, and Charles Stanley.

Harry Plantinga, director of *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, describes contemplative prayer as follows:

“As I was growing up, my church experience seemed somewhat heady to me--concerned more about correct belief than about actually loving God. Whether or not that was a correct perception, I wanted more. I wanted not just to know about God, I wanted to know God ... Christian mysticism addresses that longing of the heart. ... Webster defines mysticism as ‘the doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation and love WITHOUT THE MEDIUM OF HUMAN REASON.’ That definition captures what I have in mind by the term” (*CCEL Times*, April 1, 2008).

In his pursuit of contemplative mysticism, Plantinga promotes Roman Catholic mystic writings such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This book, which came out of the darkness of Roman Catholic monasticism, encourages the use of a mantra to drive away conscious thoughts with the objective of entering into an experiential communion with God in “the nothingness.” *The Cloud of Unknowing* says:

“... dismiss every clever or subtle thought no matter how holy or valuable. Cover it over with a thick cloud of forgetting because in this life only love can touch God as he is in himself, never knowledge” (chapter 8, pp. 59, 60).

“Focus your attention on a simple word such as sin or God ... and WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF ANALYTICAL THOUGHT allow yourself to experience directly the reality it signifies” (chapter 36, p. 94).

“For in this darkness we experience an intuitive understanding of everything material and spiritual without giving special attention to anything in particular” (chapter 68).

Richard Foster, one of the most prominent gurus of contemplative mysticism, says repetitious prayers such as breath prayers “BIND THE MIND” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, p. 124).

This is not biblical meditation; it is a dangerous recipe for demonic delusion. We must seek God through faith, and faith comes only by God's Word.

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

If we try to know and “experience” God beyond the pages of Scripture, beyond the teaching of the Bible, we are walking in disobedience and unbelief and are setting ourselves up for spiritual deception from the hands of the one who appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The late Roman Catholic-Buddhist Thomas Merton, one of the most influential contemplative writers, described his own delusion in these frightful words: “In the end the contemplative suffers the anguish of realizing that he no longer knows what God is” (Merton, *The New Seeds of Contemplation*).

Contemplative practices such as the Jesus Prayer, visualizing prayer, breath prayer, and centering prayer are exceedingly dangerous. Many who practice these things end up believing in a pagan concept of God such as pantheism (God is everything) and panentheism (God is in everything). Through these practices people typically become increasingly ecumenical and interfaith in thinking.

One does not have to choose between knowing *about* God and knowing God personally. GOD IS KNOWN IN CHRIST THROUGH HIS WORD. The study of the Bible is not an end in itself and should never be a mere dry intellectual exercise; it is the means whereby we know God and this is something we grow in year by year as long as we don't lose our first love.

“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

For more on this subject see the book **CONTEMPLATIVE MYSTICISM**, which is available in print and eBook editions from Way of Life Literature.

A Bridge to Paganism

The following is excerpted from our book *Contemplative Mysticism: A Powerful Ecumenical Bond*, which is available from Way of Life Literature in both print and eBook editions.

The Catholic contemplative practices (e.g., centering prayer, *lectio divina*, the Jesus prayer, breath prayer, visualization prayer) that are flooding into evangelicalism are an interfaith bridge to eastern religions.

Many are openly promoting the integration of pagan practices such as Zen Buddhism and Hindu yoga.

In the book *Spiritual Friend* (which is highly recommended by the “evangelical” Richard Foster), Tilden Edwards says:

“This mystical stream is THE WESTERN BRIDGE TO FAR EASTERN SPIRITUALITY” (*Spiritual Friend*, 1980, pp. 18, 19).

Since Eastern “spirituality” is idol worship and the worship of self and thus is communion with devils, what Edwards is unwittingly saying is that contemplative practices are a bridge to demonic realms.

The Roman Catholic contemplative gurus that the evangelicals are following have, in recent decades, developed intimate relationships with pagan mystics.

Jesuit priest Thomas Clarke admits that the Catholic contemplative movement has “BEEN INFLUENCED BY ZEN BUDDHISM, TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION, OR OTHER CURRENTS OF EASTERN SPIRITUALITY” (*Finding Grace at the Center*, pp. 79, 80).

Consider just a few of the many examples we could give.

THOMAS MERTON, the most influential Roman Catholic contemplative of this generation, was “a strong

builder of bridges between East and West” (*Twentieth-Century Mystics*, p. 39). The *Yoga Journal* makes the following observation:

“Merton had encountered Zen Buddhism, Sufism, Taoism and Vedanta many years prior to his Asian journey. MERTON WAS ABLE TO UNCOVER THE STREAM WHERE THE WISDOM OF EAST AND WEST MERGE AND FLOW TOGETHER, BEYOND DOGMA, IN THE DEPTHS OF INNER EXPERIENCE. ... Merton embraced the spiritual philosophies of the East and integrated this wisdom into (his) own life through direct practice” (*Yoga Journal*, Jan.-Feb. 1999, quoted from Lighthouse Trails web site).

Merton was a student of Zen master Daisetsu Suzuki and Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. In fact, he claimed to be both a Buddhist and a Christian. The titles of his books include *Zen and the Birds of the Appetite* and *Mystics and the Zen Masters*. He said: “I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is in the West. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can” (David Steindl-Rast, “Recollection of Thomas Merton’s Last Days in the West,” *Monastic Studies*, 7:10, 1969, www.gratefulness.org/readings/dsr_merton_recol2.htm).

Merton defined mysticism as an experience with wisdom and God beyond words. In a speech to monks of eastern religions in Calcutta in October 1968 he said: “... the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. IT IS WORDLESS. IT IS BEYOND WORDS, AND IT IS BEYOND SPEECH, and it is BEYOND CONCEPT” (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, 1975 edition, p. 308).

In 1969 Merton took the trip of his dreams, to visit India, Ceylon, Singapore, and Thailand, to experience the places where his beloved eastern religions were born. He said he was “going home.”

In Sri Lanka he visited a Buddhist shrine by the ocean. Approaching the Buddha idols barefoot he was struck with the “great smiles,” their countenance signifying that they were “questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing, the peace ... that has seen through every question without trying to discredit anyone or anything--*without refutation*--without establishing some other argument” (*The Asian Journal*, p. 233).

This alleged wisdom is a complete denial of the Bible, which teaches us that there is truth and there is error, light *and* darkness, God *and* Satan, and they are not one. The apostle John said, “*And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness*” (1 John 5:19). True wisdom lies in testing all things by God’s infallible Revelation and rejecting that which is false. Proverbs says, “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going” (Prov. 14:15).

Merton described his visit to the Buddhas as an experience of great illumination, a vision of “inner clearness.” He said, “I don’t know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination” (*The Asian Journal*, p. 235). Actually it was a demonic delusion.

Six days later Merton was electrocuted in a cottage in Bangkok by a faulty fan switch. He was fifty-four years old.

Merton has many disciples in the Roman Catholic Church, including David Steindle-Rast, William Johnston, Henri Nouwen, Philip St. Romain, William Shannon, and James Finley.

