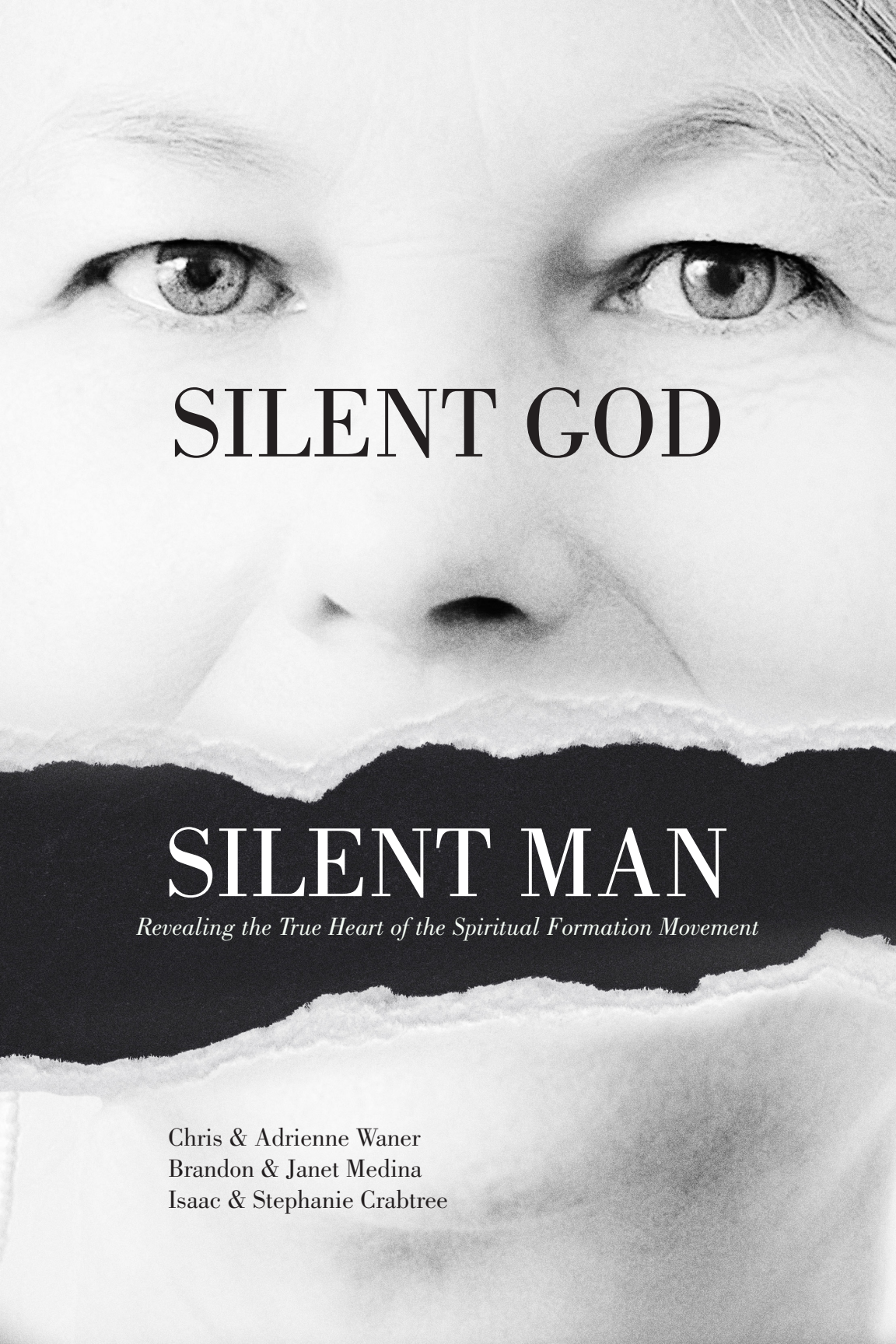




SILENT GOD

SILENT MAN

Revealing the True Heart of the Spiritual Formation Movement

Chris & Adrienne Waner
Brandon & Janet Medina
Isaac & Stephanie Crabtree

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THEOLOGYTHINKTANK
Kansas City, Missouri

Silent God, Silent Man:

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TheologyThinkTank

Kansas City, Missouri 64131

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Introduction

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” —Ephesians 4:14-16

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” —2 Timothy 3:16-17

Almost certainly some readers of this book will view certain parts of its content as mean-spirited, harsh, or even unloving. The truth is that it is our love for the church and its pastors and teachers that compelled us to bring this information to light. Yet we understand that often when concerns are brought for-

ward with the hope of correcting what we believe to be unhealthy practices, some people might wince—especially at our more pointed remarks. Everyone have expectations about what speaking the truth in love should look like, but we also know that discipline, correction, and reproof are aspects of love and, according to the Bible, are useful for growth in life.

We hope that the reader will absorb, scour and test the information, process and discuss it, pray about it, take it back to the Scriptures, and decide for themselves how to move forward. As Colossians 2:8 says,

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

This verse—simply and succinctly stated—is the reason that this book is necessary. The charge to discern and distinguish the truth of the gospel from false teaching compelled us to action in the fall of 2016, when we discovered that our local church had become completely awash in the teachings of the Spiritual Formation and Contemplative Mystical movement. What ensued was twelve months of research, meetings, interviews, and ultimately, this book. It is our hope that this book helps bring to light ongoing practices which we believe are not healthy for the church at large.

The topic of our research is properly termed, Christian Mysticism. More specifically, however, we focus on the issues of Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Disciplines, Contemplative Mysticism, Spiritual Direction, and their increasingly prominent presence in the Evangelical church. The information that we have gathered over the past year has piled up and amounts to what we feel is a veritable mountain of evidence, which supports our serious concern over these issues.

We acknowledge (and have experienced) that discussing these topics can evoke strong emotions. Therefore, we challenge and even exhort the reader to keep feelings in check as he or she prayerfully considers the information at hand. Just as Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-38,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”

God created us to be thinking beings. Clearly, we can process information unlike any of His other earthly creatures. But he did not just give us the gift of intellect; He charged us as Christ-followers to love Him with that gift. We are compelled to believe that loving God with one’s mind translates to studying the Word of God carefully, dedicating it to memory, seeking to understand it, praying for revelation about it, and looking to apply it accurately, discerning the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and forwarding the Kingdom of God with one’s every thought.

This book covers many topics: Christian Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Disciplines, and Contemplative Mysticism—including the leading Spiritual Direction and supervision accreditation institutions and prominent intellectual leaders and authors, information about all of which is necessary in order to understand the scope of these issues.

The information in this book is thoroughly researched and documented with reputable and often primary source materials and quotes to ensure accuracy. This book has not been created to sow division or discord among believers.

Relatedly, none of the information herein can be construed to be personal attacks against anyone. Rather, our focus has always been on the content of the ideas and the strength or weakness of the supporting evidence, be it scriptural or otherwise. A reasoned and balanced discourse in love is the mainstay of mature Christian fellowship and should be in all cases encouraged rather than discouraged. All information should be judged on its truthfulness and adherence to the Scriptures.

Finally, understanding the philosophical and theological foundations of the Spiritual Formation movement is not a simple task. This book, therefore, presents a detailed history of the movement, an analysis of the core philosophy and theology underpinning the movement, and the teachings of the movement’s key authors and proponents.

Spiritual Formation

The Western Evangelical church is in the midst of a sea-change, a literal revolution and a reimagining of what it means to grow in Christ. This revolution is called, Christian Spiritual Formation, and although the term first emerged on the Evangelical scene only forty or so years ago, it has captured the minds and imaginations of nearly every Protestant denomination. Books, videos, courses, training, and curricula on the topic are proliferating at a fantastic rate.¹ Seminaries across the United States and Europe offer and often even require courses in Spiritual Formation. The term has become so ubiquitous in online articles and discourse about “sanctification” that it is almost difficult to imagine what Christianity looked like before the term Spiritual Formation emerged. As Richard Foster, the founding father of the Evangelical Spiritual Formation movement, put it in a pastoral letter,

1 <http://web.archive.org/web/20100601012402/http://www.theooze.com/articles/article.cfm?id=744>

*“By now enough water has gone under the Christian Spiritual Formation bridge that we can give some assessment of where we have come and what yet needs to be done. When I first began writing in the field in the late 70s and early 80s the term ‘Spiritual Formation’ was hardly known, except for highly specialized references in relation to the Catholic orders...Huge numbers are seeking to become certified as Spiritual Directors to answer the cry of multiplied thousands for spiritual direction.”*²

Spiritual Direction is an important matter discussed in detail later; however, the more immediate question is: what precisely is Spiritual Formation?

Spiritual Formation is a term which describes the process of apparent spiritual maturation by means of the practice of certain behaviors known as Spiritual Disciplines—activities that ostensibly help to shape the character of the practitioner into Christ-likeness. Richard Foster is clear when he writes,

*“Spiritual formation is a process, but it is also a journey through which we open our hearts to a deeper connection with God. We are not bystanders in our spiritual lives, we are active participants with God, who is ever inviting us into relationship with him.”*³

And again,

*“Christian spiritual formation is a God-ordained process that shapes our entire person so that we take on the character and being of Christ himself. Properly employed...these disciplines help us attain increasing levels of spiritual maturity so that we respond to our life circumstances with the mind of Christ.”*⁴

2 Ibid.

3 <http://www.renovare.us/SPIRITUALRENEWAL/WhyBecomeLikeJesus/Whatisspiritualformation/tabid/2572/Default.aspx>, internet archive access registry date: 16 May 2012.

4 Foster, Richard J. and Gayle D. Beebe. *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. pp 15-16.

Truly, the thoroughgoing follower of Jesus longs for an ever-deepening connection with God. Passivity, rather than activity, all-too-often describes the normal Christian experience. God's invitation for a relationship with His people is real, as is the Christian's longing for a deeper connection, but is the path which has come to be known as Spiritual Formation one that is biblical and healthy for spiritual growth; in other words, is it actually "God-ordained?" To answer this question we need to go back to the roots of the Spiritual Formation movement and work our way forward, examining the teachings and practices of this movement in light of the Scriptures.

The intellectual pioneer of the modern Spiritual Formation movement was Thomas Merton, a Catholic monk and prolific writer, whose works—particularly in the 1950s and 60s—offered many of the core philosophical foundations upon which Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and many others would later build. Merton held to a Gnostic philosophy known as the Path of the Negative, which taught that knowing God by way of the Scriptures is fruitless and, indeed, impossible, but that only a direct experience of the Divine was real and profitable for living a godly life.⁵ God, Merton wrote, could only be known by what God is not, and, therefore, he said that, "We must always walk in darkness. We must travel in silence. We must fly by night."⁶ Because of this, doctrine, for Merton, held little value, and he often spoke of the need to find what is common between people of various religious traditions. Merton wrote, for example, of the relationship between Christianity and Islam,

*"Personally, in matters where dogmatic beliefs differ, I think that controversy is of little value because it takes us away from the spiritual realities into the realm of words and ideas...But much more important is the sharing of the experience of divine light...It is here that the area of fruitful dialogue exists between Christianity and Islam."*⁷

5 Merton, Thomas. *Living the Wisdom*. p 106.

6 Merton, Thomas. *Ascent to Truth*. p 179.

7 Baker, Dan and Gray Henry. *Merton and Sufism*. 1999. p 109.

Merton, also a practicing Sufi or Islamic mystic—and who said of himself, “I am deeply impregnated with Sufism”⁸—believed, as many in the Spiritual Formation movement do, in the Perennial Philosophy,⁹ which holds that all religions are ultimately worshiping the same God. Merton’s view was that all spiritual paths and all religions will naturally lead to God. Merton said,

*“It is in surrendering a false and illusory liberty on the superficial level that man unites himself with the inner ground of reality and freedom in himself which is the will of God, of Krishna, of Providence, of Tao.”*¹⁰

Merton came to hold the view that all religions worship the same god by means of the practice of Spiritual Disciplines, which facilitated deep meditative states of consciousness. He learned to achieve these altered states of consciousness by two related paths. First, Merton was a practicing Buddhist. Merton wrote,

*“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.”*¹¹

Merton incorporated the Eastern meditative practices of interior solitude and silencing the mind, senses, and ego (or sense of self-identity) into his spiritual practices and spoke of the importance of praying short repetitive prayers, often with the pattern of breathing in and out. He joined this Eastern practice with the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Jesus Prayer, or repeating a short word or phrase such as, “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Merton

8 Ibid.

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perennial_philosophy

10 “The Significance of the Bhagavad-Gita,” The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton, appendix ix, p 353.

