

# DO CHRISTIAN LEADERS UNDERSTAND THE CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER MOVEMENT?

By Christopher Lawson

Do Christian leaders understand the dangers of the Contemplative Prayer - Contemplative Spirituality [Spiritual Formation] movement? It appears that countless numbers of them do not. Countless others do not seem to care and even others are hostile to those who expose the dangers of this so-called, ancient-future spirituality.

Contemplative Spirituality can be clearly defined this way:

**Contemplative Spirituality: A belief system that uses ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (the silence) and is rooted in mysticism and the occult but often wrapped in Christian terminology. The premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheistic (God is all) and panentheistic (God is in all). [ <http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/> ]**

The concern that has motivated the writing of this article stems from the fact that many Christian leaders are ignorantly engaging in and outright promoting this dangerous spiritual method. The core of this methodology, which can lead to extreme spiritual hazards, is meditative, contemplative - *centering prayer*. In light of this, vast volumes of contemplative promoting literature is being gobbled up by undiscerning Christians. This fact alone shouts forth with clarity that the missing jewel in the 21st Century Church is biblical discernment. The following examples and citations serve to show the incredible lack of discernment showing forth in the Church today.

## NATIONAL PASTORS CONVENTION DISPLAYS LACK OF DISCERNMENT

The *2008 National Pastors Convention*, which was brought to you by: *Zondervan* and *InterVarsity Press*, also had Presenting Sponsors: *Vida*, *World Vision* and *Christianbook.com*. The purpose of the *2008 National Pastors Convention* was stated in their banner sentence for the convention:

**nourish your soul. engage your mind. connect in meaningful conversation**

[Zondervan links to the 2008 National Pastors Convention are no longer active]

Along with the Christian Yoga classes which will be [were] offered by Shelly Pagitt (Wife of Doug Pagitt from Solomon's Porch) at this "Pastor's Convention", people had the opportunity to attend the National Pastor's Retreat. The link to the National Pastors Retreats informed Church leaders that they could "Experience a Deeper Connection with God" by attending this overnight retreat. According to the advertisements, the main speakers for this retreat were [Joe Sherman](#) and [Ruth Haley Barton](#).

**This National Pastors Retreat provides leaders with a safe place to be honest about the challenges of spiritual leadership, to experience spiritual rhythms of solitude, prayer, and community, and to deepen their understanding of leadership**

that flows from one's authentic self. Led by The Transforming Center leaders Ruth Haley Barton and Joe Sherman,... Ruth Haley Barton is a Spiritual Director, teacher and retreat leader trained through the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation and the Pathways Center for Spiritual Leadership in Nashville, Tennessee. (<http://www.zondervan.com/Cultures/en-US/NPC/Retreat/>)

Sherman and Barton are both co-founders of *The Transforming Center* ([www.thetransformingcenter.org](http://www.thetransformingcenter.org)). Barton, president of *The Transforming Center*, is a teacher, spiritual director, and retreat leader. She has served on the pastoral staff of several churches including *Willow Creek Community Church*.

It is well known that Ruth Haley Barton is a promoter of Contemplative Prayer. She is the author of numerous books and in the 1999 *Discipleship Journal* (Vol. 113) she is quoted as saying:

**Ask for a simple prayer to express your willingness to meet God in the silence ... a simple statement ...such as "Here I am." ... Help yourself return to your original intent by repeating the prayer that you have chosen.**

## EVANGELICAL LEADERS PROMOTE NEW AGE AND EASTERN SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

From a Lighthouse Trails press release entitled [Evangelical Leaders Promote New Age and Eastern Spiritual Practices](#), we quote the following at length:

In what appears to be a sweeping phenomenon, Christian leaders are embracing practices and a new spirituality that borrows from Eastern mysticism and New Age philosophy. The changes are taking place worldwide and involve many of the most popular evangelical leaders including [Rick Warren](#), [Brian McLaren](#), [Richard Foster](#), [Tony Campolo](#), and [Eugene Peterson](#).