Benedictine monk **JOHN MAIN**, who is a pioneer in the field of contemplative spirituality, studied under a Hindu guru. Main combined Catholic contemplative practices with yoga and in 1975 began founding meditation groups in Catholic monasteries on this principle. These spread outside of the Catholic Church and grew into an ecumenical network

called the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM). He taught the following method:

“Sit still and upright, close your eyes and repeat your prayer-phrase (mantra). Recite your prayer-phrase and gently listen to it as you say it. DO NOT THINK ABOUT ANYTHING. As thoughts come, simply keep returning to your prayer-phrase. In this way, one places everything aside: INSTEAD OF TALKING TO GOD, ONE IS JUST BEING WITH GOD, allowing God’s presence to fill his heart, thus transforming his inner being” (*The Teaching of Dom John Main: How to Meditate*, Meditation Group of Saint Patrick’s Basilica, Ottawa, Canada).

THOMAS KEATING is heavily involved in interfaith dialogue and promotes the use of contemplative practices as a tool for creating interfaith unity. He says, “It is important for us to appreciate the values that are present in the genuine teachings of the great religions of the world” (*Finding Grace at the Center*, 2002, p. 76).

Keating is past president of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), which is sponsored by the Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries of North America. Founded in 1977, it is “committed to fostering interreligious and intermonastic dialogue AT THE LEVEL OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE.” This means that they are using contemplative practices and yoga as the glue for interfaith unity to help create world peace. MID works in association with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Consider one of the objectives of the MID:

“The methods of concentration used in other religious traditions can be useful for removing obstacles to a deep contact with God. THEY CAN GIVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ONENESS OF CHRIST AS EXPRESSED IN THE VARIOUS TRADITIONS and CONTRIBUTE TO THE FORMATION OF A NEW WORLD RELIGIOUS CULTURE. They can also be helpful in the development of certain potencies in the

individual, for THERE ARE SOME ZEN-HINDU-SUFI-ETC. DIMENSIONS IN EACH HEART” (Mary L. O’Hara, “Report on Monastic Meeting at Petersham,” *MID Bulletin 1*, October 1977).

Keating and Richard Foster are involved in the Living Spiritual Teachers Project, a group that associates together Zen Buddhist monks and nuns, universalists, occultists, and New Agers. Members include the Dalai Lama, who claims to be the reincarnation of an advanced spiritual person; Marianne Williamson, promoter of the occultic *A Course in Miracles*; Marcus Borg, who believes that Jesus was not virgin born and did not rise from the grave; Catholic nun Joan Chittister, who says we must become “in tune with the cosmic voice of God”; Andrew Harvey, who says that men need to “claim their divine humanity”; Matthew Fox, who believes there are many paths to God; Alan Jones, who calls the doctrine of the cross a vile doctrine; and Desmond Tutu, who says “because everybody is a God-carrier, all are brothers and sisters.”

M. BASIL PENNINGTON, a Roman Catholic Trappist monk and co-author of the influential contemplative book *Finding Grace at the Center*, calls Hindu swamis “our wise friends from the East” and says, “Many Christians who take their prayer life seriously have been greatly helped by Yoga, Zen, TM, and similar practices...” (25th anniversary edition, p. 23).

In his foreword to **THOMAS RYAN’S** book *Disciplines for Christian Living*, Henri Nouwen says: “[T]he author shows A WONDERFUL OPENNESS TO THE GIFTS OF BUDDHISM, HINDUISM, AND MOSLEM RELIGION. He discovers their great wisdom for the spiritual life of the Christian and does not hesitate to bring that wisdom home.”

ANTHONY DE MELLO readily admitted to borrowing from Buddhist Zen masters and Hindu gurus. He even taught that God is everything: “Think of the air as of an immense ocean that surrounds you ... an ocean heavily

colored with God's presence and God's being. ... While you draw the air into your lungs you are drawing God in" (*Sadhana: A Way to God*, p. 36).

De Mello suggested chanting the Hindu word "om" (p. 49) and even instructed his students to communicate with inanimate objects:

"Choose some object that you use frequently: a pen, a cup ... Now gently place the object in front of you or on your lap and speak to it. Begin by asking it questions about itself, its life, its origins, its future. And listen while it unfolds to you the secret of its being and of its destiny. Listen while it explains to you what existence means to it. Your object has some hidden wisdom to reveal to you about yourself. Ask for this and listen to what it has to say. There is something that you can give this object. What is it? What does it want from you?" (p. 55).

Paulist priest **THOMAS RYAN** took a sabbatical in India in 1991 and was initiated in yoga and Buddhist meditation. Today he is a certified teacher of Kripalu yoga. In his book *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice* (1995) and his DVD *Yoga Prayer* (2004) he combines Catholic contemplative practices with Hindu yoga.

All of these are influential voices in the contemplative movement, and those who dabble in the movement will eventually associate with them and with others like them. This the Bible forbids in the strongest terms.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

SOME OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CONTEMPLATIVE PRIESTS HAVE PURSUED THEIR INTERFAITH VENTURE SO FAR THAT THEY HAVE BECOME HINDU AND ZEN BUDDHIST MONKS. FOLLOWING ARE A FEW EXAMPLES:

JULES MONCHANIN and **HENRI LE SAUX**, Benedictine priests, founded a Hindu-Christian ashram in India called Shantivanam (Forest of Peace). They took the names of Hindu holy men, with le Saux calling himself Swami Abhishiktananda (bliss of the anointed one). He stayed in Hindu ashrams and learned from Hindu gurus, going barefoot, wearing an orange robe, and practicing vegetarianism. In 1968 le Saux became a hermit in the Himalayas, living there until his death in 1973.

The Shantivanam Ashram was subsequently led by **ALAN GRIFFITHS** (1906-93). He called himself Swami Dayananda (bliss of compassion). Through his books and lecture tours Griffiths had a large influence in promoting the interfaith philosophy in Roman Catholic monasteries in America, England, Australia, and Germany. He eventually came to believe in the reality of goddess worship.

WAYNE TEASDALE (1945-2004) was a Roman Catholic lay monk whose writings are influential in the contemplative movement. As a student in a Catholic college in Massachusetts, he began visiting St. Joseph's Abbey near Spencer and came under the direction of Thomas Keating. This led him into an intimate association with pagan religions and the adoption of Hinduism. Teasdale visited Shantivanam Ashram and lived in a nearby Hindu ashram for two years, following in Bede Griffiths' footsteps. In 1989 he became a "Christian" *sanyassa* or a Hindu monk. Teasdale was deeply involved in interfaith activities, believing that what the religions hold in common can be the basis for creating a new world, which he called the "Interspiritual Age" -- a "global culture based on common spiritual values." He believed that mystics of all religions are in touch with the

same God. He helped found the Interspiritual Dialogue in Action (ISDnA), one of the many New Age organizations affiliated with the United Nations. (Its NGO sponsor is the National Service Conference of the American Ethical Union.) It is committed “to actively serve in the evolution of human consciousness and global transformation.”

WILLIGIS JAGER, a well-known German Benedictine priest who has published contemplative books in German and English, spent six years studying Zen Buddhism under Yamada Koun Roshi. (*Roshi* is the title of a Zen master.) In 1981 he was authorized as a Zen teacher and took the name Ko-un Roshi. He moved back to Germany and began teaching Zen at the Munsterschwarzach Abbey, drawing as many as 150 people a day.

In February 2002 he was ordered by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (currently Pope Benedict XVI) to cease all public activities. He was “faulted for playing down the Christian concept of God as a person and for stressing mystical experience above doctrinal truths” (“Two More Scholars Censured by Rome,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 1, 2002).

Thus, Ratzinger tried to stem the tide of eastern mysticism that is flooding into the Catholic monastic communities, but he was extremely inconsistent and ultimately ineffectual.