11 Baillie, John, Lucius Hatfield Bugbee, Charles Kendall Gilbert. Religion In Life, Volume 48. 1979. p 69.

called this style of prayer Centering Prayer because the utilization of the practice enabled the person to switch off his or her mind in order to prepare or center the person to enter into the spiritual plane. This short prayer would be repeated until the words lost meaning and the mind slipped into an altered state of consciousness, as is the case with all mantra practices of Eastern religions. Devout practitioners might repeat a word or phrase 3,000 - 12,000 times a day.¹²

Merton worked tirelessly advocating for the abolition of the boundaries that separated Christianity from other world religions until his death in 1967. After his death, Wayne Teasdale, a Catholic monk and interspirituality advocate, wrote passionately about Merton's great interfaith mission,

*"Thomas Merton was perhaps the greatest popularizer of interspirituality. He opened the door for Christians to explore other traditions, notably Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism."*¹³

*"Merton was consciously trying to relate the mystical insights of other traditions with his own Christian faith."*¹⁴

Just seven years later, in 1974, another Catholic monk and Merton contemporary named William Menninger set into motion the cascade of events which directly led to the creation of the Evangelical Spiritual Formation movement. Menninger discovered a 14th century book in a monastery library entitled, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

*"As he read it he was delighted to discover that this anonymous 14th century book presented contemplative meditation as a teachable, spiritual process enabling the ordinary person to enter and receive a direct experience of union with God."*¹⁵

12 Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way*. p 60.

13 Teasdale, Wayne. *Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*.

14 Teasdale, Wayne. *A Monk in the World*, New World Library. 2003. p 181.

15 <https://contemplativeprayer.net/>

Menninger blended the teachings found within *The Cloud of Unknowing* with Merton's Centering Prayer and produced a new system of prayer for the masses, known as Contemplative Prayer.

*"He [Menninger] quickly began teaching contemplative prayer according to The Cloud of Unknowing at the Abbey Retreat House. One year later his workshop was taken up by his Abbot, Thomas Keating, and Basil Pennington, both of whom had been looking for a teachable form of Christian contemplative meditation to offset the movement of young Catholics toward Eastern meditation techniques."*¹⁶

The writings of Menninger, Keating, and Pennington influenced contemplatives Henri Nouwen and Tilden Edwards who in turn along with Thomas Merton became the primary source material for Richard Foster's, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path for Spiritual Growth*. In fact, Foster quotes Merton no fewer than 10 times in that volume and dozens of times elsewhere. Foster recommends the *Cloud of Unknowing*, and he found Tilden Edwards' contemplative classic, *Spiritual Friend*, particularly inspirational. On pages 18-19 of that book, Edwards writes,

"This mystical stream [contemplative prayer and other monastic traditions] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality (and to that of Sufi Moslems and some Hasidic Jews in the West as well)... It is no accident that the most active frontier between Christian and Eastern religions today is between contemplative Christian monks and their Eastern equivalents. Some forms of Eastern meditation informally have been incorporated or adapted into the practice of many Christian monks, and increasingly by other Christians.

This exchange, together with the more popular Eastern impact in the West through transcendental meditation, Hatha Yoga, the martial arts, and through many

16 Ibid.

available courses on Eastern religions in universities, has aided a recent rediscovery of Christian apophatic mystical tradition..."¹⁷

Henri Nouwen's writings, like Tilden Edwards', takes on a decidedly inter-faith overtone. In fact, Nouwen went so far to say,

*"Today 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 about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God."*¹⁸

Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* rocketed to the top of the sales charts and became a run-away best seller. Nowhere was this book more popular than in the Protestant Evangelical churches. From this book, and likely for the first time ever, the Evangelical church learned about the prayer practices of the Desert Fathers.¹⁹ The Desert Fathers were a group of Eastern Orthodox monks who traveled from Europe to North Africa, lived in caves, and developed the same Jesus Prayer, mantra-like practices that Thomas Merton used to adopt interspirituality and Universalism (the idea that God will ultimately redeem all men regardless of their faith in Christ),²⁰ among many other Spiritual Disciplines—without which, it is proclaimed, Spiritual Formation is not possible.

In 1988 Dallas Willard burst onto the scene with his now famous book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, in which Willard explains that what is necessary for spiritual growth is not ultimately found in studying the Scriptures and accepting the Bible's truths by faith but in the practice of certain Spiritual Disciplines not

17 Edwards, Tilden. *Spiritual Friend*. pp 18-19.

18 Nouwen, Henri. *A Restless Soul: Meditations from the Road*. Ave Maria Press. p 102.

19 Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. pp 55-57.

20 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universalism>

found in the Bible, like Centering Prayer. Richard Foster heartily endorsed the book, saying,

*“[The Spirit of the Disciplines] reveals how the key to self-transformation resides in the practice of the spiritual disciplines, and how their practice affirms human life to the fullest.”*²¹

What Foster does not point out, however, is that Willard’s claim runs exactly contrary to the Scriptures, which reads in 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Later that same year Richard Foster founded Renovaré, an organization dedicated to promoting and publicizing Spiritual Formation to the masses and, in particular, the greater Evangelical community. Through Renovaré, Foster began creating a new translation of the Bible, known as the Renovaré Christian Spiritual Formation Bible, a translation filled with both exegetical and expositional problems. The following list briefly summarizes some of the errors:

The Renovaré Bible denies and attacks the divine authorship of the book of Genesis, stating in the Introduction that Genesis was not written by Moses through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit but was, rather, a compilation of myths and tales from many traditions, which were modified in order to match the Old Testament’s monotheistic tone.²² Of course, the Bible itself is clear that God inspired every word of the Bible and that Moses wrote the Torah or Law—the first five books of the Old Testament (see Exodus 17:14, 24:4; Deuteronomy 31:9, 25; Joshua 8:31–32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Chronicles 30:16; Nehemiah 8:1; Luke 24:44; John 1:17, 45; 5:45–46; 7:19–23). We should note that among these passages

21 <https://renovare.org/books/spirit-of-the-disciplines>

22 The Renovaré Bible. Sec. “Introduction.”

Jesus, Himself, tells us that Moses is the author. The *Renovaré Bible*, therefore, denies the authority and infallibility of both Christ Jesus and the Scriptures.

The *Renovaré Bible* denies that the book of Daniel is a prophetic book when it states that, “We do not know who wrote it or exactly when it was written.”²³ Of course, not only does the book of Daniel itself tell us that the author is Daniel (Daniel 8:15, 27; 9:1-2; 10:2) but Jesus also tells us in Matthew 24. Daniel also makes clear precisely when he wrote the words in the book of Daniel, “in the first year of Darius.” The *Renovaré Bible* claims that Jesus, the Bible, and Daniel are not truthful and accurate sources.

When speaking of the book of Isaiah, the *Renovaré Bible* claims that Isaiah is not really the author,²⁴ and is a combination of “tradition” and “poetic imagination.”²⁵ Even more troubling is that among other intertextual problems, The *Renovaré Bible* declares that the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9:6-7, in which the Messiah is called “the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father,” is not the product of divine inspiration but the product of “human agents.”²⁶

Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, who later joined Foster’s *Renovaré* organization, along with many other key figures, including Eugene Peterson, worked with *Renovaré* to inspire a generation of Christians who would come to adopt Christian Spiritual Formation as normal, historical, and biblically accurate Christianity. Among Foster and Willard’s spiritual offspring were Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Dan Kimball, Eddie Gibbs, Spencer Burke, Rob Bell, and many other men and women who labored to launch the Emergent Church Movement. Each of the people above and, indeed, almost all of the major figures within the Emergent Church Movement regularly give credit to Foster, Willard, Peterson, Merton, Nouwen, Keating, etc. for the insights which undergird their

23 The *Renovaré Bible*. p 1245.

24 The *Renovaré Bible*. pp 982, 1068.

25 Ibid., pp 982-983.

26 Ibid., p 997.

movement.²⁷ The principal teachings of the Emergent Church Movement and the broader Spiritual Formation movement, and which are identical to the teachings of those men listed above, can be summarized as follows:

1. **Postfoundationalism:** that nothing in this world is objectively true, and, therefore, all human endeavors are relative and subjective. This, it is said, is true also of the Bible itself.
2. **Perennialism/Perennial Philosophy:** that all world religions worship the same god, and, therefore, no error is committed in the blending of Christianity with the practices of other religious traditions.
3. **Universalism:** that God will ultimately save and redeem all of mankind regardless of whether or not an individual believes in Jesus Christ.
4. **Sanctification by Works:** that God saves all people, but a person is sanctified or transformed by means of practicing Spiritual Disciplines.

A few quotes will suffice to establish the validity and accuracy of the above list:

Brian McLaren states,

*“My knowledge of Buddhism is rudimentary, but I have to tell you that much of what I understand strikes me as wonderful and insightful, and the same can be said of the teachings of Muhammad, though of course I have my disagreements...I’d have to say that the world is better off for having these religions than having no religions at all, or just one, even if it were ours...They aren’t the enemy of the gospel, in my mind....”*²⁸

“For too many people the name Jesus has become a symbol of exclusion, as if Jesus’ statement ‘I am the way, and of the truth, and the life; no one comes to the

27 Brian McLaren, “The Emergent Mystique,” Christianity Today, November 2004.

28 McLaren, Brian, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, pp 62-63.

*Father except through me’ actually means, ‘I am in the way of people seeking truth and life. I won’t let anyone get to God unless he comes through me.’”*²⁹

*“In the Bible, save means ‘rescue’ or ‘heal’. It emphatically does not mean ‘save from hell’ or ‘give eternal life after death,’ as many preachers seem to imply in sermon after sermon. Rather its meaning varies from passage to passage, but in general, in any context, save means ‘get out of trouble.’ The trouble could be sickness, war, political intrigue, oppression, poverty, imprisonment, or any kind of danger or evil.”*³⁰

These quotes stand in direct opposition to John 3:16,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Consider also this quote from Rob Bell,

*“Repentance is not turning from sin. It is a ‘celebration’ of life in Christ. Anyone who tells you that you need to repent is not talking about Christianity.”*³¹

Again, in direct opposition to Acts 20:21,

“...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the following quote Bell makes matters much worse,

“[This is] part of the problem with continually insisting that one of the absolutes of

29 Ibid. p 70.

30 Ibid. p 90

31 Rob Bell, “The ‘gods’ Aren’t Angry Tour,” Nov. 16, 2007, Dallas, TX.

*the Christian faith must be a belief that “Scripture alone” is our guide. It sounds nice, but it is not true...When people say that all we need is the Bible, it is simply not true.”*³²

This quote is in direct opposition to 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Finally, consider these words from Spencer Burke,

*“I don’t believe any single religion owns heaven or God - even a religion that tries to include everyone. When I say I’m a universalist, what I really mean is that I don’t believe you have to convert to any particular religion to find God. As I see it, God finds us, and it has nothing to do with subscribing to any particular religious view...Universalism says that a theology of grace implies salvation for all, because if grace could be limited to some people and not to others...it is in fact no grace at all...grace is bigger than any religion.”*³³

*“What’s more, I’m not sure I believe in God exclusively as a person anymore either... I now incorporate a panentheist [sic] view.”*³⁴

Contrasted to and in opposition of John 14:6-7,

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’”

32 Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p 68.

33 Burke, Spencer. *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity*. pp 197-198.

34 *Ibid.* p 195

The Emergent Church Movement stands as an example of what happens when the teachings of Merton, Keating, Nouwen, Foster, and Willard take hold. And it is not at all surprising given the clear teachings of Merton, Keating, Nouwen, Foster, Willard, and many others. At a fundamental level the Spiritual Formation movement is simply this: experiencing the presence of God is the result of practicing very specific Spiritual Disciplines not the result of holding by faith to sound doctrine. In fact, for Spiritual Formation proponents the order is precisely the opposite—only by practicing the Spiritual Disciplines can one understand the doctrines of Christ or Buddha or Krishna. Below, the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Leith Anderson, explains what he believes to be the important and necessary shift away from a focus on sound, biblical doctrine,

*“The old paradigm taught that if you had the right teaching, you will experience God. The new paradigm says that if you experience God, you will have the right teaching. This may be disturbing for many who assume propositional truth must always precede and dictate religious experience.”*³⁵

When “propositional truth”—the teaching found in the Bible—no longer defines the proper boundaries of spiritual experience, certainly any experience is permissible. In fact, the preeminence of experience over doctrine necessarily mandates that one’s interpretation of the Bible must follow from his or her experience, not the other way around. Merton and those who endorse Merton’s teachings, therefore, have no misgivings when they embrace the notion that all people of all religious traditions can and do experience the same god when they practice the Spiritual Disciplines. This is because all non-Christian religious traditions utilize ascetic practices—severe self-discipline and abstention from any kind of indulgence—and purgative meditative rituals in order to elicit identical spiritual experiences. Merton understood this to be the case, and, therefore, understood the important relationship between the Perennial Philosophy (that

35 Leith Anderson, as quoted in Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We do Ministry* (InterVarsity Press, 2000): p 126.

all religions worship the same god) and the Spiritual Disciplines, a fact that will become indisputable in the next two sections.

Spiritual Disciplines

Perhaps the most complete Evangelical exposition and defense of the nature and application of the Spiritual Disciplines, as mentioned in the previous section, is the work of philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard in what is now his classic, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. This book has quite literally become the textbook for defending, understanding, and utilizing the Spiritual Disciplines in the Evangelical sphere. And yet Willard introduces the topic of Spiritual Disciplines in this book in a most unexpected way. Dallas Willard admits that almost inexplicably neither Jesus nor Paul ever instructed anyone to utilize Spiritual Disciplines—and certainly not those Spiritual Disciplines which Willard believes are most crucial.³⁶ The Christian has every right to ask, instead, if Spiritual Disciplines are nowhere taught in the Bible and yet the Scriptures are profit-

36 Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. p 99.

able to bring the believer to maturity as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 clearly teaches, what justification can Willard possibly provide in support of the universal adoption of Spiritual Disciplines? Willard answers this question, asserting that the problem is not the Spiritual Disciplines but the Bible itself. He writes,

“All pleasing and doctrinally sound schemes of Christian education, church growth, and spiritual renewal came around at last to this disappointing result. But whose fault was this failure?”