In Rick Warren's Purpose-Driven Life, on Day Eleven, he encourages people to practice "[breath prayers](#)" by repeating words and phrases over and over in a mantra-style prayer, a practice used centuries ago by a group of mystical monks known as the Desert Fathers. This so-called "prayer" is identical to that found in Hindu [yoga](#) and Zen [Buddhism](#)...

[Ruth Haley Barton](#), formerly of *Willow Creek* and trained at the very contemplative *Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation* in Washington D.C., wrote *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, and teaches contemplative prayer through her *Transforming Center*. Barton co-authored with John Ortberg *Ordinary Day With Jesus*, which clearly instructs readers in mystical prayer practices. And as if that were not enough to show Ortberg's sympathies to this New Age spirituality, he will be speaking this year at the *National Pastor's Convention* where labyrinths, contemplative prayer exercises, and yoga workshops will take place.

Do not think that the infiltration stops there—[Eugene Peterson](#), author of *The Message*, endorsed the back cover of [Sue Monk Kidd's](#) book, *When the Heart Waits*. Monk Kidd, once a conservative Baptist, began practicing contemplative prayer and has now become a major promoter of the practice and of feminine spirituality. *When the Heart Waits* clearly shows her descent into this belief system. What was Peterson thinking when he put his name on that book?

Read entire Press Release:

<http://www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/PressReleasemarhc252005.htm>

But just what is this “invitation to solitude and silence”. And what is this “repetition of sacred words” one is supposed to engage in?

## CONTEMPLATIVE CENTERING PRAYER AND THE SILENCE?

For those who are not yet aware of what “the silence” is, “the silence”, according to Buddhist, Hindu, Theosophist, Christian mystic, etc. literature is a self-induced altered state of consciousness one enters when practicing contemplative “centering” prayer. Referred to by occultists and Christian mystics alike, “the silence” is where individuals say they “commune with the Divine Consciousness”, or, the “Divine Self”. This is one of the roles of “meditation, concentration and contemplation” in the occult training of Hindu Yogi’s and Zen Buddhists. Christian Mystic Contemplatives such as [Thomas Merton](#), [Thomas Keating](#), [Basil Pennington](#), [Bede Griffiths](#), [Brennan Manning](#) (reader use caution at these web-links) and many others have this mystical-occult method into their brand of Christianity. Richard Foster gleaned it from Thomas Merton and other Christian mystics and has popularized it amongst Western Christendom. Basil Pennington, one of the best known proponents of the centering prayer practice, gave specific methodical guidelines for the centering prayer.

From the *Contemplative Outreach, Ltd.* website, on the *Informational Pamphlet on Centering Prayer* page, we read the following under **The Guidelines**:

- 1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. [Examples: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Mercy, Listen, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Yes.]**
- 2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.**
- 3. When engaged with your thoughts\*, return ever-so gently to the sacred word.**
- 4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. [ \*Thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections]**

<http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/site/DocServer/MethodCP2008.pdf?docID=121>

Wikipedia states the end result of [centering prayer](#):

**Ideally, the prayer will reach the point where the person is not engaged in their thoughts as they arrive on their stream of consciousness. This is the "unknowing" referenced in the 14th century book.**

In actuality, “[the silence](#)” is an [altered state of consciousness](#) (Alpha state) whereby human beings, in a self-induced mystical way, interface spiritually with demonic entities that teach *pantheistic* (All-is-God, God-is-All) and *pan-en-theistic* (All-in-God) occult philosophy. Occult literature bears this out perfectly and this is why so many practitioners of Contemplative centering prayer end up believing an unbiblical, mysticism-friendly, Eastern occult world-view. Buddhist’s, Theosophist’s, Hindu’s, Jain’s, Witches, etc. do not come to the Biblical Jesus through Contemplative prayer. In fact, professing Christians can very easily erode their own personal biblical view of God as a result of practicing the unbiblical Contemplative prayer centering method.

## PASTORS INFLUENCED BY CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS?

Are we saying that Ruth Haley Barton is purposefully leading people into altered states of consciousness in order to introduce people to demonic spirits? No, we are not implying that she is purposefully attempting to do this. We are simply making the point that occultists and non-Christian mystics who are in touch with demon spirits, use *the same exact technique as Christian Contemplatives and "centering prayer" advocates*. Or should we say, proponents of the Contemplative prayer methodology are doing exactly what occultists and mystics have been doing for centuries, only now it is Christianized.