Jager kept quiet for a little while, but soon he was speaking and writing again. In 2003 Liguori Press published *Search for the Meaning of Life: Essays and Reflections on the Mystical Experience*, and in 2006 Liguori published *Mysticism for Modern Times: Conversations with Willigis Jager*.

Jager denies the creation and fall of man as taught in the Bible. He denies the unique divinity of Christ, as well as His substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection. He believes that the universe is evolving and that evolving universe is God. He believes that man has reached a major milestone in evolution, that he is entering an era in which his consciousness will be transformed. Jager believes in the

divinity of man, that what Christ is every man can become. He believes that all religions point to the same God and promotes interfaith dialogue as the key to unifying mankind.

Jager learned these heretical pagan doctrines from his close association with Zen Buddhism and his mindless mysticism. He says that the aim of Christian prayer is transcendental contemplation in which the practitioner enters a deeper level of consciousness. This requires emptying the mind, which is achieved by focusing on the breathing and repeating a mantra. This “quiets the rational mind,” “empties the mind,” and “frustrates our ordinary discursive thinking” (James Conner, “Contemplative Retreat for Monastics,” *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue Bulletin*, Oct. 1985).

This is the same practice that is taught in the 14th century Catholic writing *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which is very influential in modern contemplative circles.

Jager says that as the rational thinking is emptied and transformed, one “seems to lose orientation” and must “go on in blind faith and trust.” He says that there is “nothing to do but surrender” to “THIS PURE BLACKNESS” where “NO IMAGE OR THOUGHT OF GOD REMAINS.”

This is idolatry. To reject the Revelation God has given of Himself and to attempt to find Him beyond this through blind mysticism is to trade the true and living God for an idol.

THERE IS ALSO AN INTIMATE AND GROWING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CONTEMPLATIVE MOVEMENT AND THE NEW AGE.

The aforementioned Thomas Keating is past president of the Temple of Understanding, a New Age organization founded in 1960 by Juliet Hollister. The mission of this organization is to “create a more just and peaceful world.” The tools for reaching this objective include interfaith education, dialogue, and experiential knowledge (mystical practices).

Shambhala Publications, a publisher that specializes in Occultic, Jungian, New Age, Buddhist, and Hindu writings, also publishes the writings of Catholic mystics, including *The Wisdom of the Desert* by Thomas Merton, *The Writings of Hildegard of Bingen*, and *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence.

Sue Monk Kidd, who believes in the divinity of mankind and considers herself a goddess, was asked to write recommendations to two Catholic contemplative books. She wrote the foreword to the 2006 edition of Henri Nouwen's *With Open Hands* and the introduction to the 2007 edition of Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

New Ager Caroline Myss (pronounced mace) has written a book based on Teresa of Avila's visions. It is entitled *Entering the Castle: Finding the Inner Path to God and Your Soul's Purpose*. Myss says, "For me, the spirit is the vessel of divinity" ("Caroline Myss' Journey," *Conscious Choice*, September 2003).

On April 15, 2008, emerging church leaders Rob Bell and Doug Pagitt joined the Dalai Lama for the New Age Seeds of Compassion InterSpiritual Event in Seattle. It brought together Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Buddhists, Sikhs, Muslims, and others. The event featured a dialogue on "the themes common to all spiritual traditions." The Dalai Lama said, "I think everyone, ultimately, deep inside [has] some kind of goodness" ("Emergent Church Leaders' InterSpirituality," *Christian Post*, April 17, 2008).

In his book *Velvet Jesus*, Bell gives a glowing recommendation of the New Age philosopher Ken Wilber. Bell recommends that his readers sit at Wilber's feet for three months!

"For a mind-blowing introduction to emergence theory and divine creativity, set aside three months and read Ken Wilber's *A Brief History of Everything*" (*Velvet Elvis*, p. 192).

The aforementioned Catholic contemplative monk Wayne Teasdale conducted a *Mystic Heart* seminar series with Wilber. In the first seminar in this series Teasdale said, “You are God; I am God; they are God; it is God” (“The Mystic Heart: The Supreme Identity,” <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7652038071112490301&q=ken+Wilber>).

Roger Oakland remarks:

“Ken Wilber was raised in a conservative Christian church, but at some point he left that faith and is now a major proponent of Buddhist mysticism. His book that Bell recommends, *A Brief History of Everything*, is published by Shambhala Publications, named after the term, which in Buddhism means the mystical abode of spirit beings. ... Wilber is perhaps best known for what he calls integral theory. On his website, he has a chart called the Integral Life Practice Matrix, which lists several activities one can practice ‘to authentically exercise all aspects or dimensions of your own being-in-the-world.’ Here are a few of these spiritual activities that Wilber promotes: yoga, Zen, centering prayer, kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), TM, tantra (Hindu-based sexuality), and kundalini yoga. ... *A Brief History of Everything* discusses these practices (in a favorable light) as well. For Rob Bell to say that Wilber’s book is ‘mind-blowing’ and readers should spend three months in it leaves no room for doubt regarding Rob Bell’s spiritual sympathies. What is alarming is that so many Christian venues, such as Christian junior high and high schools, are using *Velvet Elvis* and the *Noomas*” (*Faith Undone*, p. 110).

In *Up from Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* (1981, 2004), Ken Wilber calls the Garden of Eden “a fable” and the biblical view of history “amusing” (pp. xix, 3). He describes his “perennial philosophy” as follows:

“... it is true that there is some sort of Infinite, some type of Absolute Godhead, but it cannot properly be conceived as a colossal Being, a great Daddy, or a big Creator set apart from its creations, from things and events and human

beings themselves. Rather, it is best conceived (metaphorically) as the ground or suchness or condition of all things and events. It is not a Big Thing set apart from finite things, but rather the reality or suchness or ground of all things. ... the perennial philosophy declares that the absolute is One, Whole, and Undivided” (p. 6).

Wilber says that this perennial philosophy “forms the esoteric core of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Sufism, AND CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM” (p. 5).

Thus, this New Ager recognizes that Roman Catholic mysticism, which spawned the contemplative movement within Protestantism, has the same esoteric core faith as pagan idolatry!

Dancing with Demons

The following is excerpted from our book *Contemplative Mysticism: A Powerful Ecumenical Bond*, which is available from Way of Life Literature in both print and eBook editions.

The Bible repeatedly warns about the danger of spiritual delusion and exhorts believers to be very careful. Consider the following:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matthew 24:4-5).

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:24).

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

“Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:13).

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

To be sober means to be in control of one’s mind, to be spiritually and mentally alert. It means to be on guard against danger. It is the opposite of emptying one’s mind and letting’s one’s imagination run wild and using a mantra to keep one’s thoughts at bay.

The Bible warns that demons transform themselves into angels of light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). It warns of false christ and false spirits (Mat. 24:4-5; 2 Cor. 11:3-4).

When emergents see “Jesus” in their contemplations, how can they be certain that it is the Jesus of the Bible and not a false christ or a demonic delusion? The only way to be certain is by making the Bible the central authority and carefully testing everything by it, but mysticism does not provide such certainty.

In Scripture, error is often referred to in terms of cunning deception. We are warned that wolves hide in sheep's clothing (Mat. 7:15). See Matthew 24:11, 24; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 11:13; Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 2:4, 8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; 2 Timothy 3:13.

In light of these warnings, we see the danger and folly of the contemplative practices.

Some of them, such as Centering Prayer, attempt to shut down the mind. The very title of the popular 14th century meditative book *The Cloud of Unknowing* refers to the practice of blotting out conscious thoughts in an attempt to enter into the depths of mindless meditation and transcendental communion with God.