A question, which Willard, himself, answers,

*“The gospel preached and the instruction and example given these faithful ones [in the Bible] simply do not do justice to the nature of human personality, as embodied, incarnate.”*³⁷

Willard's conclusion is that the preaching of the gospel from Scripture and discipleship through the hearing of the Word of God do not do justice to the complexity of human life in the real world and are, therefore, ultimately and regrettably, ineffectual. In fact, the broader view within the Spiritual Formation movement is that the Protestant church has been effective at creating a religion of the head but that the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches were better at creating a religion of the heart. Both claims are debatable, but Willard believes, therefore, that hope yet remains. He writes,

*“Today, for the first time in our history as a nation, we are being presented with a characteristic range of human behaviors such as fasting, meditation, simple living, and submission to a spiritual overseer, in an attractive light.”*³⁸

The exuberance Willard communicates is based upon his understanding of

37 Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. p 18.

38 *Ibid.*, p 17.

Matthew 11:29-30, which reads, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.” This passage represents the entire scriptural basis or foundation for Willard’s case for Spiritual Disciplines, from which Willard concludes that,

*“...in this truth lies the secret of the easy yoke: the secret involves living as he [Jesus] lived in the entirety of his life—adopting his overall life-style.”*³⁹

And Willard goes yet further, claiming that not only sanctification but salvation also is predicated thereon; he writes,

*“Salvation as conceived today is far removed from what it was in the beginnings of Christianity and only by correcting it can God’s grace in salvation be returned to the concrete, embodied existence of our human personalities walking with Jesus in his easy yoke.”*⁴⁰

Salvation, Willard makes clear, is no longer a result of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross for all who believe by grace through faith and confess that Jesus is Lord. Sanctification and salvation alike additionally require the “concrete” practicing of Spiritual Disciplines, and,

*“...the disciplines cannot be carried out except as our body and its parts are surrendered in precise ways and definite actions to God.”*⁴¹

Richard Foster agrees, and writes,

39 Ibid, p 5.

40 Ibid., p 33.

41 Ibid., p 40.

*“Frankly, no Spiritual Disciplines, no Spiritual Formation.”*⁴²

In contrast, however, Jesus clearly lays out the means by which a person is saved in John 3:16,

“For God so loved the world that he sent His only-begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

It is faith in Christ Jesus that saves. Likewise, Jesus clearly lays out the means by which a person is sanctified in John 17:17 when he prayed,

“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth...”

The Word of God is the truth by which a person who is saved by grace through faith is sanctified—not Spiritual Disciplines. The writer of Hebrews is clear in Hebrews 10:10. No acts or sacrifices of the body can sanctify, but Christ alone,

“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Dallas Willard’s conclusion is definitional: Jesus’ yoke is the practice of Spiritual Disciplines—a conclusion which Willard cannot defend scripturally; in fact, as we have seen, Willard openly admits that he cannot. What explanation does Willard give for the Bible’s missing Spiritual Disciplines, which are themselves necessary for sanctification and salvation? He writes,

*“It is almost impossible in the thought climate of today’s Western world to appreciate just how utterly unnecessary it was for Paul to say explicitly, in the world in which he lived, that Christians should fast, be alone, study, give, and so forth as regular disciplines for the spiritual life.”*⁴³

42 Foster, Richard. *Spiritual Formation: A Pastoral Letter*. Sunday January 18, 2004.

43 Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. p 99.

In other words, according to Willard, the Spiritual Disciplines were so ubiquitous at the time of Paul's writing that he and the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures and—being Himself God and omniscient and knowing that the knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines would be lost in the passing of time—did not even think to include them. Instead, Willard argues,

*“This is not something St. Paul had to prove or even explicitly state to his readers—but it also was not something he overlooked, leaving it to be thought up by crazed monks in the Dark Ages. It is, rather, a wisdom gleaned from millennia of collective human experience.”*⁴⁴

The Spiritual Disciplines, therefore, by Willard's own admission, are nothing more or less than the traditions of men masquerading as the wisdom of God. In fact, Willard encourages us to just practice whatever feels right or makes sense.

*“As we have indicated, there are many other activities that could, for the right person and upon the right occasion, be counted as spiritual disciplines in the strict sense stated of our previous chapter. The walk with Christ certainly is one that leaves room for and even calls for individual creativity and an experimental attitude in such matters.”*⁴⁵

Quite to the contrary, the Scriptures set the boundaries in “such matters.” Truly the Spiritual Disciplines are nothing other than the hope that good works might lead by ritual or habit or pattern to sanctification. What possible good could come of this? The apostle Paul asked the Galatians the same question in chapter 3 and verse 3,

“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p 190.

Although possibly unnecessary at this point—given, as Willard admits, that no scriptural evidence exists for the claim that Spiritual Disciplines are necessary or even helpful for sanctification or salvation—the question remains: what specific and otherwise missing Spiritual Disciplines are Christians supposed to practice according to Willard and Spiritual Formation proponents? Oddly, Willard begins to list practices that are clearly endorsed in Scripture, only not to the ends to which he ascribes. The list includes: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission, and fasting. Which one of these is not found in the Bible as Willard claims? All are found in the Bible. However, Willard gets to the point when he introduces practicing silence and solitude, predictably citing Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen among other contemplatives.

*“This factual priority of solitude is, I believe, a sound element in monastic asceticism. Locked into interaction with the human beings that make up our fallen world, it is all but impossible to grow in grace as one should.”*⁴⁶

Silence and solitude, the hallmark of monastic asceticism (extreme self-denial), according to Willard, are the priority, necessary for growing in grace, and are at the core of the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines. But why are silence and solitude the core disciplines? Because this silence is no ordinary silence. As Merton, Keating, Nouwen, and Foster (as well as many other Contemplative Prayer practitioners) teach,

*“...the late twentieth and twenty-first century model for ‘proper’ mysticism has been an Eastern model...that holds up contemplative pathways and the experience of silence and nothingness as the highest form of pursuit or union with the Absolute, no longer necessarily is the Christian God or Godhead.”*⁴⁷

46 Willard, Dallas. *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. pp 161-162.

47 Kroll, Jerome and Bernard Bachrach. *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and*

In Ray Yungen's book, *A Time of Departing*, he speaks of Richard Foster's unique understanding of the practice of the Spiritual Discipline of silence,

"When Foster speaks of the silence, he does not mean external silence. In his book, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Foster recommends the practice of breath prayer—picking a single word or short phrase and repeating it in conjunction with the breath. This is classic contemplative mysticism.

*"In the original 1978 edition of Celebration of Discipline, he makes his objective clear when he states, 'Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it.' In Prayer: Finding The Heart's True Home, he ties in a quote by one mystic who advised, 'You must bind the mind with one thought.'"*⁴⁸

Practicing the silence through repetitive Breath Prayer is taught in many forms in many world religions. Although some argue that Jesus Prayer or Abiding Prayer or Centering Prayer or Breath Prayer is an Eastern Orthodox practice dating back to the monastic Desert Fathers of Egypt and north Africa in the 5th century AD—a practice which also recommended praying a short prayer about Jesus in conjunction with breath patterns—the clear evidence is that Breath Prayer dates back to Egypt (c. 1550 BC) with a practice known as Mantra Isis. In this ritual prayer exercise, words or syllables are spoken with the breath.⁴⁹

*"The 'i' is pronounced as 'e' as in 'teeth,' and the 's' is pronounced as a hissing sound as a snake would make. Do this in a gentle and relaxed way, focusing your attention on the sound and the vibrations of the mantra."*⁵⁰

Ascetics. p 204.

48 Yungen, Ray. *A Time Of Departing*. Lighthouse Trails Publishing, LLC; 2nd Edition. 2006. p 75.

49 Weor, Samael Aun. *Manual of Practical Magic*. 1954. p 5.

50 Norris, Justin, Vida Norris, Jordan Resnick, Jenny Resnick. <http://www.thespiritualsun.com/practices/>

Like Mantra Isis in Egypt, pre-Christian Hindus practiced Pranayama, a Breath Prayer in which they recited simple words with the breath, most commonly found in Om Mantra style meditation.⁵¹ This is mentioned in Hindu literature dating all the way back to between the 4th and 2nd century BC.⁵²

The connection between pagan mantra and Christian breath prayer is well established. Dr. Jacques-Albert Cuttat, a Catholic, who ministered for many years in India, writes, “Hesychasm [contemplative quietude/silence brought on by Breath Prayer] attempts to incorporate essentially non-Monotheistic practices and perspectives into Christian theosis.”⁵³

Henri Nouwen, a Christian contemplative mystic mentioned earlier, writes in regard to Breath Prayer/Jesus Prayer/Abiding Prayer/Contemplative Prayer,

*“Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen to the voice of love...For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required.”*⁵⁴

When Nouwen speaks of “the moral,” he refers to biblical doctrine, knowledge of God, and His will. He advocates, as all mystics do, that contemplative experience is a purely mystical encounter with God, accomplished by means of the Spiritual Disciplines of silence and Breath Prayer, which diminish or eliminate the use of the mind.

texts/ancient-egyptian/mantra-isis-an-ancient-egyptian-exercise

51 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pranayama>

52 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhagavad_Gita

53 Johnson, Christopher D.L. *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation*. Bloomsbury. 2010. p 57.

54 Nouwen, Henri. *In the Name of Jesus*. The Crossroad Publishing Company. 1992. pp 6, 31-32, 47.

Breath Prayer is one of several Spiritual Disciplines that incorporates a type of prayer/meditation known as Apophatic meditation,⁵⁵ so named because it uses “nothingness” or “emptiness” or a “lack of content” as the instrument of achieving a state of stillness in which higher brain function, emotional awareness, volition of will, and the ego (sense of self or personhood) cease. Apophatic prayer/meditation is not only Eastern in origin⁵⁶ but is a clear violation of the greatest commandment as received from Scripture, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength...” Repeatedly in Scripture the Christian is instructed to be sober-minded, alert, aware, discerning, and constantly testing all things by the Scriptures. The abrogation of the mind, emotions, will, and sense of self, therefore, is strictly forbidden because the Christian cannot actively exercise the love of God with all of his or her capacities nor follow the instruction of vigilance in the absence of the faculties of the soul—mind, emotions, and will. Yet Breath Prayer and other Apophatic prayer practices, which call for the shutting down of the faculties of the soul, make up a majority of the crucial and prescribed Spiritual Formation methodologies.

No single individual, with the possible exception of Saint John of the Cross, engenders devotion and praise from Apophatic mystics than Teresa of Avila, who like Saint John of the Cross was a 16th century Catholic mystic. She advocates the suspension of the faculties of the mind,

“The ‘devotion of union’ is not only a supernatural but an essentially ecstatic state. In this state, reason is also absorbed in God, and only the memory and imagination are left open to the physical world. This state is characterized by a blissful peace, a sweet slumber of the higher faculties of the soul, a conscious rapture in the love of God.”

55 Komjathy, Louis. *Contemplative Literature: A Comparative Sourcebook on Meditation*. p 95.

56 Jones, Tony. *The Sacred Way*. p 81.

And again,

*“After half an hour this is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, during which all the faculties are negated in the union with God. From this the subject awakens in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, a trance-like state.”*⁵⁷

Many Evangelical adopters of Breath Prayer or Centering Prayer deny that these techniques are simply Christianized Eastern mantra practice, claiming instead a Christian origin. The common Evangelical argument is that Apophatic techniques are simply a way to remove distractions and cast off the cares of the day; however, Evangelicals have a problem because they are very much alone in the denial of the pagan origins of Breath Prayer techniques. Non-evangelicals, including those who brought the techniques to Evangelicals—people like Keating, Rohr, Nouwen, Menninger, Pennington, Merton, etc.—readily admit that these techniques are mantra. Joyce Cox, a Catholic scholar, proponent, and teacher of Spiritual Formation through the Spiritual Discipline of Centering Prayer, said in a 2010 interview,

*“What I do in Centering Prayer is I choose a mantra, which is my sacred word. It doesn’t have to have any meaning for me. What I simply do is return to that sacred word as a method of intention, and just sit.”*⁵⁸

Although Apophatic Breath Prayer/Centering Prayer/Jesus Prayer/Contemplative Prayer/Abiding Prayer/Infused Prayer is one of the primary modes of the practice of silence, it is not by any means the only mode. Kataphatic prayer/meditation is an alternative or additional means of deprecating the role of the mind. Kataphatic prayer/meditation differs from Apophatic forms in that Kata-

57 http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Teresa_of_Avila as taken from Teresa’s Autobiography (14.1).

58 Cox, Joyce. Spiritual Directors. Religion and Ethics News Weekly. PBS. February 26, 2010.

phatic prayer utilizes mental images and imagination often, but not always, of or about God⁵⁹ in order to guide the mind into what neuroscientists refer to as alpha state—a shallow state of hypnosis. In alpha state the mind is highly suggestible, malleable, and impressionable; fundamental and even life-altering changes can be made to the human unconscious and preconscious mind, often without the subject even being aware of its happening.⁶⁰ Because both Apophatic and Kataphatic practices serve the same purpose—the deprecation of soul activity—the two must be treated with the same degree of skepticism. Some examples of Kataphatic Spiritual Disciplines described below include *Lectio Divina*, Imaginative Prayer, and Visualization/Guided Visualization practices.

