



## *Contemplative Prayer - To whom are you praying?*

BY TOM WATSON

*Bended Knee International* was founded fifteen years ago and one of our foundational purposes was **“To provide a ministry of discernment because of the many perversions of the Gospel and the Christian life.”** For some time now, we have been concerned about the growing promotion and acceptance of contemplative prayer among evangelicals. Having just returned from the Navajo Reservation, we know at the time of this writing, contemplative teachers have plans to bring their influence directly into the Reservation.

Contemplative prayer is actually an ancient practice calling for one to enter absolute stillness and silence and to go beyond thought by the use of repeated prayer words or phrases which can even result in an altered state of consciousness. The purpose is to open one up to knowing God and to be receptive to God. It is part of what is called the Spiritual Formation Movement.

If we would trace the history of contemplative prayer, we would go back to the mystical and occult practices of the Eastern Religions. This practice was picked up by the Desert Fathers, a group of monks who lived in the area of the Middle East, beginning around the third century. They taught the practice of contemplative prayer, borrowing from the Hindu and Buddhist religions.

Contemplative prayer then became the practice of Roman Catholic mystics such as St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), Brother Lawrence (1611-1691) and Thomas Merton (1915-1968).

Merton embraced the spiritual practices of Buddhism and Hinduism and intermingled it with Christianity. He said, “I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity.” He believed all people are united to God whether they are Christian or not. Merton, a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemane in Kentucky, more than anyone else, influenced contemplative practices among Roman Catholics and has been highly praised by Pope Francis for doing so.

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), a Dutch Roman Catholic priest, along with Merton began having an influence on those who were considered evangelicals. He taught, “The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of every human being.” He believed every human being can come to God through silence or contemplative prayer whether they know Jesus or not.

Richard Foster (*Celebration of Discipline*), Dallas Willard (*The Spirit of Discipline*) and Eugene Peterson (*The Message*), to mention a few, all came under the influence of Merton and Nouwen.

Foster taught that even people who have yet to turn their lives over to Jesus can and should practice the spiritual discipline of silence and contemplative prayer. He said a Christian, a Buddhist, a Muslim, even an atheist can benefit from these spiritual disciplines.

The acceptance of contemplative prayer did not stop there. Roger Oakland (*Faith Undone*) writes, **“a mystical form of Christianity has infiltrated, to some degree, nearly all evangelical denominations.”** This would include churches, parachurch, schools and seminaries. Corporations such as NIKE are also promoting a form of contemplative prayer called Mindfulness.

*Let the words  
of my mouth  
and the  
meditation of  
my heart  
Be acceptable  
in Your sight,  
O Lord, my  
rock and my  
Redeemer.”*

- Psalm 19:14

(NASB)

(Continued...)

***“If you allow a religious authority to tell you that Scripture is mystical, hard to understand with elusive meanings, then you need a special class of people to inform you of what Scripture says, and you are in bondage to those people.”***

- Randy Guliuzza

*World Magazine, February 13, 2018*

Rick Warren encouraged the use of contemplative “breath prayers” in his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Warren chose three doctors, all who are involved in contemplative practices including Dr. Mehmet Oz to put together his *Daniel Plan*.

Larry Crabb promoted “centering prayers” in his book, *The Papa Prayer*. He admitted he was influenced by Romans Catholic mystic, Brother Lawrence.

Beth Moore, writing on prayer states, “I have picked up on the terminology of Brother Lawrence, who called prayer unceasingly practicing God’s presence.” Moore, along with Priscilla Shirer, played vital roles in the *Be Still* Video produced by Fox Home Entertainment. The main message of the DVD is you cannot really know God if you do not practice the art of going into contemplative silence. Moore states, “If we are not still before Him, we will never truly know, to the depths of the marrow in our bones, that He is God. There has got to be a stillness.”

Moore often refers to Roman Catholic monk, Brennan Manning, who taught, “The first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer.” Manning believed the prayer of one religion is just as good as that of another religion. Moore states that Manning’s contribution to “our generation of believers may be a gift without parallel.” It is no wonder that *Christianity Today* identified Moore as a contemplative advocate.

Evangelicals justify contemplative prayer by using biblical words and phrases to bring them to silence. They also interpret Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God” (KJV) as applying only to believers. The Hebrew word “still” means to slacken, cease or abate and is therefore translated, “cease striving” in the NASB. Many reliable theologians believe this is in the context of the nations and that God is actually speaking to His enemies. Note the following thoughts expressed on Psalm 46:10:

John Calvin – The Psalmist seems to turn his discourse to the enemies of the people of God... Accordingly, the prophet justly requires the enemies of the church to be still and hold their peace...