“I urge you to dismiss every clever or subtle thought no matter how holy or valuable. Cover it with a thick cloud of forgetting because in this life only love can touch God as He is in Himself, never knowledge” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 8).

The Cloud of Unknowing instructs the contemplative practitioner to choose a one-syllable word and to repeat it as a mantra to “beat down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting” (chapter 7, p. 56).

The practitioner is instructed NOT to focus his attention on the meaning of the word or to use “logic to examine or explain this word ... nor allow yourself to ponder its ramifications” (chapter 36, p. 94).

It also says, “Have no fear of the evil one, for he will not dare come near you” (chapter 34, p. 92).

Centering Prayer involves “moving beyond thinking into a place of utter stillness” (*The Sacred Way*, p. 71).

Note the following excerpts from *Finding Grace at the Center* by Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating, which emphasize the unthinking aspect of centering prayer:

“It is best when this word is wholly interior without a definite thought or actual sound” (p. 39).

“We are quite passive. We let it happen” (p. 39).

“As it goes beyond thought, beyond image, there is nothing left by which to judge it” (p. 43).

“By turning off the ordinary flow of thoughts ... one’s world begins to change” (p. 48).

“Go on with this nothing, moved only by your love for God” (p. 49).

“The important thing is not to pay any attention to them [thoughts]. They are like the noise in the street...” (p. 51).

“Any thought will bring you out [of the deep waters of silence]” (p. 52).

“[Centering prayer] leads you to a silence beyond thought and words...” (p. 53).

“Firmly reject all clear ideas, however pious or delightful” (p. 54).

“As soon as you start to reflect, the experience is over” (p. 56).

In light of the Bible’s warnings about the great potential for spiritual deception and the necessity of constant sobermindedness, I cannot imagine a more dangerous spiritual practice than centering prayer.

When asked if it is possible for meditation to be “inviting the devil in,” James Finley replies:

“Sometimes I will tell people who express that--well why not try it? Why not try to just quietly and sincerely and silently open your heart to God and see for yourself if you sense something dangerous or bad or dark. And you might discover that the opposite’s the case” (“Experiencing God through Meditation: Interview with James Finley,” Beliefnet.com).

This counsel is unbelievably dangerous and unscriptural. The Bible warns that the devil takes on the persona of an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14-16). The only way to discern the difference between true and false spirits is to be born again

and walking in the Spirit and to carefully test them by the Bible. Catholic mystics such as Finley, Thomas Merton, and William Johnston don't do that and, in fact, don't know how to do that.

Some of the contemplatives do give warnings about the potential for spiritual delusion, but their warnings are ineffectual.

Richard Foster warns that contemplative prayer is "entering deeply into the spiritual realm," and he says that not everyone is ready and equipped to enter into the "all embracing silence" of contemplative prayer (p. 156). He admits that there is the possibility of meeting dark powers, but his suggested solution to this danger is exceedingly shallow and unscriptural. He recommends that practitioners ask "God to surround us with the light of His protection" (*Celebration of Discipline*, 1978, p. 23). He suggests the following prayer: "All dark and evil spirits must now leave" (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, 1992, p. 157).

It is not enough to pray that God will protect us from spiritual danger; we must obey His Word. If we pursue practices that are contrary to Scripture, all the prayer mantras in the world will not keep us from the evil that we will experience there! To pray for protection and then walk in disobedience is not faith but presumption. In such a situation, a prayer of protection is no more effective than holding a crucifix or fingering prayer beads.

Roger Oakland wisely observes:

"I wonder if all these Christians who now practice contemplative prayer are following Foster's advice. Whether they are or not, they have put themselves in spiritual harm's way. Nowhere in Scripture are we required to pray a prayer of protection before we pray. The fact that Foster recognizes contemplative prayer is dangerous and opens the door to the fallen spirit world is very revealing. What is this--praying to the God of the

Bible but instead reaching demons? Maybe contemplative prayer should be renamed contemplative terror. ... Foster admits that contemplative prayer is dangerous and will possibly take the participant into demonic realms, but he gives a disclaimer saying not everyone is ready for it. My question is, who is ready, and how will they know they are ready? What about all the young people in the emerging church movement? Are they ready? Or are they going into demonic altered states of consciousness completely unaware?" (*Faith Undone*, pp. 99, 100).

The Roman Catholic contemplative monk John Michael Talbot gives an even stronger warning about the potential danger of contemplative prayer. He says:

“IT CAN BE MOST DESTRUCTIVE IF USED UNWISELY. I CAN ALMOST PROMISE THAT THOSE WHO UNDERTAKE THIS STUDY ALONE WITHOUT PROPER GUIDANCE, AND GROUNDING IN CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY, WILL FIND THEMSELVES QUESTIONING THEIR OWN FAITH TO THE POINT OF LOSING IT. SOME MAY FIND THEMSELVES SPIRITUALLY LOST. IT HAS HAPPENED TO MANY. For this reason, we do not take the newer members of The Brothers and Sisters of Charity through this material in any depth as part of their formation, but stick squarely to overt Catholic spirituality and prayer teachings. I would not recommend too much integration of these things without proper guidance for those newer to the Catholic or Christian faith” (Talbot, “Many Religions, One God,” Oct. 22, 1999, <http://www.johnmichaeltalbot.com/Reflections/index.asp?id=135>).

Talbot thus recognizes the extreme danger of contemplative practices, yet he thinks he is capable of using them without being harmed by them. He should listen to the words of Scripture: “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

I AM CONVINCED THAT THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH THINGS OPEN THEMSELVES UP TO DEMONIC INFLUENCE.

David Hunt sounds an important warning about visualizing prayer. He gives the example of a man who visualized Jesus and was surprised when “Jesus” began to interact with him.

“I began to visualize myself as a boy of eight. ‘Now see if you can imagine Jesus appearing,’ [the seminar leader] instructed. ‘Let Him walk toward you.’ Much to my amazement Jesus moved slowly toward me out of that dark playground. He began to extend His hands toward me in a loving, accepting manner. I NO LONGER WAS CREATING THE SCENE. The figure of Christ reached over and lifted the bundle from my back. And He did so with such forcefulness that I literally sprang from the pew” (Robert L. Wise, “Healing of the Memories: A Prayer Therapy for You,” *Christian Life*, July 1984, pp. 63-64, quoted from Hunt, *The Occult Invasion*).

Hunt observes:

“That this was more than imagination is clear. The one who originally visualized the image of ‘Jesus’ was surprised when it suddenly took on a character of its own and he realized that he was no longer creating the image. This ‘Jesus’ had its own life and personality. There can be no doubt that real contact had been made with the spirit world. We may be equally certain that this being was not the real Jesus Christ. No one can call Him from the right hand of the Father in heaven to put in a personal appearance. The entity could only have been a demonic spirit masquerading as ‘Jesus’” (*The Occult Invasion*, “Imagination and Visualization”).

Morton Kelsey taught the use of visualization and exhorted his readers not to fear when the visualizations took on a life of their own! He quoted from Carl Jung, who communicated with a spirit guide throughout his life:

“In the same way, when you concentrate on a mental picture, IT BEGINS TO STIR, the image becomes enriched by details, it moves and develops. Each time, naturally, you mistrust it and have the idea that you have just made it up, that it is merely your own invention” (Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, quoted in Kelsey, *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 226).