One of the most popular Kataphatic Spiritual Disciplines in the Spiritual Formation movement today is a practice known as *Lectio Divina*, a Latin term meaning divine reading or spiritual reading or holy reading. Although often described in Evangelical circles as praying the Bible, this description is neither accurate nor helpful. Far from biblical models of prayerful Bible reading, *Lectio Divina* has a specific Kataphatic goal in mind—to promote communion with the deity and to achieve special spiritual insights and biblical interpretation through the practice of silencing the mind by means of contemplative prayer practices. A form of quietude brought on by contemplative prayer, as Saint John of the Cross—the 16th century monastic mystic briefly mentioned earlier—codified it, *Lectio Divina* is practiced through four steps:

Lectio: A short passage from the Bible is selected and read slowly. Often this passage is only one or two verses long.

Meditatio: Then the participant dwells on the passage, being careful not to analyze or discern its meaning.

Oratio: Next the participant initially asks for and then waits for the Holy

59 Beougher, Timothy and Alvin L. Reid. *Evangelism for a Changing World*. p 41.

60 Ed. Gheorghiu, Vladimir A., et al. *Suggestion and Suggestibility: Theory and Research*. pp 221-233.

Spirit to illuminate the meaning of the passage.

Contemplatio: When illumination comes, the participant then repeats a small portion (usually one word) of the passage over and over again with the breath until, it is suggested, God grants him or her a contemplative experience of the Divine.⁶¹

Lectio Divina was at the center of Thomas Merton's mystical practices and constitutes the basis for his Centering Prayer.

*"Merton raised up the ancient practice of lectio divina...The deeply personal practice of lectio unfolds in four non-linear movements that oscillate between the sensuous experience of kataphatic forms conveyed in words and images and apophatic experience of a pregnant emptiness beyond all sense and reason."*⁶²

Within the full context of Lectio Divina outlined above only step one (reading the Bible passage) does not suffer from serious problems. In step two, meditation, the participant is advised to reject the temptation to analyze the text for meaning. Precisely how the practitioner might go about testing any interpretation by the Scriptures while avoiding any type of analysis is not clear and is likely not possible. This problem is exacerbated in step three, Oratio or Prayer, in which the participant waits for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the meaning of the text. Without placing the passage within the proper biblical context nor even thinking about the words in the passage to understand their meaning, no reasonable recourse remains for testing the authenticity of the forthcoming illumination. The interpretation of the passage could originate from the participant's own imagination or even from an evil spirit. Only after testing the newly illuminated interpretation against the narrower and broader context of Scripture might the Christian know whether the interpretation is reasonable or valid. However, no

61 Keating, Thomas. The Method of Centering Prayer. <https://cpt.org/files/WS%20-%20Centering%20Prayer.pdf>

62 Merton, Thomas. Ed. Kathleen Deignan. A Book of Hours. Introduction. Sec. Lectio Divina.

time is taken in Lectio Divina for this process to occur. Instead, the participant simply accepts the interpretation and begins to contemplate it, reducing the Bible passage to a single “sacred” word that becomes a Breath Prayer in order to achieve an altered state of consciousness.

Some argue that the Holy Spirit often gives deeply personal correction or instruction during Lectio Divina—specific messages that would not be found in the Bible. For example, the Holy Spirit might tell someone to pray for a friend from high school whom he or she has not seen for many years. This could indeed happen and would be consistent with the Scriptures; however, this word from the Lord would not be an interpretation of the passage neither would the specific conditions proposed in Lectio Divina be at all necessary for God to communicate that information. Consequently, this argument does not justify the use of Lectio Divina.

The overwhelming majority of Lectio Divina resources take a passage like Psalm 46:10, “Be still and know that I am God,” and begin to derive new revelation as the participant reduces the Bible passage. For example, the passage above might be reduced in the following way:

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know

Be still

Be

Be

As it happens this passage is commonly used as a breath prayer and is taken to mean that the believer in prayer ought to practice the silence and should be still or just be. However, Psalm 46:10 means nothing of the sort. In Psalm 46 God is saying that he will bring an end to the wars of the earth. In fact, God is not even necessarily directing those words to Jews or Christians. God says,

“Come, behold the works of the Lord,

how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

*he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
 he burns the chariots with fire.
 Be still, and know that I am God.
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth!”*

The dangers of Lectio Divina are well known, and even Lectio Divina proponents warn of the risks. Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, Episcopal priest and leader in the Spiritual Formation movement, warns that no more than an hour of Contemplatio per day is recommended without a qualified expert present.⁶³ The dangers of diving into deep meditative states will become clear in the next chapter; however, what is now clear is that nowhere in the Bible are Christians warned about extended periods of biblical prayer.

Whereas Lectio Divina blurs the lines between Apophatic and Kataphatic techniques, visualization/guided visualization is conceived as a wholly Kataphatic method of meditation which uses imagination as a Spiritual Discipline in order to move the person into the silence, into deeper meditative states. Often these visualization exercises are highly subjective and imaginative. Here is Hypnotherapist and New Age Meditation guru Kerie Logan guiding her audience through a visualization exercise,

“...take in a breath and as you exhale feel your whole body becoming like a rag doll...but that you are a young bird who just learned to fly...and you are flying up to a lovely blue sky. Your wings are flapping up and down as your body lifts higher, and higher, and higher. And the higher up you go the smaller everything below looks...as you look down you can see that you are flying over a lovely field of yellow flowers. Around the edge of the field is a row of trees, and on the other side of the row of trees is a pretty stream. You can hear the water. Now because you are a bird, you have very special eye sight and you can see right down into that stream. You can see tiny fish swimming around and some smooth round pebbles at the bottom

63 Bourgeault, Cynthia, Rev. Dr. Centering Prayer. <http://www.contemplative.org/contemplative-practice/centering-prayer/>

*of the stream. And look, there's some tiny black tadpoles darting here and there. And growing out of the stream, thin blades of grass and few lily leaves...."*⁶⁴

Clearly the content is not objectionable in any way; however, the content is not at all the point. The goal is relaxation and achieving ever-deepening states of altered consciousness by way of Kataphatic modalities in order to become united with the Divine or the Absolute; further, the triviality of the content should in no way distract the reader from the reality of what is taking place. Christian Research International put it this way,

"Perhaps the most authoritative general text on the subject, Seeing with the Mind's Eye: The History, Techniques and Practices of Visualization, observes, 'If there are two important 'new' concepts in 20th century American life, they are meditation and visualization.'

The book's authors continue, 'The growth of interest in visualization since the 1960s is part of a new climate of thought in the West. This new climate has manifested in an interest in all forms of imagery, in the experience of Eastern religions and philosophy, in hypnotism, and in hallucinogenic drugs and altered states of consciousness in general.'

The article continues,

"It should be recognized that when the mind is manipulated into novel states of consciousness, there is always a potential for spiritual deception and danger. This is true regardless of a person's motive or environment (i.e., the spiritual context in which he or she is operating). The number of well-meaning people who have em-

⁶⁴ Logan, Kirie. Child Flying Like a Bird. <http://www.empoweredwithin.com/product/guided-imagery-youtube-child-flying-like-bird-mp3-download/>

*barked on a visualization program for physical health, psychological understanding, or spiritual advancement and ended up involved in the occult is not small.”*⁶⁵

Not only Christians warn of the danger of guided visualization. Consider this warning from Chogyam Trungpa, leading Tibetan Buddhist in his book, *The Dawn of Tantra*: “Certainly practicing visualization without the proper understanding is extremely destructive....Tantric scriptures abound with warnings about using visualization.”⁶⁶

Even Christian practitioners and proponents of visualization like Richard Foster warn of the manifest dangers of engaging in such activities. Here Foster writes,

*“I also want to give a word of precaution. In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as a supernatural guidance. While the Bible does not give us a lot of information on that, there are various orders of spiritual beings, and some of them are definitely not in cooperation with God and his way! ... But for now I want to encourage you to learn and practice prayers of protection.”*⁶⁷

A distinction within Foster’s quote above must be clarified. Foster is not suggesting that in a general sense praying and doing spiritual warfare might alert the enemy to our activities; within the context of his writing he is saying the act of praying in the contemplative way itself is potentially dangerous. Nowhere in the Bible is biblical prayer—talking to God and listening to God—dangerous or risky or that it leaves us open and vulnerable to spiritual attack from evil spirits. Neither does any Scripture suggest that prayers of protection are or should be necessary before praying. And yet in spite of warnings from Christians who do

65 Weldon, John and John Ankerberg. Visualization. CRI. Article ID: DN388-1.

66 Brennan, J.H. Astral Doorways. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972. p 98.

67 Foster, Richard. Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home. HarperCollins, 1992. p 157.

not practice visualization, Christians who do practice visualization, and non-Christians who do practice visualization, with increased frequency Evangelical Christians are teaching and writing books about how to lead others and even children and teenagers through visualization exercises. Jared Boyd, head of the Order of Sustainable Faith—a Vineyard monastic Spiritual Formation/Direction and accreditation organization—recently published a book entitled, *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation*. Boyd writes,

*“At a young age, and during these early stages of faith, a child’s sense of belonging can often feel at risk, especially when morality and adherence to particular doctrines are being emphasized. We can be quick to think that our behavior or belief system is what sets us apart from “the world.” It’s just not so. This kind of thinking can be dangerous, especially for children. Churches that set up behavior and doctrine as boundary markers can produce an underlying system of comparison and judgement.”*⁶⁸

Boyd’s views above precisely fit the pattern of Merton’s, Keating’s, Nouwen’s, Foster’s, (and indeed most of Spiritual Formation’s lead proponents’) teachings on the subject. In Boyd’s view, not only should the youngest and least knowledgeable and discerning among us—children and teens—engage in what all sides agree is a potentially dangerous activity, but Boyd recommends Visualization and Imaginative Prayer in the absence of and instead of sound biblical doctrine. What kinds of Visualizations would Boyd have children practice? Boyd begins just as any New Age meditation session does, “Close your eyes and let’s take a few deep breaths together.”⁶⁹ Then after saying, “Come Holy Spirit,” Boyd continues,

“Close your eyes and imagine with me that you have the ability to fly into the air...

68 Boyd, Jared. *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation*. Intervarsity Press, 2017. p 108.

69 Ibid., p 36.

*Imagine that you fly into the air and that you watch as the ground gets farther away from you. You feel the wind pressing against you as you fly...you notice how beautiful and green the grass is. You notice leaves, and you look across and see a great number of trees blowing in the wind. Off in the distance you see a body of water—the ocean—and you make your way toward the coast...you are swimming with thousands of fish. There are bright orange fish all around you, and they are beautiful...*⁷⁰

Why bother leading any Christian, let alone children, in a prayer that has nothing to do with Jesus? The specific answer, according to Boyd and contemplative proponents, is to have a spiritual experience. But is this “spiritual experience” a genuine experience of God? Absolutely no scriptural defense whatsoever is provided for such practices, and, therefore, no guarantee whatsoever can be provided that the one true God has anything to do with those experiences.

In fact, the overwhelming evidence from worldwide religions suggests that the God of the Bible is not at all necessary for valid, intense, powerful, ecstatic, and life-changing spiritual experiences to take place. This fact is trivially simple to prove; techniques identical to Boyd’s imaginative prayer and visualization exercises, as shown earlier, are effective for Buddhists, Hindus, Sufis, Gnostics, Kabbalists, Satanists, occultists, New Agers, and even atheists who seek a one-with-the-universe experience. The Bible is clear that spirits other than God masquerade as angels of light to deceive, and they deceive quite effectively.

For example, Ignatius of Loyola, a 16th century Catholic mystic and founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), while recovering in Manresa, Spain following a battle injury had a vision of a beautiful and luminescent serpent whose skin was covered in what appeared to be eyes. So taken was Ignatius with the serpent that when the apparition disappeared he became not only inconsolable but completely obsessed with reliving the vision.⁷¹ This event along with feelings of emptiness, aimlessness, and depression drove him to seek mystical

70 Ibid., p 37.

71 Ignatius of Loyola. *A Pilgrim’s Journey: Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*. p 66.

spiritual experiences in a cave near Montserrat for eleven months. During this time Ignatius not only regained the vision of the serpent but also developed his now famous tome, *Spiritual Exercises*,⁷² Ignatius' personal collection of *Spiritual Disciplines*. The serpent was his companion, appearing several times a day for fifteen years though, as commentators put it, "sometime later...he came to know that it was the devil."⁷³

Not only was Ignatius of Loyola taken in and deceived when he received a vision from the evil one, but we believe that his other prominent visions in which an angel confirmed the sanctity of several false Catholic doctrines and another in which Mary and baby Jesus appeared to Ignatius⁷⁴ were likewise false because Jesus is not a baby, Mary is dead, and communion with the dead is forbidden in the Scriptures.