Charles Spurgeon – Hold off your hands, ye enemies.

Matthew Henry – Let His enemies be still...

James Montgomery Boice – Therefore, in this setting, “be still and know that I am God” is not advice to us to lead a contemplative life...

There are several reasons why the believer should not condone, embrace or practice contemplative prayer.

**(1) Nowhere in the Scripture are we commanded or even encouraged to empty our minds of all thought, especially thoughts of God. There is not one example of Jesus or the disciples practicing contemplative prayer.** There is a place for silence (Psalm 4:4; 62:1, 5) while waiting on the Lord, but Old Testament meditation was upon the law of God (Psalm 1:2) and the Word of God (Psalm 119:15). There are four Hebrew words, in the Bible, translated “meditate or “meditation”. They refer to singing God’s Word or an actual oral recitation of it to oneself (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 35:28; 119:12, 54, 97, 172).

In the New Testament, Paul, writing to the Philippians (4:8) in the context of prayer, gives us eight virtues that should continually fill our minds. Sinclair Ferguson writes:

In our modern world many people seek freedom from anxiety by trying to empty their minds; Paul teaches that true peace can be ours only when our minds are properly filled. He points the Philippians to the store from which they can furnish their minds; things that are *true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy*.

**(2) When one enters into contemplative silence, he/she opens themselves up to a mystical, occult or demonic experience.** Contemplatives even admit that dark forces are frequently contacted during contemplative prayer because mysticism opens occult doors. Even mystics acknowledge that the contemplative realm is no different than the realm reached by the occultists.

Richard Kirby (*The Mission of Mysticism*) writes, “The meditation of advanced occultists is identical with the prayer of advanced mystics.” In biblical prayer (Philippians 4:6, 7), through supplications, thanksgiving and requests the end result is the guarding of our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Not a mystical openness to whatever enters one’s mind.

(3) **Contemplative practices open the door to unite all religions into a one-world religion.** In contemplative theology, Christ is not necessary and all can know God no matter what their religion or even their lack of religion. In Spiritual Formation, you can be Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Goddess, New Age, Native American, Jewish or anything else. It is not a coincidence that Warren, Crabb and Moore are highly ecumenical, especially when it comes to Roman Catholicism.

On this point contemplative thought is best expressed by Merton when he writes, “I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door whether they know Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God”. **The Bible is emphatically clear that there is no salvation, forgiveness of sin, access to God and the glory of heaven apart from saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

To better understand contemplative prayer, we should know what contemplatives mean in the terminology they express; therefore, the following definitions are presented.

Spiritual Formation – A movement that has provided a channel through which contemplative prayer is entering the church. Its base is both mystical and occult with strong roots in Buddhism, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism and ancient paganism.

Contemplative prayer – Going beyond thought by the use of repeated prayer words or phrases.

Silence- the absence of normal thought to get in touch with one’s higher self, the universe or the divine.

Meditation – Ridding oneself of all thought in order to still the mind by putting it in the equivalent of pause or neutral.

Breath prayer – practice consisting of picking a single word or short phrase and repeating it in conjunction with the breath in order to enter the silence.

Centering prayer – meditation to go deep into your center where God is according to Buddhist and Hindu teaching. According to Merton, “at the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth... This little point... is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.”

Mindfulness – an Eastern practice for spiritual enlightenment. TIME magazine recently published a ninety-six page special edition entitled *Mindfulness – The New Science of Health and Happiness*. There is nothing new about Mindfulness except that this Zen Buddhist practice has made its way into schools, the work place, churches and seminaries here in the United States. It is claimed to be a new answer to stress and anxiety. God’s answer to stress and anxiety is prayer (Philippians 4:6-7) resulting in “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension.” Satan, the great deceiver and mimic of God, offers through contemplative prayer, a mystical and occult experience that also goes beyond human understanding. Webster’s Dictionary defines the occult as “beyond human understanding”. The believer should beware.

**Conclusion** – Why are so many evangelicals denying the completeness and sufficiency of Scripture by looking elsewhere for fulfillment in the Christian life? The Scripture is complete and sufficient and all believers must “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Jesus prayed, **“And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent”** (John 17:3). Make sure the prayer of Jesus has been answered in your life!

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Window Rock  
Arizona  
(Left)



Navajo  
Reservation  
(Right)



Crosslands  
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