Kelsey then comments:

“It is usually not too difficult for most people to start the process by concentrating on something graphic. The hard part comes in realizing THAT SOMETHING COULD MOVE UNEXPECTEDLY INSIDE US WITHOUT OUR CONSCIOUS DIRECTION. That is why it is so vital in developing imagination, meditation, or contemplation TO REALIZE THAT OUR EGO IS NOT THE ONLY FORCE OPERATING WITHIN US” (*The Other Side of Silence*, p. 227).

Since Kelsey didn't believe the Bible, viewing it largely as myth, he didn't understand that when images “stir” and “move unexpectedly” and take on a life of their own it is because one has entered the realm of the demonic.

Consider the practice of guided visualization. A leader instructs the practitioners to get comfortable and then to do something like the following:

“Imagine yourself walking down a road. It's the path of your life. Imagine what the path looks like. Is it curvy? Or straight? Hilly? Flat? Is it wide or narrow, surrounded by trees or by fields? You look down. Is the path rocky? Sandy? Is it dirt? Maybe it's paved. What does it feel like under your feet? And up ahead, what's in your path? Does it look clear or are there hurdles in your way? Something is in your hands. You've been carrying it a long time--it's something you brought with you, in your spirit, up to camp. Look at it. What does it look like? What does it feel like in your hands? Is it hot? Cold? Warm? Is it smooth? Prickly? Sharp? Rough? Is it heavy or light?

“Now look up ahead. A figure is moving toward you. You can’t quite make out who it is, but he seems to know you and his pace quickens as he recognizes you. Now you can see--it’s Jesus! He’s coming closer. What’s the expression on his face as he walks toward you? How do you feel? He says a word of greeting to you. What does he say? How do you feel? Do you say anything back?

“Now Jesus is standing in front of you. What does he say? Now he’s holding his hands out--he wants you to put what’s in your hands into his hands. How does it feel as the object leaves your hands? Do you say anything to Jesus?

“Now you and Jesus start to walk together--he’s holding the object of yours. As the two of you walk along, what do you talk about? Imagine the conversation” (Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way*, pp. 83, 84).

This is either pure fantasy and therefore of no value, or it moves into the realm of the occult. Tony Jones describes how that Jesus allegedly appeared to him during one such episode and spoke to him face to face (*The Sacred Way*, p. 79).

Al Dager of Media Spotlight gives a discerning warning about the extreme danger of contemplative practices:

“Unfortunately, all these exercises serve to do is open the person up to demonic influences that assuage his or her conscience with a feeling of euphoria and even ‘love’ emanating from the presence that has invaded their consciousness. This euphoria is then believed to validate that the person is on the right spiritual path. It may result in visions, out-of body experiences, stigmata, levitation, even healings and other apparent miracles.”

The guided prayer techniques are exactly the same as the techniques I was taught by disciples of the Hindu guru Paramahansa Yogananda before I was converted. We were supposed to use these techniques to view events in our past lives. The yogic meditation led me into dark realms farther and farther from the holy God of the Bible, the God who is

light and in whom “is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). I repented of it completely after I came to Christ. I wrote to the Self-Realization Fellowship Society, testified to them of my Christian conversion, and asked them to drop my name from their rolls.

Emergent leader Nanette Sawyer unwittingly gives a frightful testimony along this line. She said that she is a Christian (of the liberal brand) because she was taught meditation techniques by a Hindu. She said that while “sitting in meditation, in a technique similar to what Christians call Centering Prayer, I encountered love that is unconditional, yet it called me to responsible action in my life” (*An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, p. 44). This occurred AFTER she had rejected biblical Christianity and the gospel that Jesus died for our sins (p. 43). She said that she found love and Jesus through Hindu meditation, but it was not the Jesus of the Bible nor was it the love of God as described in the Bible. It was another gospel, another Jesus, and another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4). John warned, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1), and the only sure way to try the spirits is to test them by the Bible. As for true love, John defined that, too. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

THE FACT THAT ITS PRACTITIONERS CALL CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY “DARKNESS” IS A LOUD WARNING TO THOSE WHO HAVE EARS TO HEAR.

Brennan Manning calls centering prayer a “GREAT DARKNESS” (*The Signature of Jesus*, p. 145) and an entire chapter of his book is devoted to “Celebrate the Darkness.” He claims that the darkness of centering prayer is caused by the human ego being broken and spiritual healing being achieved, but since the practice is not supported by Scripture that is presumption and not faith.

The sixth century Syrian monk called Dionysius the Areopagite said that asceticism and mystical practices can penetrate the mystery of God's "DARK NO-THINGNESS." This man has had a major influence on Catholic mysticism.

The Cloud of Unknowing uses the terms "BLIND" and "DARKNESS" and "NOTHING" repeatedly.

Jesuit priest Anthony de Mello calls centering prayer "DARK CONTEMPLATION" and descending "into THE DARKNESS" (*Sadhana: A Way to God*, pp. 32, 33). He says those who practice centering prayer "expose themselves, in BLIND FAITH, to THE EMPTINESS, the DARKNESS, the idleness, THE NOTHINGNESS" (p. 31).

Catholic monk William Johnston says that meditation is the art of passing from one layer to the next in an inner or downward journey to the core of the personality where dwells the great mystery called God ... WHO DWELLS IN THICK DARKNESS" (*The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion*, 1981, p. 127).

God did hide Himself in thick darkness in the Old Testament era because of man's sin and the fact that Christ's atonement had not yet been made (Exodus 20:21), but in reality God is light and not darkness. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It is sin that separates the sinner from God and His glorious light. The people in Moses' day had to stand away from Mt. Sinai when God gave the Law and God wrapped Himself in darkness, because the Law of Moses can only reveal sin and cannot justify the sinner (Romans 3:19-20). The Old Testament temple signified this separation. God dwelt in the holy of holies, and no man could enter therein except the high priest and that only one time a year, on the Day of Atonement. There was a thick veil that barred the way into the holy of holies.

But when Jesus Christ came and died on the cross and shed His blood to make the perfect atonement for man's sin,

the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom, signifying that man now has free entrance into God's very presence if he comes through faith in Christ (Mat. 27:50-51).

If a contemplative encounters darkness in his mystical journey, that darkness is not God; it is sin and the devil. The darkness of this world is the devil's domain, but God has turned the believer "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). He has "delivered us from the power of darkness" (Col. 1:13) and called us "out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Now we are "children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:5).

Pierre Teilhard described his practice of meditation as "going down into my innermost self, to THE DEEP ABYSS" (*The Divine Milieu*, p. 76). He said: "At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me." At the end of the journey he found "a bottomless abyss at my feet."

This is a loud warning to those who have ears to hear. Though the mystic believes that he is touching light and truth through contemplative practices, in reality he is fellowshiping with darkness and lies and demons. Who were these "persons" who were distinct from Teilhard himself and who did not obey him? From a biblical perspective, we have to conclude that the man was communicating with demons. This is why he taught such demonic doctrines as evolution and a "cosmic" christ that is something different than the person of Jesus.

John Michael Talbot, the popular Roman Catholic CCM musician and contemplative promoter, recommends the use of eastern religious practices such as yoga but, as we have seen, he admits that such experiences "can be most destructive if used unwisely." He even says: "SOME MAY FIND THEMSELVES SPIRITUALLY LOST. IT HAS HAPPENED TO MANY" (Talbot, "Many Religions, One

God,” Oct. 22, 1999, <http://www.johnmichaeltalbot.com/Reflections/index.asp?id=135>).