Like his visions, Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, a collection of *Spiritual Disciplines* created for the purpose of the sanctification of the believer, suffer similarly. In addition to the Kataphatic practices of visualization and imaginative prayer previously discussed, Ignatius also laid out additional disciplines as rules that one must follow. These included praying to Mary and praying to Saints, of which Ignatius taught,

*"To praise relics of the Saints, giving veneration to them and praying to the Saints; and to praise Stations, pilgrimages, Indulgences, pardons, Cruzadas, and candles lighted in the churches."*⁷⁵

This practice is strictly forbidden in the Scriptures as are many of Ignatius' other *Spiritual Disciplines*, including self-flagellation (beating one's body to expiate sin). Ignatius writes,

72 "The Cave an Artistic Heritage". The Cave. Place of pilgrimage and worship. Cova de Sant Ignasi.

73 Ignatius of Loyola. *A Pilgrim's Journey: Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*. p 66.

74 <http://www.jesuit.ie/blog/tom-casey-sj/may-mary-made-new-man-ignatius/>

75 <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/loyola-spirex.asp>

*“The third [way to satisfy the debt of sin is], to chastise the flesh, that is, giving it sensible pain, which is given by wearing haircloth or cords or iron chains next to the flesh, by scourging or wounding oneself, and by other kinds of austerity. Note. What appears most suitable and most secure with regard to penance is that the pain should be sensible in the flesh and not enter within the bones, so that it give pain and not illness. For this it appears to be more suitable to scourge oneself with thin cords, which give pain exteriorly, rather than in another way which would cause notable illness within.”*⁷⁶

He then explains the reasons for which he suggests self-flagellation,

*“...the exterior penances are done chiefly for three ends: First, as satisfaction for the sins committed; Second, to conquer oneself—that is, to make sensuality obey reason and all inferior parts be more subject to the superior; third, to seek and find some grace or gift which the person wants and desires...the person finds himself.”*⁷⁷

Self-flagellation, according to Ignatius of Loyola, was not only helpful in the practice of self-control but also for the satisfaction of the sins committed and compelling God to bestow gifts and graces.

Needless to say, Ignatius’ teachings were at complete odds with those of Martin Luther and Ignatius’ other Protestant contemporaries, who taught that man cannot overcome sin by acts of the flesh or the will. Ultimately, Ignatius too came to realize that self-flagellation was ineffectual; however, as Doctor of Divinity, J.H. D’Aubugine said of Ignatius’ teachings in his five volume, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*,

“Inigo [Ignatius of Loyola], instead of feeling that his remorse was sent to drive him to the foot of the cross, persuaded himself that these inward reproaches pro-

76 Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. p 50.

77 Ibid.

*ceeded not from God, but from the devil; and he resolved never more to think of his sins, to erase them from his memory, and bury them in eternal oblivion. Luther turned toward Christ, Loyola only fell upon himself... Visions came erelong to confirm Inigo in the convictions at which he had arrived... Inigo did not seek truth in the Holy Scriptures; but imagined in their place immediate communication with the world of spirits... Luther on taking his doctor's degree had pledged his oath to Holy Scripture... Loyola at his time, bound himself to dreams and visions; and chimerical apparitions became the principle of his life and his faith."*⁷⁸

Luther believed that Christ accomplished all that was necessary for man to find an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and that the Christian enters into this relationship by faith. Ignatian Spirituality teaches that unity with God was to be achieved through Spiritual Exercises and Disciplines by substituting imagination and Encounter Theology for the biblical teaching of faith—which is believing in, standing upon, and living out the teaching of the Scriptures. Encounter Theology is the idea that true revelation of the divine comes through soulful experience of the supernatural. With faith no special prayer practices are necessary to reach God's ear nor to receive from God. The weakest prayer from the weakest saint touches His heart, and He will not withhold Himself but pour Himself out over and over again in greater measure until the weak are made perfect. The Christian knows that God has heard the prayer because the Christian believes the promise of the Bible; this belief, therefore, is a manifestation of true faith. Nothing else is required and nothing else is taught in Scripture.⁷⁹

In spite of this the teachings of Ignatius of Loyola are one of the centerpiece texts in the Spiritual Formation movement and are the foundation of the teaching of Spiritual Disciplines.

Furthermore, that the Spiritual Disciplines are merely the traditions of men is the best-case scenario. Equally likely is the possibility that the core Spiri-

78 J.H. Merle D'Aubugine, D.D., *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 5 Volumes in 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reproduced from London 1846 edition in 1976, book 10.

79 Biermanski, Johannes. *The Sacred Scriptures - Vol. III: The New Covenant & New Testament*.

tual Disciplines of interior silence, breath prayer, visualization, and imaginative prayer, given their demonstrable origins in pagan religions from around the world, and their complete absence from the Bible, are actually more akin to doctrines of demons than the arguably more innocuous traditions of men. As it happens, no speculation is required. Here Tilden Edwards—a catholic mystic whom Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Dallas Willard, many in the Emergent Church, and nearly every major Spiritual Formation proponent cites in defense of Spiritual Formation—tells us not only the origin of but our appropriate posture toward these pagan Apophatic and Kataphatic practices:

*“In the wider ecumenism of the Spirit being opened for us today, we need to humbly accept the learnings of particular Eastern religions in relation to the body now available to us. What makes a particular practice Christian is not its source, but its intent. If our intent in assuming a particular bodily practice is to deepen our awareness in Christ, then it is Christian.... This is important to remember in the face of those Christians who would try to impoverish our spiritual resources by too narrowly defining them. If we view the human family as one in God’s Spirit, then this historical cross-fertilization is not surprising... In terms of the body, selective attention to Eastern spiritual practices can be of great assistance to a fully embodied Christian life.”*⁸⁰

The Bible disagrees. Leviticus 18:3 reads,

“You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.”

And again in Deuteronomy 12:30,

“...beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations

80 Edwards, Tilden. *Living the Presence*. pp 18-19.

serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?”

And again in Colossians 2:8,

“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.”

As Jesus said in Matthew 15:9,

“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Quite to the contrary, the Heavenly Father said in Deuteronomy 4:2 in reference to the Law of God,

“You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.”

Although the stated goal of the Spiritual Disciplines of silence and solitude, Lectio Divina, Imaginative Prayer, Visualization/Guided Visualization, and breath prayer is to elicit an experience of God or the Absolute or the Divine, what might actually be happening is something rather more subtle and not regularly discussed with Evangelical Christians and those who are uninitiated into Contemplative Mysticism. As a matter of fact, secrecy rather than disclosure characterizes the teaching and practice of Contemplative Mystical Apophatic and Kataphatic Spiritual Disciplines in many local churches. The reasons for the hushed tone with regard to Contemplative Mysticism will become clear in the next section.

Contemplative Mysticism

Mysticism is the belief that union with the Deity/Absolute/Universe and the spiritual apprehension of knowledge inaccessible to the intellect may be attained through Contemplation.

*Mysticism is the belief characterized by self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought, especially when based on the assumption of occult qualities or mysterious agencies.*⁸¹

Contemplative methodology, which begins with Kataphatic practices to prepare the practitioner for deeper Apophatic practices,⁸² is the two-stage vehicle used to achieve absorption into the deity. Further, “mysticism is the practice of religious Ecstasies (religious experiences during altered states of

81 Oxford English Dictionary. “Mysticism.”

82 Keating, Thomas. *The Christian Contemplative Tradition*. Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. 1993. p 3.

consciousness), together with whatever ideologies, ethics, rites, myths, legends, and magic may be related to them.”⁸³ The term “ecstasy” comes from the Greek word, *ecstasis*, or to achieve “union with an otherworldly entity”⁸⁴ and “to stand outside oneself.”⁸⁵ While ecstasies refer to the experiences obtained during altered states of consciousness, the altered state of consciousness itself is referred to as Hesychasm.⁸⁶ Mystics from many religious traditions participate in the Ecstasies while in Hesychastic states.

Christian mysticism is nearly identical in form and structure to pagan religious practices. Dr. Don Whitney, leading authority on the practice of spiritual disciplines and contemplative mysticism, defines Christian Mysticism in his 2001 white paper, *Defining the Boundaries of Evangelical Spirituality*, as, “those forms of Christian spirituality which attempt direct or unmediated access to God.” Mystics are those who expect to experience “a direct inner realization of the Divine” and an “unmediated link to an absolute.”⁸⁷ Quite to the contrary, 1 Timothy 2:5 teaches, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Contemplative mystics, regardless of the tradition (Hebraism, Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or Catholicism), almost without exception teach that an initiate must pass through five stages or levels—with each tradition using a different nomenclature.⁸⁸ Evelyn Underhill, a Catholic contemplative mystic, teaches that typically the mystical practitioner completes all five stages only after many years of practice, and she defines the five Christian Mystical stages as follows.

83 Encyclopedia Britannica. “Mysticism.”

84 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecstasy_\(philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecstasy_(philosophy))

85 J. Glenn Friesen, *Enstasy, Ecstasy and Religious Self-reflection*. 2001.

86 Johnson, Christopher D.L. *The Globalization of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer: Contesting Contemplation*. Bloomsbury. 2010. p 57.

87 Whitney, Donald. *Defining the Boundaries of Evangelical Spirituality*. November 15, 2001. pp 3-5.

88 Editors: Max Velmans & Susan Schneider. *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*. p 167.

1. **Awakening:** This is often, but not always, a pre-mystical realization that God is in and at work within all people and created reality.
2. **Detachment or Purgation:** In this stage the soul—mind, emotions, and will—are made empty in order to produce a clean slate, an empty vessel. This stage is frequently known as Soul Detachment.
3. **Illumination:** In the Illumination stage the deity theoretically begins filling the clean slate or empty vessel with information and messages of a spiritual origin.
4. **The Dark Night of the Soul:** Named by Saint John of the Cross in the 16th Century, this stage is characterized by the realization that union with God is earned on one's own merit.⁸⁹ This stage is almost universally accompanied by depression, tremendous anxiety and fear, and physical and mental torment. As Saint John of the Cross put it, "the soul begins to burn in the darkness." Saint Teresa of Avila said that she was "burned and dismembered in a hellish dark enclosure."⁹⁰
5. **Union:** In this stage the identity of self is lost completely and (Mystics believe) unity with the deity is achieved.⁹¹

Below is a table, albeit abridged, of mystical traditions which teach the five stages of contemplative mysticism with the view of unity with the deity/divine/universe as a goal.

89 Ibid.

90 Ellwood, Gracia F. *The Uttermost Deep: The Challenge of Near-Death Experiences*. pp 252-253.

91 Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. pp 169, 200, 246, 170.

Catholic ¹	Hinduism ²	Kabbalah ³	Gnosticism ⁴	Buddhism ⁵
Awakening	Adhyatma	Nephesh	Adoption	Wisdom and Virtue
Detachment Purgation	Bhavana	Ruach	Illumination	Preparation
Illumination	Dhyana	Neshama	Conversation	Illumination
Dark Night of the Soul	Samata and of- ten Kundalini Awakening	Chaya	Congress or Bridal Cham- ber	True Cultivation
Union	Vritii Sam- skhaya	Yechida	Union	Enlightenment
(Footnotes) 1 Editors: Max Velmans & Susan Schneider. <i>The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness</i> . p 167. 2 V. Jayaram. Dhyana or Meditation in Hindu Tradition. http://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/essays/meditation.asp . 3 Miller, Moshe. Levels of Soul Consciousness. http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380651/jewish/Levels-of-Soul-Consciousness.htm 4 Schnoebelen, William. <i>Masonry: Beyond the Light</i> . 1991. pp 195-197. 5 http://www.meditationexpert.com/comparative-religion/c_five_stages_of_the_spiritual_path.html				

The five general stages listed above are often subdivided in various ways in order to bring additional clarity or specificity to the contemplative process. One prominent example is Teresa of Avila's famous book, *The Interior Castle*, in which she likens the soul to a great crystal with many facets. Teresa, herself a 16th century contemplative mystic mentioned in the previous section, held to a concept known as Soul Detachment, which she poetically discussed in many of her writings. Teresa's view was that the Dark Night of the Soul should be subdivided into three new levels, known as the fourth through sixth mansions.⁹² In order for a person to transverse the corridors, open the locked doors, and navigate the many rooms in the spiritual realms, one must become detached from the soul, mind activity must cease, emotions must be deprecated, and the will must

92 Teresa of Avila. *Interior Castle*. 1577.

be put into a dreamy slumber so that the spirit might commune with the void or emptiness at the center of the person, which Teresa calls God. Teresa describes the process in the fourth through seventh mansions,

“The first, Devotion of Heart, is mental prayer of devout concentration or contemplation. It is the withdrawal of the soul from without and especially the devout observance of the passion of Christ and penitence (Autobiography 11.20).

“The second, Devotion of Peace, is where human will is surrendered to God. This is by virtue of a charismatic, supernatural state given by God, while the other faculties, such as memory, reason, and imagination, are not yet secure from worldly distraction. While a partial distraction is due to outer performances such as repetition of prayers and writing down spiritual things, yet the prevailing state is one of quietude (Autobiography 14.1).

“The third, Devotion of Union, is absorption in God. It is not only a supernatural but an essentially ecstatic state. Here there is also an absorption of the reason in God, and only the memory and imagination are left to ramble. This state is characterized by a blissful peace, a sweet slumber of at least the higher soul faculties, or a conscious rapture in the love of God.