To note, the *Theosophical Publishing House* in India, a well known producer of many volumes of occult literature, has published books that state in exactly the same terms as Christian Contemplatives how one can enter an altered state of consciousness. Through this occult method, Christian Mystics and practitioners of the occult alike get the same sensory loaded result! It is through deceitful theological term switching that Eastern evolutionary mystical occultism has worked its way into the Church. Inducing oneself into an altered state of consciousness and allowing ones God-given discernment faculties to be lowered, in order to "enhance communion with the Divine" is a dangerous game indeed. When this happens, the mind can be craftily influenced by malign spirit beings. A convoluted and distorted theology of God is oftentimes the end result of meditative contemplative prayer.

It is important to note that self-induction into altered state of consciousness is extremely dangerous. Christian mystics have done this through the centuries and they are doing it today. Hijacking Eastern spirituality (Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) in the name of Christianity, as a means to "connect with the Divine" and "have an experience", is evil. Yes people are having "experiences" when they do these things but to be sure, they are not "connecting" with the God of the Bible. Let the reader forever remember that the world of the occult is centered around spirituality based on **experience**, not on Biblical truth. Contrary to the schemes of the Prince of Darkness, the kingdom of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ is based on worshipping God "in spirit and in truth". Jesus said to the woman at the well:

**God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.**  
(John 4:24)

## TESTIMONY OF A FORMER SATANIST - MARTIAL ARTS EXPERT REGARDING CONTEMPLATIVE CENTERING PRAYER METHOD

Consider closely what a former Satan worshipper and Martial Arts expert of 18 years says. In his article entitled, [Contemplative Prayer](#), Max Debono-De-Laurentis ([MDDL Discernment and Study Ministry](#)) writes concerning his testimony of coming to Jesus Christ out of the world of the occult:

**When I was heavily involved in the occult/new age, one of the most important forms of developing your communion with the spirits was through mantra chanting and emptying the mind to hear what the spirit has to say to you. I understood that I was to hear my spirit tell me what to do. It worked, and I have the emotional scars to prove it.**

**When I got saved and set free through the shed Blood of Jesus and His resurrection, I believed this stuff was all behind me. I had repented of the occult practices I was involved in, from Martial Arts to Satan worship.**

**In the last 20 years as a believer I have seen more and more practices I thought I had left behind coming into the church and believers calling it Christian and Biblical. These practices have been around for three thousand years or so, and never**

until recently have they been called Biblical. <http://www.maxddl.org/ContemplativePrayer.htm>

## THE WORD OF GOD VS. COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The Christian ought to remember that Satan is able to counterfeit spiritual experiences to such a degree that an undiscerning Christian can end up practicing Christianized occultism and Christianized Eastern mysticism. The definition of counterfeit is: *“made in imitation of something else with intent to deceive”* [ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counterfeit> ] This is exactly what Satan intends to do and is doing, at large, through unbiblical forms of mystical spirituality.

Are Christian pastors being deceived in different parts of the world today? Yes they are! Spiritual deception can happen to any Christian who is undiscerning and who is not grounded in the Word of God. Remember what Paul the Apostle stated so clearly to those whom he sincerely loved at Corinth:

**But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, 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)**

Are Christian pastors today being taught unbiblical, and even occult based mystical prayer methods? Yes they are! Jesus Christ our Lord never taught His disciples to practice “centering prayer”, or to ever so gently return to and repeat a mantra, a “sacred word”, etc. On the contrary, Jesus told His disciples to pray intimately to God and not use vain repetitions like the heathen do:

**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. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. (Matthew 6:6-8)**

Do Christian leaders really understand the Contemplative Prayer, Spiritual Formation Movement? It appears many do not. Are Christian leaders - even the very elect, being deceived today? It appears many are!

**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)**

Christian pastors and Church leaders of today, let us, like the Apostles of old who knew their Lord and who personally knew His ways, be guided by the Holy Spirit and by the everlasting Word of God:

**But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4)**