Anything with that type of power for evil and spiritual destruction should be avoided like the plague!

Philip St. Romain, the Catholic lay minister who wrote *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality* (1990), has experienced many strange things while practicing centering prayer. After “centering down” into silence, gold lights would appear and swirl in his mind, forming themselves into captivating patterns. He felt prickly sensations that would continue for days. “Wise sayings” popped into his mind as if he were “receiving messages from another.” After studying eastern religions he came to the conclusion that he was dealing with kundalini energy, and we have no doubt that he was, because mindless centering prayer brings one into the same dark realm as Hinduism’s yoga. The “inner adviser” that one encounters through centering prayer is demonic.

Even the heathen practitioners of kundalini warn about its dangers. *The Ayurveda Encyclopedia* says, “Those who awaken their kundalini without a guru can lose their direction in life ... they can become confused or mentally imbalanced ... more harm than good can arise” (p. 336). The book *Aghora II: Kundalini* warns many times that “indiscriminate awakening of the Kundalini is very dangerous” (p. 61). It says, “Once aroused and unboxed Kundalini is not ‘derousable’; the genie will not fit back into the bottle. ‘After the awakening the devotee lives always at the mercy of Kundalini’” (p. 20). In fact, the book says that “some die of shock when Kundalini is awakened, and others become severely ill” (p. 61).

St. Romain is communing with demons and he got there, not through Hindu yoga, but through Catholic contemplative mysticism, the same kind of mysticism promoted by the Quaker Richard Foster and the Southern Baptist Rick Warren.

St. Romain has come to depend on the voice that he hears in contemplative prayer.

“I cannot make any decisions for myself without the approbation of THE INNER ADVISER, whose voice speaks so clearly in times of need” (*Kundalini Energy*, p. 39).

The Ayurveda Encyclopedia explains that one can encounter internal voices through yogic mediation, and the practitioner is instructed to listen to the voices and follow their counsel.

“Just as with all spiritual experiences that are out of the norm of supposed societal acceptance, THE HEARING OF INNER SOUNDS OR VOICES (nada) has generally been associated with mental illness. Spiritual counseling reassures a person that their experiences and feelings are spiritual--not abnormal. Understanding nada helps persons feel comfortable when hearing any inner sounds. ... If a sound is heard, listen to it. If many sounds exist, listen to those in the right ear. The first sound heard is to be followed. Then, the next sound heard is also to be followed” (p. 343).

I have never read a more effective formula for demon possession and spiritual delusion, and “contemplative” practices such as centering prayer and visualization and guided imagery are no different in character than Hindu yoga. In fact, many contemplative practitioners admit this.

John Michael Talbot says:

“For myself, after the moving meditations of Hinduism and Taoism, and the breath, bone-marrow, and organ-cleansing of Taoism, I move into a Buddhist seated meditation, including the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. I do all of this from my own Christian perspective...” (*Come to the Quiet*, p. 237).

Meditation practitioner W.E. Butler, in *Lords of Light*, says that mystical contemplation “brings with it a curious kind of

knowing that there is somebody else there with you; you are not alone” (p. 164).

Indeed, but that “somebody else” that the unsaved meditation practitioner encounters is certainly not Almighty God.

Tony Jones admits that the practice of silence often results in spiritual oppression. He mentions “the dark night of the soul” which comes through meditation and says, “It seems one cannot pursue true silence without rather quickly coming to a place of deep, dark doubt” (*The Sacred Way*, pp. 41, 82). He quotes Thomas Merton as follows: “The hermit, all day and all night, beats his head against a wall of doubt. That is his contemplation” (p. 41).

We are reminded of Mother Teresa, who was called a living saint by Catholics and Protestants alike during her lifetime and is on a fast track for canonization in the Catholic Church. She practiced a very serious level of contemplative spirituality all her life, but she found only darkness. This is documented in the shocking book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light, the Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (2007), which contains statements made by the nun to her Catholic confessors and superiors over a period of more than 65 years.

In March 1953 she wrote to her confessor: “... THERE IS SUCH TERRIBLE DARKNESS WITHIN ME, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started ‘the work.’”

Over the years she had many confessors, and she continually referred to her spiritual condition as “my darkness” and to Jesus as “the Absent One.”

In 1962 she wrote: “IF I EVER BECOME A SAINT -- I WILL SURELY BE ONE OF ‘DARKNESS,’” and again, “How cold -- how empty -- how painful is my heart. -- Holy communion -- Holy Mass -- all the holy things of spiritual life -- of the life of Christ in me -- are all so empty -- so cold -- so un-wanted” (*Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, p. 232).

In 1979 she wrote: “THE SILENCE AND THE EMPTINESS IS SO GREAT -- that I look and do not see, -- Listen and do not hear.”

Her private statements about the spiritual darkness she encountered in contemplative prayer continued in this vein until her death, and they are the loudest possible warning about the danger of contemplative mysticism.

Contemplative practices are vehicles to bring the practitioners into contact with demons.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES HAVE EVEN LED SOME TO GODDESS WORSHIP.

Sue Monk Kidd

This is what happened to Sue Monk Kidd (b. 1948), and her experience is a loud warning about flirting with Catholic mysticism.

She was raised in a Southern Baptist congregation in southwest Georgia. Her grandfather and father were Baptist deacons. Her grandmother gave devotionals at the Women’s Missionary Union, and her mother was a Sunday School teacher. Her husband was a minister who taught religion and a chaplain at a Baptist college. She was very involved in church, teaching Sunday School and attending services Sunday morning and evening and Wednesday. She describes herself as the person who would have won a contest for “Least Likely to Become a Feminist.” She was even inducted into a group of women called the Gracious Ladies, the criterion for which was that “one needed to portray certain ideals of womanhood, which included being gracious and giving of oneself unselfishly.”

But for years she had felt a spiritual emptiness and lack of contentment. Prayer was “a fairly boring mental activity” (Kidd’s foreword to Henri Nouwen’s *With Open Hands*, 2006, p. 10). She says,

“I had been struggling to come to terms with my life as a woman--in my culture, my marriage, my faith, my church, and deep inside myself” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 8).

She was thirty years old, had been married about 12 years, and had two children.

Instead of learning how to fill the emptiness and uncertainty with a know-so salvation and a sweet walk with Christ in the Spirit and a deeper knowledge of the Bible, she began dabbling in Catholic mysticism. A Sunday School co-worker gave her a book by the Roman Catholic monk Thomas Merton. She should have known better than to study such a book and should have been warned by the brethren, but the New Evangelical philosophy that controls the vast majority of Southern Baptist churches created an atmosphere in which the reading of a Catholic monk’s book by a Sunday School teacher was acceptable. Their thinking goes like this: Who are we to judge what other people read, and who is to say that a Roman Catholic priest might not love the Lord?

Kidd began to practice Catholic forms of contemplative spirituality and to visit Catholic retreat centers and monasteries.

“... beginning in my early thirties I’d become immersed in a journey that was rooted in contemplative spirituality. It was the spirituality of the ‘church fathers,’ of the monks I’d come to know as I made regular retreats in their monasteries. ... I thrived on solitude, routinely practicing silent meditation as taught by the monks Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating. ... For years, I’d studied Thomas Merton, John of the Cross, Augustine, Bernard, Bonaventure, Ignatius, Eckhart, Luther, Teilhard de Chardin, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and others” (pp. 14, 15).