“‘The fourth, Devotion of Ecstasy, is where the consciousness of being in the body disappears. Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are also absorbed in God or intoxicated. Body and spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation, sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. This after half an hour is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. The subject awakens from this in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, producing a trance.’ Indeed, she was said to have been observed levitating during Mass on more than one occasion.”⁹³

These practices are openly pagan in origin and read like a New Age meditation guide. However, these practices are identical to the mystical practices taught by Merton, Keating, Nouwen, and countless other mystics. Special attention is warranted to what Saint Teresa calls, “fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation.” These descriptions are very similar to symptoms that experienced yoga meditation practitioners report when moving through the chakras of the kundalini, a condition known as kundalini awakening: “stress and fear accompanies such a process...itchy creepy crawlly [feelings], intense pressure in the forehead, spontaneous orgasms...”⁹⁴ And what precisely did Teresa experience in these trances? Saint Teresa writes in her autobiography,

*“...the devil was with me for five hours torturing me with such terrible pains and both inward and outward disquiet that I do not believe I could have endured them any longer. The sisters who were with me were frightened to death...for the devil had made me pound the air with my body, head and arms and I had been powerless to resist him. But the worst thing had been the interior disquiet. I could find no way of regaining my tranquility.”*⁹⁵

In addition to depression, tremendous anxiety and fear, and physical and mental torment, the fourth stage of the contemplative mystical process known as the Dark Night of the Soul (the fourth through sixth mansions) is also characterized by overt sexual perversion. In the Gnostic tradition, sexual intercourse with demons is common.⁹⁶ It is also true that in the Dark Night of the Soul Saint Teresa of Avila had sexual relations with spirits and also entered into an illicit sexual marriage union with who she believed to be God the Father and Jesus Christ. She writes,

94 Mehta, Anmol. Signs and Symptoms of the Kundalini Awakening Experience. <http://anmolmehta.com/signs-and-symptoms-of-the-kundalini-awakening-experience/>

95 Bache, Christopher M. Dark Night, Early Dawn: Steps to a Deep Ecology of Mind. State Univ of NY. 2000. p 283.

96 Schnoebelen, William. Masonry: Beyond the Light. Chick Pub. 1991. pp 195-197.

*"I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form...He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire...In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by the intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one's soul be content with anything less than God."*⁹⁷

While necessarily cryptic, given the 16th century context in which she was writing, scholars unanimously agree that Teresa of Avila was (or believed that she was) engaged in sexual activity with a spirit being. This is true not only within the scope of modern scholarship but also criticism throughout the intervening centuries. In fact, Bernini's famous sculpture, *The Ecstasy of Teresa of Avila* in Cornaro Chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, depicts her sexual encounters with spirits. These experiences were not one-time occurrences but characterized her experience in deeper levels of contemplative mysticism. As mentioned above, Teresa not only engaged in sexual experiences with unnamed spirits but with God also, or so she believed. She writes in her *Autobiography*,

*"The pain is not bodily, but spiritual, though the body has its share in it. It is a caressing of love so sweet, which now takes place between the soul and God that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying."*⁹⁸

Unsurprisingly, Teresa named her sixth mansion the same name that the

97 New World Encyclopedia. "Saint Teresa of Avila." Source, Saint Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*.

98 Ibid.

Gnostics chose for their overtly sexual meditative states of consciousness—the Bridal Chamber.⁹⁹

Teresa of Avila's experiences are deeply occult in nature and range from levitation to out of body experiences to masochism to behavior that seems to match the descriptions of demon possession to being helplessly tortured by Satan and demons to sexual perversion and intercourse with spirits.¹⁰⁰ Needless to say, none of these things are Godly or biblical but, according to Teresa of Avila, are the natural if not inevitable result of following her methods of Soul Detachment, and as in the quote above, she hoped that others would experience these things also. Few would suspect that her book *Interior Castle* or her descriptions or methodologies for entering into mystical states would ever be adopted or endorsed in Evangelical churches, but this assumption is flatly false.

In fact, Teresa's teachings are once again growing in popularity in Evangelical churches under a new name, the Mansions of the Heart, named for R. Thomas Ashbrook's book *Mansions of the Heart*. Ashbrook openly admits in his 2009 publication that his entire purpose for writing his book is to repackage Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* for a modern audience. In *Mansions of the Heart* Ashbrook faithfully defines and summarizes all seven of Teresa's mansions, including the Bridal Chamber—albeit without the colorful descriptions and anecdotes from Teresa's life. But why omit the encounters that Teresa had with various spirits as she traveled the corridors of the spiritual realms? If Teresa's skill, techniques, and accomplishments in Contemplative Mysticism are so envious that a twenty-first century audience must learn her path, why not proclaim it loudly? As previously mentioned, secrecy seems to be of some importance in these matters, and as one pushes in toward the deeper teachings of Contemplative Mystics the reason for secrecy becomes clear.

Indeed, the deepest and center-most teaching of the Christian Mystics and mystics from many religious traditions is that of Union with the Divine or Ab-

99 Schnobelen, William. *Masonry: Beyond the Light*. Chick Pub. 1991. pp 195-197.

100 Teresa of Avila. *Autobiography*. Dover Publications. 2010.

solute or God. Because this teaching is esoteric in nature, it can be difficult to unpack; however, a basic understanding of Gnostic teaching is a great help in grasping Christian Mystic theology, for the Christian Mystics are, in almost all respects, Gnostic.

The Gnostics taught that their god is “wholly other,” and man could not know him¹⁰¹ except that he or she walk the path of the negative—to think or speak about what god is not.¹⁰² A person could not come to a “positive” or “affirmative” knowledge of god except by means of a mystical soul-experience of the Divine, known as the Awakening.¹⁰³ In Gnostic teaching the human soul is sleeping or slumbering¹⁰⁴ or has forgotten who he or she is and must be awakened to the presence of the Divine Spark¹⁰⁵—a void or emptiness at the center of every person that is untouched by sin and is itself god.¹⁰⁶ God, therefore, is in everyone and everything, but each person must awaken to this reality, an illumination known as Gnosis—a supra-intellectual revelation or “deep” knowing that is indescribable in human terms,¹⁰⁷ but is known as Sophia—the illuminated human soul, the female Spirit of Wisdom, the true Bride of Christ, and Christ’s syzygy or female half.¹⁰⁸ The awakening is accomplished through an interior pilgrimage, in which the pilgrim transverses multiple stages or concentric circles of the soulish and spiritual planes, utilizing altered and novel states of consciousness brought on by means of meditative practices so that by way of spiritual experiences of

101 Kyle, Eric J. *Sacred Systems*. Pickwick Publications. *Gnostic Christian Formation: Theological*.

102 *Ibid.*

103 Weor, Samael Aun. *The Perfect Matrimony*. Ch. *The Awakening of Consciousness*. 1950.

104 Kyle, Eric J. *Sacred Systems*. Pickwick Publications. *Gnostic Christian Formation: Models of Reality*.

105 Hoeller, Stephan A. *Gnosticism: New Light on an Ancient Tradition of Inner Knowing*. Quest Books, 2012. p 18.

106 Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. 1968. p 158.

107 Kyle, Eric J. *Sacred Systems*. Pickwick Publications. *Gnostic Christian Formation: Theological*.

108 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia_\(Gnosticism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophia_(Gnosticism))

the Divine—visions, dreams, apparitions, ecstasies, and encounters—the person might enter the bridal chamber and by way of mystical Union come to realize his or her Inner or True Self.¹⁰⁹ The gnosis of the True Self is the realization that god is one and unitary in nature, having no divisions or separations and, therefore, for the mystic to be found in god is for the mystic to be god. This process is known as apotheosis or man becoming god.

Each of the descriptions above, though accurately describing the theology and language of the Gnostics, match in precise ways the teachings of Christian Mysticism. The following breakdown will show the accuracy of this claim. Although many citations could be provided for each of the following items, in the spirit of brevity the sections below have been reduced to include only two or three citations each. Likewise, citations from contemplative leaders whom many lesser known mystics cite have been used instead of citations from the lesser known mystics themselves. For example, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Eugene Peterson all cite Thomas Merton regularly; therefore, citations from Merton are used instead of citations from Foster, Willard, and Peterson. The following begins with a post-biblical historical analysis of the infiltration of Gnosticism into Christian thought and practice before progressing to specific Gnostic teachings as they appear in modern Christian Mysticism.

1. Gnostic Origins in Post-biblical Christian Mysticism

Long before Merton, Keating, Foster, Willard, or even Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila, two post-biblical-period sources stand apart as the central figures responsible for infusing Gnosticism into Christianity—the Desert Fathers of the fourth century AD and Meister Eckhart of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries AD.

As previously mentioned, the modern mystics (Merton, Keating, Nouwen,

109 Kyle, Eric J. *Sacred Systems*. Pickwick Publications. *Gnostic Christian Formation: Models of Reality*.

Foster, etc.) point to the Desert Fathers—Orthodox monks who left Europe for Egypt and North Africa late in the third century AD—as proof that mysticism properly belongs to the Christian tradition. Until relatively recently, however, very little was known about the Desert Fathers beyond their use of Apophatic meditative techniques to achieve Ecstatic Hesychastic states. Because of the discovery of Desert Father manuscripts in the Nag Hammadi Codices,¹¹⁰ archaeologists and historical scholars now believe that the Desert Fathers were not Christians in the traditional biblical sense but were actually Christian Gnostics.¹¹¹ As historian Dr. Bart Ehrman wrote of the “desert monks,”¹¹²

*“No form of lost Christianity has so intrigued modern readers and befuddled modern scholars as early Christian Gnosticism. The intrigue is easy to understand, especially in view of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library.... When that group of field hands headed by Mohammed Ali uncovered this cache of books in Upper Egypt, the world was suddenly presented with hard evidence of other Christian groups in the ancient world that stood in sharp contrast with any kind of Christianity familiar to us today. There was no Jesus of the stained glass window here, nor a Jesus of the creeds—not even a Jesus of the New Testament. These books were fundamentally different from anything in our experience, and almost nothing could have prepared us for them.”*¹¹³

Like the Desert Fathers before him, Meister Eckhart articulated the Gnostic path within Christianity and went on to inspire the flow of modern Christian Mysticism. In fact, the community of modern Christian Mysticism almost unanimously lauds Meister Eckhart’s teachings as foundational to understanding the

110 <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/post-biblical-period/the-nag-hammadi-codices/>

111 Teska, William. *Meditation in Christianity*. p 65.

112 Ehrman, Bart. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*. Oxford University Press. 2005. p 45.

113 *Ibid.* p 113.

pathway of Union with the Divine. Below, author and mystic Ted Nottingham summarizes Meister Eckhart's teachings. The Gnostic influence is unmistakable.

*“He [Eckhart] saw us [humanity] as fragmented and separated from our source of origin with an irrepressible orientation toward our spiritual unity, but he provided no dogma as sign posts on the way. He preferred to say what God is not rather than what God is. He believed that each person had to find his or her own path to the Godhead within...in simplest terms he believed that God was immediately present to us and through the abandonment of our lower selves and their world of multiplicity we can be filled with eternal illumination of the unmediated, inexpressible Godhead...progress is, therefore, equated with knowing—a knowing which is not based on empirical observation or rational comprehension, but, rather, on an inner, higher level of consciousness which transcends the material world. Meister Eckhart considered the intellect as the element in us that opens onto higher spiritual spheres...[the intellect] is of God’s order and not made from nature. Awareness of God comes through the development or transformation of this Ancient [human consciousness] into God. The consciousness of the nearness of God reveals for Eckhart that all reality depends on the invisible and imminent reality of the Divine. The material, historical dimension of reality is seen as the lowest level from which the soul must become detached. This most important idea of detachment assumes that time and space are fragments and that unity—the highest good and truth—is found only in God...time and space veil the unity from which everything comes. The consciousness of God excludes the consciousness of one’s self until one finds one’s self again in God...The intellect must have no existence of its own in order to be filled with the only true existence. This union is accomplished in the moment when the receptive intellect is transformed into God’s fullness.”*¹¹⁴

There can be no question that Eckhart's teaching is demonstrably Gnostic in nature, and the books of First, Second, and Third John strongly warn the Christian against Gnostic teaching; further, nowhere in Scripture is any mention that believers in Jesus Christ in any way must empty their minds, downplay their in-

114 Nottingham, Ted. Union with the Divine: The Mysticism of Meister Eckhart. 2015.

tellect, or that they ever become the fullness of God. For this teaching and many other false teachings Meister Eckhart was tried and convicted of heresy and excommunicated, yet he remains one of the founding fathers of modern Christian Mysticism in spite of (or perhaps because of) his clear Gnostic leanings. That both the Desert Fathers and Meister Eckhart are used as primary source material for the principal teachings of Contemplative Mysticism and the greater Spiritual Formation movement is shameful and represents a dangerous trajectory in Western Christian thought and practice. The list of Gnostic teachings, which continues below, will establish the ubiquity and scope of the infiltration of Gnostic theology and practice in the Spiritual Formation movement.

2. That God is Wholly Other

The concept of the Wholly Other is that the lower world is cut off from the Divine in a direct sense, and so one must journey within the soul out of the chaos,¹¹⁵ busyness, and distractions of this world into that reality which sin and the mundane have not affected, namely god—the Wholly Other, which is at the core and center of all people. As Contemplative Mystic, Richard Rohr, puts it,

*“On the other hand, when they [people] can enter into the mystery of powerlessness, which is what we symbolize by the Lamb of God, and walk with their own inner child, they meet a wholly other God...”*¹¹⁶

Rohr’s conception is identical with the teachings of Thomas Merton,¹¹⁷ Henri

115 DeConick, April D. *The Gnostic New Age: How Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion...* Sec. The Shamanic Quest.

116 Rohr, Richard. *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment*. Crossroad Publishing. p 180.

117 Merton, Thomas. *Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings*. Paulist Press, 1992. p 431.

Nouwen,¹¹⁸ Rudolf Otto (which he called the Numinous),¹¹⁹ and many others. The Christian, therefore, can neither hope to understand the Scriptures—because the Scriptures speak of one who is Wholly Other—nor depend on his or her mental faculties to discern the things of God in the Scriptures, but instead, to use Richard Foster’s platitude, the Christian must begin making the move from “head to heart.”¹²⁰ The only recourse, therefore, as Dallas Willard and Richard Foster suggest, is that the Christian must practice the silence, Kataphatic and Apophatic, Contemplative Mystical practices to achieve passive states of consciousness so that the revelation of Union with the Divine is achieved.

3. That the Intellect Is Relegated to the Path of the Negative

Without the revelation of Union with the Divine by means of mystical practices, the Christian Mystics claim that the believer is constrained to the Path of the Negative or the Negative Way. As mystic Thomas Aquinas¹²¹ put it,

*“Because we cannot know what God is, but only what He is not, we cannot consider how He is but only how He is not.”*¹²²

Thomas Merton learned of the Path of the Negative from 16th Century mystic Saint John of the Cross, who said,

118 Nouwen, Henri. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. Image, 2006. p 18.

119 Otto Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*, Trans. John W. Harvey. Oxford University Press 1950.

120 <https://renovare.org/about/overview>

121 Torrell, Jean-Pierre, O.P. St. Thomas Aquinas: Theologian and Mystic. <http://santotomasdeaquino.verboencarnado.net/st-thomas-aquinas-theologian-and-mystic-by-jean-pierre-torrell-o-p/>

122 Aquinas, St. Thomas. *The Summa Theologica*. Sec. Of the Simplicity of God.

“In this life we know God better ‘by what he is not’ than ‘by what He is...’”¹²³

Quite to the contrary the Bible is full of positive, affirmative statements about God and His nature and character. The Bible stands in sharp contrast to the void or nothingness that is god in the Mystics’ conception. A Christian need not walk in ignorance about God where he or she has the true witness of the Scriptures as a guide. Unsurprisingly, the Bible never reveals that Kataphatic and Apophatic Contemplative Mystical activities and experiences are at all required to affirm the truth of God and experience the move of the Holy Spirit. The mystics teach precisely the opposite.

4. That the Divine Spark is a Void or Emptiness Within Each Person and is the True Self

Thomas Merton put it succinctly when he said,

*“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, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.”*¹²⁴

“[Through Contemplative prayer a] restructuring of consciousness takes place

123 Ekstrand, Dr., D. W. <http://www.thetransformedsoul.com/additional-studies/spiritual-life-studies/saint-john-of-the-cross>

124 Merton, Thomas. *Spiritual Master: The Essential Writings*. Paulist Press; 1st edition, 1992. p 146.

*which empowers one to perceive, relate and respond with increasing sensitivity to the divine presence in, through, and beyond everything that exists.”*¹²⁵

5. That the Awakening is a Journey through Concentric Circles of the Spiritual Plane

Although many mystics use the Gnostic notion of concentric circles to describe the pilgrimage toward the True Self—including Thomas Keating,¹²⁶ Thomas Merton,¹²⁷ Saint John of the Cross,¹²⁸ and Teresa of Avila¹²⁹ to name a few—R. Thomas Ashbrook in his book, *Mansions of the Heart*, goes so far as to diagram each circle in the journey.¹³⁰ Based upon Teresa of Avila’s *Mansions*, Ashbrook charts the path of the Christian from the outer circle of the First Mansion—the early salvation experience—all the way to bridal union with Christ and the realization of the True Self.

6. That Soul Detachment is the Means of this Interior Journey

The evidence outlined in this section as well as previous sections has established that Soul Detachment through altered states of consciousness by means of

125 Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimensions of the Gospel*. Continuum Intl. Publishing Group, 2002. p 4.

126 Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Mystical Hope Trusting in the Mercy of God*. Cowley Publication: 2001. p 51.

127 Ibid. p 52.

128 Larkin, Ernest E. *The Prayer Journey of St. Saint John of the Cross*. Carmelite Publications. p 270.

129 Welch, John. *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*. Paulist Press: 1982. p 16.

130 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 1069-1070). Wiley. Kindle Edition. Figure 3.1 The Seven Mansions of the Interior Castle.

Kataphatic and Apophatic practices is central to the interior journey according to both modern mystics like Foster, Nouwen, Keating, Rohr, and Merton, and also the historical mystics like Ignatius of Loyola, St. John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. Each of these mystics owe to Meister Eckhart their understanding of Soul Detachment. Eckhart puts it plainly,

*“...whereby man may come most closely to God and wherein he may once more become like the original image as he was in God when there was yet no distinction between God and himself before God produced creatures. And having dived into the basis of things to the best of my ability I find that it is no other than absolute detachment (abegescheidenheit) from everything that is created.”*¹³¹

And what was the nature of this detachment? Eckhart said that within himself and all like him there is, “bloss niht,” or “absolute nothing.” This nothing is the highest virtue with which God can have his way and is God.

7. That the Bridal Chamber and Its Ecstasies are the Ultimate Destination

As briefly explained above, the Gnostics believed that the soul of the person who receives Gnosis was transformed into Sophia, or Wisdom—Christ’s female half and the body of Christ. It was in the Bridal Chamber—a deep meditative trance-state that Ecstatic and sexual union with Christ was achieved. Clearly, Teresa of Avila’s teachings parallel if not match precisely this Gnostic doctrine; however, Thomas Merton in his time went so far as to borrow not only the practices but the vocabulary of the Gnostics as well. In Christopher Pramuk’s book, *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, Pramuk unpacks Merton’s conception of Sophia as Christ.

131 Blakney, “About Disinterest,” p 82.

*“Bound up closely with Hebrew creation texts, the Wisdom tradition running through both testaments (e.g., John 1:1-18; 1 Cor 1:24; Col 1:15-20) intimates that the living heart of the universe is not a “what,” as in the impersonal fire, but rather a “Who,” in whom all things are created, sustained, redeemed: YHWH, Wisdom, Word, Spirit, Christ, Sophia.”*¹³²

Speaking of Sophia mystically as the female aspect of God/Christ and as the Bride of Christ, Merton writes,

*“Because she receives [being herself a kind of manifestation of God] perfectly there is in her no stain. She loves without blemish, and gratitude without self-complacency. All things praise her by being themselves and by sharing in the Wedding Feast....”*¹³³

Again, more specifically, speaking of Sophia, Merton writes,

*“He is Father and Mother, we call her His ‘glory.’ She is the Bride and the Feast and the Wedding.”*¹³⁴

The Bible declares that Jesus Christ is the “glory” of God. Consider Hebrews 1:3,

“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”

Further, the Bible declares that the church is the Bride of Christ. Consider, Revelation 21:9, in which the angel shows John the overcoming church and calls the church, “the Bride.”

132 Pramuk, Christopher. *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*. Michael Glazier, 2009. p 147.

133 Ibid. p 304.

134 Ibid. p 204.

“Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”

The mystical teaching of Sophia is false and dangerous, spilling from the notion that the True Self of each person is God.

8. That Union is Achieved When the Person Realizes that the True Self is God

Even the Gnostic teaching that man’s True Self is God is ensconced in Christian Mysticism. Here Thomas Merton clears up all doubt.

*“The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. But whatever is in God is really identical with Him [sic], for His infinite simplicity admits no division and no distinction.”*¹³⁵

Contemplative Mystic and Spiritual Formation leader, Richard Rohr, says,

*“Longing for God and longing for our True Self are the same thing. It is God who is longing in us and through us.”*¹³⁶

David Benner, a popular Evangelical Psychologist and mystic, concurs when he admits,

“I would suggest that, grounded in a deep awareness of the sacredness and inter-

135 Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New Directions Paperbook: 1972. pp 35-36.

136 <https://twitter.com/richardrohrfm/status/762999495252672512>

*connectedness of everything in existence, wisdom is living in alignment with the creative Spirit of Wisdom who inhabits all of creation and who is our truest and deepest self.”*¹³⁷

Jesus said that a tree, whether it is good or evil, is known by its fruit. Even a casual examination of those teachers whom Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, Eugene Peterson, Thomas Ashbrook, Henri Nouwen, and so many others in the Spiritual Formation movement recommend and endorse—people like Thomas Merton, Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, the Desert Fathers, etc.—reveals a dizzying array of false and dangerous practices and teachings. What is equally or even more troubling, however, is that an organized system for the distribution and training of these ideas within the context of an intimate, unsupervised, one-on-one, discipleship-type context is already in existence in Evangelical Christian denominations today. The international organizations which promulgate Contemplative Mystical practices under the name of Spiritual Formation have literally tens of thousands of trained individuals, known as Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Supervisors, working and practicing in the United States and in local churches around the country and the world. These organizations have stated objectives to bring the teachings of Merton, Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and many others to Christians of all ages, all denominations, not to mention, people of all faith traditions—a fact which will become undeniable in the next section.

137 <http://www.drdavidgbenner.ca/writing-and-living/#more-4179>

Spiritual Direction

Before discussing the major international organizations working to spread the teachings of Contemplative Mysticism to pastors, teachers, church leaders, and literally every person in every age group it is important to know what a Spiritual Director is and what he or she does. A Spiritual Director is a mentor or guide which leads an initiate on a pathway of Spiritual Formation by means of the practice of Spiritual Disciplines previously described—meditative activities and exercises utilizing Breath Prayer, Lectio Divina, Imaginative Prayer, Visualization, internal solitude, interior silence, purgation, and other methodologies in order to achieve Soul Detachment, altered states of consciousness, receive new revelation, and ostensibly rediscover the True Self and enter into unity with the Divine. Spiritual Direction, based upon what appears to be broad agreement from many sources, can be additionally described as follows:

Spiritual Direction is not counseling.

Spiritual Direction is not therapy.

Spiritual Direction is not financial advice.

Like psychotherapy, it is often offered as a one-on-one or group experience in private sessions with spiritual mentors who have most likely completed extensive formation for the ministry and service of Spiritual Direction.

It is up to each individual to choose a Spiritual Director who has the training, formation and experience that suits his or her needs. Spiritual Direction includes your deity or higher power as a third partner in the process.

Put plainly, a Spiritual Director guides a person through the five stages of Contemplative Mysticism while slowly reeducating the person in Apophatic and Kataphatic spirituality.

However, unlike a tour guide or a movie director who actively leads from a position of expertise, a Spiritual Director leads in “nondirective” and mostly empathetic ways. Within the academic community of Spiritual Direction, this method is known as the Rogerian¹³⁸ approach—named for psychotherapist Carl Rogers’ techniques. In the most general sense Rogerian psychotherapy belongs to the humanistic school of psychotherapies and taught that the director or therapist should project three core conditions, which Rogers believed were necessary for patients to learn to trust the authority of the self. The three core conditions that the director/therapist must embody to lead a patient toward personal realization are:

1. **Congruence**—the willingness to transparently relate to the clients without hiding behind a professional or personal façade.
2. **Unconditional Positive Regard**—the therapist offers acceptance and prizes their client for who he or she is without conveying disapproving feelings, actions, or characteristics and demonstrates a willingness to at-

138 Evans, Jean. *Journal of Religion and Health*. February 2015, Volume 54, Issue 1, pp 264–278.

tentively listen without interruption, judgement, or giving advice.

3. **Empathy**—the therapist communicates a desire to understand and appreciate the client’s perspective.¹³⁹

All three of the core conditions of Rogerian psychotherapy have been faithfully and purposefully established as essential pillars within the field of Spiritual Direction, and the Spiritual Director uses the Rogerian method to lead cohorts (those who are under the guidance of the Spiritual Director) into Formation Exercises using at least three fundamental philosophies:

Contemplative Awareness—Also known simply as mindfulness, Contemplative Awareness “is not thinking, interpreting, or evaluating; it is an awareness of perception. It is a nonjudgmental quality of mind which does not anticipate the future or reflect back on the past.”