Of Merton’s autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which she read in 1978 for the first of many times, she says,

“My experience of reading it initiated me into my first real awareness of the interior life, igniting an impulse toward being ... it caused something hidden at the core of me to flare up and become known” (Kidd’s introduction to *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 2007, pp. xiii, xi).

Merton communicated intimately with and was deeply affected by Mary veneration, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism, so it is not surprising that his writings would create an appetite that could lead to goddess worship.

In *The New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton made the following frightening statement that shows the great danger of Catholic mysticism:

“In the end the contemplative suffers the anguish of realizing that HE NO LONGER KNOWS WHAT GOD IS” (p. 13).

What Catholic mysticism does is reject the Bible as the sole and sufficient and perfect revelation of God and tries to delve beyond the Bible, even beyond thought of any kind, and find God through mystical “intuition.” In other words, it is a rejection of the God of the Bible. It claims that God cannot be known by doctrine and cannot be described in words. He can only be experienced through mysticism. This is a blatant denial of the Bible’s claim to be the very Word of God.

This opens the practitioner to demonic delusion. He is left with no perfect objective revelation of God, no divinely-revealed authority by which he can test his mystical experiences and intuitions. He is left with an idol of his own vain imagination (Jeremiah 17:9) and a doctrine of devils.

Kidd’s own first two books were on contemplative spirituality--*God’s Joyful Surprise* (1988) and *When the Heart Waits* (1990).

The involvement in Catholic contemplative practices led her to the Mass and to other sacramental associations.

She learned dream analysis from a Jungian perspective and believed that her dreams were revelations. One recurring dream featured an old woman. Kidd concluded that this is “the Feminine Self or the voice of the feminine soul” and she was encouraged in her feminist studies by these visitations.

She rejected the doctrine that the Bible is the sole authority. In church one day the pastor proclaimed this truth, and she describes the frightful thing that happened in her heart at that moment:

“I remember a feeling rising up from a place about two inches below my navel. ... It was the purest inner knowing I had experienced, and it was shouting in me no, no, no! The ultimate authority of my life is not the Bible; it is not confined between the covers of a book. It is not something written by men and frozen in time. It is not from a source outside myself. My ultimate authority is the divine voice in my own soul. Period. ... That day sitting in church, I believed the voice in my belly. ... The voice in my belly was the voice of the wise old woman. It was my female soul talking. And it had challenged the assumption that the Baptist Church would get me where I needed to go” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, pp. 76, 77, 78).

She began to think that the Bible is wrong in its teaching about women and that women should not take the subordinate position described therein. She came to believe that Eve might have been a hero instead of a sinner, that eating the forbidden fruit had actually opened Eve’s eyes to her true self. Kidd came to the conclusion that the snake was not evil but “symbolized female wisdom, power, and regeneration” (p. 71). She was surprised and pleased to learn that the snake is depicted as the companion of ancient goddesses, concluding that this is evidence that the Bible is wrong.

She began to delve into the worship of ancient goddesses. She traveled with a group of women to Crete where they met in a cave and sang prayers to “the Goddess Skoteini, Goddess

of the Dark.” She says, “... something inside me was calling on the Goddess of the Dark, even though I didn’t know her name” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 93).

Soon she was praying to God as Mother.

“I ran my finger around the rim of the circle on the page and prayed my first prayer to a Divine Feminine presence. I said, ‘Mothergod, I have nothing to hold me. No place to be, inside or out. I need to find a container of support, a space where my journey can unfold’” (p. 94).

She came to the place where she believed that she is a goddess.

“Divine Feminine love came, wiping out all my puny ideas about love in one driving sweep. Today I remember that event for the radiant mystery it was, how I felt myself embraced by Goddess, how I felt myself in touch with the deepest thing I am. It was the moment when, as playwright and poet Ntozake Shange put it, ‘I found god in myself/ and I loved her/ I loved her fiercely’” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 136).

“I came to know myself as an embodiment of Goddess” (*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, p. 163).

“When I woke, my thought was that I was finally being reunited with the snake in myself--that lost and defiled symbol of feminine instinct” (p. 107).

She came to believe in the New Age doctrine that God is in all things and is the sum total of all things, that God is the evolving universe and we are a part of God.

“I thought: Maybe the Divine One is like an old African woman, carving creation out of one vast, beautiful piece of Herself. She is making a universal totem spanning fifteen billion years, an extension of her life and being, an evolutionary carving of sacred art containing humans, animals, plants, indeed, everything that is. And all of it is joined, blended, and connected, its destiny intertwined. ... In other words, the Divine coinheres all that is. ... To

coinhere means to exist together, to be included in the same thing or substance” (pp. 158, 159).

She built an altar in her study and populated it with statues of goddesses, of Jesus, of a Black Madonna -- and a mirror to reflect her own image.

“Over the altar in my study I hung a lovely mirror sculpted in the shape of a crescent moon. It reminded me to honor the Divine Feminine presence in myself, the wisdom in my own soul” (p. 181).

Her book ends with the words, “She is in us.”

Sue Monk Kidd is quoted by evangelicals such as David Jeremiah (*Life Wide Open*), Beth Moore (*When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*), and Richard Foster (*Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*). Kidd's endorsement is printed on the back of Dallas Willard's book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. She wrote the foreword to the 2006 edition of Henri Nouwen's *With Open Hands* and the introduction to the 2007 edition of Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*.

Alan “Bede” Griffiths

Another example of how Catholic contemplative spirituality has led to goddess worship is the sad story of Alan “Bede” Griffiths.

He was born in England and studied at Oxford under C.S. Lewis, who became a lifelong friend. In 1931, while at Oxford he converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism. The next year he joined the Benedictine monastery of Prinknash Abbey near Gloucester and was ordained a priest in 1940. The name *Bede*, meaning prayer, was given to him when he entered the Benedictine order.

He moved to India and became a Hindu monk (while remaining a Catholic priest), calling himself Swami Dayananda (“bliss of compassion”), going barefoot, wearing

an orange-colored robe, practicing yoga, taking the tika, and refusing to eat meat.

He accepted the Hindu concept of the interrelatedness of everything and the unity of man with God.

“He loved to quote the *Chandogya Upanishad* (8, 3) [Hindu scriptures] to show that while our body takes up only a small space on this planet, OUR MIND ENCOMPASSES THE WHOLE UNIVERSE: “There is this city of Brahman (the human body) and in it there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus, and within can be found a small space. This little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun and the moon and the stars; fire and lightning and wind are there, and all that now is and is not yet--all that is contained within it” (Pascaline Coff, “Man, Monk, Mystic,” www.bedegriffiths.com/bio.htm).

He rejected the Bible’s doctrine that there is good and evil:

“I saw God in the earth, in trees, in mountains. IT LED ME TO THE CONVICTION THAT THERE IS NO ABSOLUTE GOOD OR EVIL IN THIS WORLD. We have to let go of all concepts which divide the world into good and evil, right and wrong, and begin to see the complimentarity of opposites which Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa called the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the ‘coincidence of opposites’” (1991, <http://www.bedegriffiths.com/bio.htm>).

At the end of his life he came to believe in the validity of mother goddess worship. This was the fruit of his communion with idolatry through contemplative spirituality. In 1990, after a stroke, he began to speak of the awakening of his repressed feminine.

“When he first spoke about THE BLACK MADONNA, he said his experience of her was deeply connected to the Earth-Mother, to the forms of the ancient feminine found in rocks and caves and in the different forms in nature. HE LIKENED IT TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THE

FEMININE EXPRESSED IN THE HINDU CONCEPT OF SHAKTI--THE POWER OF THE DIVINE FEMININE. Later Father wrote these reflections on the Black Madonna: "The Black Madonna symbolizes for me the Black Power in Nature and Life, the hidden power in the womb. ... I feel it was this Power which struck me. She is cruel and destructive, but also deeply loving and nourishing" (<http://www.bedegriffiths.com/bio.htm>).

Griffiths had a large influence in promoting interfaith philosophy in Roman Catholic monasteries in America, England, Australia, and Germany through his books and lectures. He wrote 12 books on interfaith dialogue, the most popular being *Marriage of East and West*.

Griffiths' love for the Black Madonna is interesting. Sue Monk Kidd, too, as she traveled from Catholic contemplative practices to goddess worship, experienced a great love for the Black Madonna. Thomas Merton did the same thing in his journey into Roman Catholic mysticism and beyond to Zen Buddhism.

This is not surprising because the Madonna was originally borrowed from pagan idolatry, from the ancient mother goddess mystery religions that stemmed from Babel.

Contemplative practices are encouraging the spread of such heresies, and this is a loud warning to those who have ears to hear.

I would urge my readers in the strongest possible way not to dabble in contemplative practices. There really is no telling where it might lead. It can lead to Rome or Buddha or even to Artemis.

This chapter is excerpted from our new book *Contemplative Mysticism: A Powerful Ecumenical Bond*, which is available from Way of Life Literature in print and eBook editions.

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CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC: SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED AND SOME WARNINGS GIVEN, ISBN 1-58318-094-x. This book expounds on five reasons why we are opposed to CCM: It is worldly; it is

ecumenical; it is charismatic; it is experience-oriented; and it weakens the fundamentalist stance of churches. We give examples of how changes are occurring in formerly fundamentalist churches through the instrumentality of contemporary music. The rest of the book deals with questions that are commonly asked on this subject, such as the following: What is the difference between using contemporary worship music and using old hymns that were interdenominational? Didn't Luther and the Wesleys use tavern music? Isn't the issue of music just a matter of taste? Doesn't the Bible encourage us to use cymbals and stringed and loud sounding instruments? What is wrong with soft rock? Didn't God create all music? Love is more important than doctrine and standards of living, isn't it? Since God looks on the heart, why are you concerned about appearance? Isn't Christianity all about grace? What about all of the young people who are being saved through CCM?

THE FOREIGN SPIRIT OF CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC. This hard-hitting multi-media video presentation, published in March 2012, documents the frightful spiritual compromise, heresy, and apostasy that permeates the field of contemporary worship music. By extensive documentation, it proves that contemporary worship music is impelled by “another spirit” (2 Cor. 11:4). It is the spirit of charismaticism, the spirit of the latter rain, the spirit of the one-world church, the spirit of the world, the spirit of homosexuality, and the spirit of the false god of *The Shack*. The presentation looks carefully at the origin of contemporary worship in the Jesus Movement of the 1970s, examining the lives and testimonies of some of the most influential people. Nearly 60 video clips and hundreds of photos are featured. It is available on DVD and as an eDownload from the Way of Life web site.

ISRAEL: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE, ISBN 978-1-58318-116-4. This is a package consisting of a 234-page illustrated book, a DVD series, and a series of Powerpoint/Keynote presentations for teachers. The package covers all of the major facets pertaining to Israel in a professional, technologically cutting-edge way: geography, culture, archaeology, history, current events, and prophecy. The series begins with an amazing aerial flyover over the land of Israel.

KEEPING THE KIDS: HOW TO KEEP THE CHILDREN FROM FALLING PREY TO THE WORLD, ISBN 978-1-58318-115-7. This book aims to help parents and churches raise children to be disciples of Jesus Christ and to avoid the pitfalls of the world, the flesh, and the devil. The book is a collaborative effort. It contains testimonies from hundreds of individuals who provided feedback to our questionnaires on this subject, as well as powerful ideas gleaned from interviews with pastors, missionaries, and church people who have raised godly children. The book is packed with practical suggestions and deals with many issues: Conversion, the husband-wife relationship, the necessity of permeating the home with Christian love, mothers as keepers at home, the father's role as the spiritual head of the home, child discipline, separation from the pop culture, discipleship of youth, the grandparents' role in "keeping the kids," effectual prayer, and fasting.

MUSIC FOR GOOD OR EVIL (4 DVDs). This video series for July 2011 is a new replacement for previous presentations we have produced on this subject. The series, which is packed with graphics, video and audio clips, has seven segments. I. Biblical Principles of Good Christian Music: II. Why We Reject Contemporary Christian Music. III. The Sound of Contemporary Christian Music. IV. Transformational Power of CCM. V. Southern Gospel. VI.

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THINGS HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD: A HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL DIFFICULTIES, ISBN 1-58318-002-8. This very practical volume deals with a wide variety of biblical difficulties. Find the answer to the seeming contradictions in the Bible. Meet the challenge of false teachers who misuse biblical passages to prove their doctrine. Find out the meaning of difficult passages that are oftentimes overlooked in the Bible commentaries. Our objective is to help God’s people have confidence in the inerrancy of their Bibles and to protect them from the false teachers that abound in these last days. Jerry Huffman, editor of *Calvary Contender*, testified: “You don’t have to agree with everything to greatly benefit from this helpful book.”

AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH: A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS COURSE, ISBN 978-1-58318-119-5. (new title for 2011) The course is built upon nearly 40 years of serious Bible study and 30 years of apologetics writing. Research was done in the author’s personal 6,000-volume library plus in major museums and other locations in America, England, Europe, Australia, Asia, and the Middle East. The package consists of an apologetics course entitled

AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH (both print and eBook editions) plus an extensive series of Powerpoint/Keynote presentations. (Keynote is the Apple version of Powerpoint.) The 1,800 PowerPoint slides deal with archaeology, evolution/creation science, and the prophecies pertaining to Israel's history. The material in the 360-page course is extensive, and the teacher can decide whether to use all of it or to select only some portion of it for his particular class and situation. After each section there are review questions to help the students focus on the most important points. The course can be used for private study as well as for a classroom setting. Sections include The Bible's Nature, The Bible's Proof, The Dead Sea Scrolls, The Bible's Difficulties, Historical Evidence for Jesus, Evidence for Christ's Resurrection, Archaeological Treasures Confirming the Bible, A History of Evolution, Icons of Evolution, Icons of Creation, Noah's Ark and the Global Flood.

WAY OF LIFE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE & CHRISTIANITY, ISBN 1-58318-005-2. This lovely hardcover Bible Encyclopedia contains 640 pages (8.5X11) of information, with more than 6,000 entries, and 7,000 cross-references. It is a complete dictionary of biblical terminology and features many other areas of research not often covered in Bible reference volumes. Subjects include Bible versions, Denominations, Cults, Christian Movements, Typology, the Church, Social Issues and Practical Christian Living, Bible Prophecy, and Old English Terminology. An evangelist in South Dakota wrote: "If I were going to the mission field and could carry only three books, they would be the Strong's concordance, a hymnal, and the *Way of Life Bible Encyclopedia*." Missionary author Jack Moorman says: "The encyclopedia is excellent. The entries show a 'distilled spirituality.'" A computer edition of the Encyclopedia is

available as a standalone eBook for PDF, Kindle, and PUB.
It is also available as a module for *Swordseacher*.

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Evangelicals and Contemplative Mysticism
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