¹⁴⁰ The cohort sits with a Spiritual Director, typically (but not always) as part of a one-on-one session, who instructs him or her in the following way,

*“Begin by sitting in a chair or on a cushion on the floor, with your back straight. Relax into your sitting posture with a few deep breaths...Allow the body and mind to become utterly relaxed while remaining very alert and attentive to the present moment.... Let your mind be soft, and allow a spacious awareness to wash gently through your body...‘Rising/falling’ from the abdomen and ‘in/out’ from the nostrils. Let the breath breathe itself without control, direction, or force...As concentration grows, mindfulness opens to the entire ‘flow’ of body/mind experience through all the sense doors — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental/emotive. Seeing things as they are begins to untangle the tangles of attachment, fear, and confusion. One is able to live more from a place of joy, compassion, equanimity and wisdom.”*¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person-centered_therapy

¹⁴⁰ Smith, Steven. Meditation and Mindfulness. CMind. <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree/meditation>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Empathetic Interaction—Distinct from the concept of empathy (feeling)—though certainly emphasizing feelings—Empathetic Interaction is “a process of convergent interaction [in which] one person’s behavior is attuned to that of the other person in the conversation, such that there often becomes a single field of action in which the two people achieve a mutual resonance rather than a merely linear back-and-forth process.”¹⁴²

Self-Realization—Also referred to as self-actualization, Self-Realization, as Villanova University professor in Religious Studies and Spiritual Direction advocate, Walter E. Conn, puts it,

*“[Self-Realization in the context of] Spiritual direction can be said to address the very meaning of the client’s life itself, to address realization of the self’s most radical desire, of its fullest, divine potential. Spiritual direction, in other words, aims at realizing the self-transcending possibilities of a client’s life by encouraging radical transformation of the self within its ongoing development, by encouraging, in a word, conversion.”*¹⁴³

So many problems and dangers exist within the context of Spiritual Direction and its adoption of humanistic Rogerian psychoanalytic philosophies, that it is difficult to summarize all of them. However, the overarching problems are clear.

1. Problems with Contemplative Awareness

Contemplative Awareness promotes distinctly Eastern Apophatic and Western Kataphatic methods of meditation and altered states of consciousness. The resulting “mindfulness” could not be a greater misnomer. Rather, mindlessness is the objective. Passivity rather than activity is the rule, and a complete depre-

142 Rekers, George Alan. *Pastoral Modes in a Theology of Evangelism*. 1997. p 271.

143 Conn, Walter E. *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence*. 1998. p 113.

cation of the role of reflection, analysis, discernment, and even awareness of the sense of self is the goal. These ideas fly in the face of the greatest commandment in the Bible: to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your strength. It is impossible to live-out this commandment in any meaningful way while at the same time turning off the mind and soul function. Therefore, Contemplative Awareness is definitionally unbiblical.

Similarly, the Bible calls the Christian to vigilant discernment and to test all things by the Scriptures and the Spirit. Contemplative Awareness has as its object a mental condition in which discernment is impossible, and for similar reasons cannot possibly be biblical.

2. Problems with Empathetic Interaction

Fr. Alfred Micallef, professor of Spiritual Psychology and expert in Spiritual Direction lays out the clear dangers of Spiritual Direction. He notes that the Rogerian methodology can foster unhealthy personas and relationship dependencies. Cohorts can come to see his or her Spiritual Director as the only important voice in his or her life and can even have trouble spiritually connecting without the Spiritual Director being present. Cohorts report unhealthy role assignments that develop between the cohort and the Spiritual Director; these role assignments include father/son roles, mother/daughter roles, father/daughter roles, and mother/son roles. Amazingly, in some Spiritual Direction environments, these roles are actually encouraged. Occasionally these roles take on an overtly sexual tone and even become heterosexual or homosexual relationships, which can continue for years because of the inherent lack of oversight. Relatedly, the cohort can often come to find the processes and methods which the Spiritual Director employs to be an unhealthy crutch, which over time becomes necessary for any feeling of spiritual or even personal/relational connectedness. Ultimately the cohort can come to depend upon the Spiritual Director rather than God for con-

tinued spiritual growth—a condition known as transference.¹⁴⁴

Micallef's warnings are not only relational in nature but academic and theological also. For example, because of the nonjudgmental nature of Rogerian methodology along with the humanistic emphasis on the authority of self, Spiritual Direction does not begin with the awareness of sin, which carries unwanted negative connotations; rather, emphasis is shifted to the awareness of spiritual experiences. Micallef points out that the emphasis on spiritual experiences itself creates additional problems; for example, Rogerian methodology does not permit the Spiritual Director to weigh-in affirmatively or negatively on the nature, quality, authenticity, or even source of the cohort's spiritual experience. The Spiritual Direction session is a safe space for the cohort to explore his or her spiritual path. No positive or negative critical analysis is allowed. The Spiritual Director is limited to commenting merely on how the cohort is responding to his or her spiritual experience—never making qualitative statements about the experience itself.¹⁴⁵

3. Problems with Self-Realization

The central philosophy undergirding Spiritual Direction is the notion of Self-Realization or Self-Actualization—obtaining the revelation of the True Self. As previously stated, the humanistic presuppositions of Rogerian methodology and, by extension, Spiritual Direction often promote the authority of self above other authorities,¹⁴⁶ often even the Bible itself—Self-Transcendence. The history and practice of Spiritual Direction in the 20th and 21st centuries speak volumes of the dangers of the Rogerian methodology and of promoting Self-Realization.

144 Micallef, Fr. Alfred. *Spiritual Direction: A Brief History of Spiritual Direction*. <http://staff.um.edu.mt/amic1/id31.htm>

145 Ibid.

146 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Person-centered_therapy

Rogerian methodology was first introduced to the Catholic Church in California in the 1960s. The Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters, along with a few other Catholic groups, became the test-bed for Rogerian-based¹⁴⁷ Spiritual Direction; the same methodology is employed today across the country. In Tom Reidy's, *Critical Mass: A Chronicle of the Catholic Church in the First Generation After Vatican II*, Reidy, a Catholic himself, spends much of his second chapter recounting the destructive consequences of introducing Rogerian methodologies. He begins,

"Nondirective psychotherapy is aimed toward getting into one's inner self and breaking down inhibitions which include "religious hang-ups" concerning authority, doctrine, and sex. The aim is "liberation" from authoritarian modes so people can follow their own consciences and do "what's right for them." 148

Reidy is quick to point out that the de-emphasis or removal of authoritative texts and doctrine, like the Bible and the teachings therein, is a critical first step in establishing a subjective worldview, where "what's right for you might not be right for me." When the individual becomes the sole and highest authority in deciding what is good or right, very little is out of bounds in the service of what feels good. Reidy continues,

"Nondirective psychotherapy utilized the Basic Encounter as one of its vehicles. The Basic Encounter was popular in the late '60s." 149

Basic Encounters were a new form of group retreat, which laid out certain rules for its participants—rules like listening rather than offering advice, offering unconditional acceptance and never being critical, embracing and not

147 Reidy, Tom. *Critical Mass*. Ch.2. Sec. III. 2012.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.

judging, etc. The purpose of the Basic Encounter was to produce “a meaningful experience characterized by trust and empathy on a mutual level. When a person relates to another positively in this way, the process becomes therapeutic and beneficial to the patient.”¹⁵⁰ Although this might sound wonderful on the surface, Reidy points out,

*“This form of psychotherapy destroyed the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in California and inflicted serious damage on other orders [and]...reduced the nuns to rubble. Within a year and a half of introducing the Rogerian program to the Immaculate Heart nuns in California, half requested dispensation from their vows...Rogerian psychology convinced them that ‘they did not want to be under anyone’s authority, except the authority of their imperial inner selves.’ The Roger’s program was aimed at tearing down the old order that kept people in what it perceived to be a rigid, narrow mindset that made them prisoners of someone else’s rules and doctrines which kept them from fully developing their ‘imperial inner selves.’”*¹⁵¹

Reidy has every right to be authoritative on this matter. It is not merely his opinion that Rogerian methodology—the same approach used in Evangelical Spiritual Direction today across the country—has as its aim the destruction of the Christian faith. In a 1994 interview entitled, *We Overcame Their Traditions, We Overcame Their Faith*, Dr. William Coulson—the former chief of staff at Carl Rogers’ Western Behavior Sciences Institute in La Jolla, California who worked to introduce Rogerian methods into the Catholic Church—dropped a bombshell when he explained how the Rogerian method was used to destroy the Christian Faith in their test-subjects. Coulson described the Rogerian philosophy in the following way:

“The proof of authenticity on the humanistic psychology model is to go against

150 <https://psychologydictionary.org/basic-encounter/>

151 Reidy, Tom. Critical Mass. Ch.2. Sec. III. 2012.

*what you were trained to be, to call all of that phoniness, and to say what is deepest within you. What's deepest within you, however, are certain unrequited longings, including sexual longings. We provoked an epidemic of sexual misconduct among the clergy and therapists.”*¹⁵²

Coulson spoke of one nun in particular who before attending a Basic Encounter retreat felt great guilt about an ongoing lesbian affair. After the Basic Encounter retreat and the supportive conversations she had with a priest there, she no longer had to feel guilty for continuing the affair. The priest had told her that it was up to her to decide if it was right or wrong.¹⁵³

Although many of these problems began in the 1960s, they continue today. An increasingly common symptom of Spiritual Direction and Contemplative Mysticism as a means of achieving revelation of the True Self is that people are abandoning faith in Jesus Christ, recognizing instead their own inner voice to be the true voice of love. In a recent article in *Presence Magazine*—a publication put out by Spiritual Directors International—entitled, *Can There Be Spiritual Direction Without God?* Jay E. Valusek says,

*“The last time I saw my spiritual director before losing my faith, I remember telling her that whenever I listen inwardly to the ‘still, small voice’ of God—for guidance, for direction, for anything—the voice I heard always sounded suspiciously like me. Talking to myself. And I had this crazy idea that God’s voice ought to sound, I don’t know, different somehow. Alas, it seemed that either God was speaking with a boring Midwestern accent just like mine, or had fallen silent altogether. Maybe God found it amusing just to listen to me talking to myself, I said. But I found it profoundly disturbing, even after spending twelve years on the apophatic path.”*¹⁵⁴

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid.

154 Valusek, Jay E. Can there Be Spiritual Direction Without God? *Presence Magazine*, Vol 20. No. 4, 2014. p 27.

Valusek's path is like so many others; at the end of the Contemplative road is the discovery of the Transcendent Self. Even he was surprised to discover it. As Valusek puts it,

*"I thought I understood these things. I had, after all, gone through training in contemplative leadership and group spiritual direction with the Shalem Institute. I had led prayer groups and retreats. I had facilitated spiritual direction groups in the Episcopal Church. I had read all the books about the dark night, about the wilderness and the desert, about the cloud of unknowing. I had spent years yearning for union with the Divine Mystery, and listening for an answer to the question of my calling to some kind of ministry. And after all that? Nothing. Nada, as St. Saint John of the Cross would say. Nada, nada, nada. He might even say I was progressing nicely as a mystic. But that's not how things turned out."*¹⁵⁵

Valusek admits that one night, "God died." And he never returned. However, after some time, Valusek returned to Spiritual Direction to continue to explore his spiritual side—this time to "listen together, not to God, but to my deeper self—my 'true self,' God's analog, if you will." Valusek says,

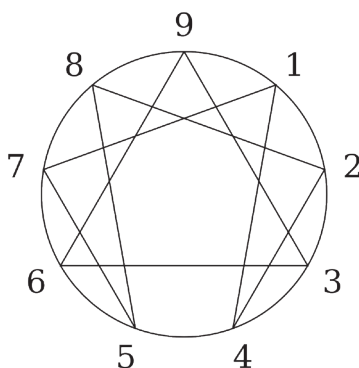
*"I've already taken the contemplative practice of lectio divina out of the church, substituted poetry for the sacred text, and offered it without any reference to God. I call it lectio poetica. I have hosted retreats and small groups using poems to open our hearts and minds to the 'still, small voice' of the soul, our source of inner wisdom, listening for a word of guidance, comfort, challenge, or direction."*¹⁵⁶

Valusek admits that God is not at all necessary to experience deep, life-changing spiritual experiences using precisely the same techniques as traditional Evangelical Spiritual Direction. In fact, he references in his article Spiritual Directors operating in the United States from all sorts of religious backgrounds

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid. pp 29-30.

and faiths.¹⁵⁷ Stories like these underscore, for Spiritual Direction proponents, the need to understand the cohort's personality and behavioral tendencies so that the Spiritual Director can help the cohort navigate his or her spiritual experiences. Increasingly this is done using a pagan personality profiling and evaluation system known as the Enneagram, pictured below.



The Enneagram

The Enneagram is growing in popularity in Evangelical Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction. Christian Research International describes the meaning of the nine points.

*“In workshops they [Spiritual Directors] learn that only nine personality types exist and that every person fits into one of them. Each of these nine types represents a personality compulsion, a wrong or even ‘demonic’ way of behaving. Once a person identifies his or her type (usually classified by a number on the enneagram), then he or she can supposedly learn how to improve, or at least avoid getting worse, spiritually.”*¹⁵⁸

157 Ibid. p 31.

158 <http://www.equip.org/article/tell-me-who-i-am-o-enneagram/>

Although mostly popular in Catholic groups, parishes, and retreat houses, very few Catholics or Evangelical Christians are familiar with the occult origins or the Enneagram. George Gurdjieff—an Armenian occultist with a fascination for astrology, mental telepathy, spiritism, fortune telling, and demon possession—traveled throughout central Asia, the Mediterranean, Egypt, Tibet, and India learning the occult sciences in the late 19th century. Of particular interest to him were Babylonian teachings passed down by the Sarmouni mystery school. On one trip to Afghanistan in 1897 Gurdjieff was introduced to a Sarmouni priest and became a student, learning among their many pagan arts their divination tool, known as the Enneagram.¹⁵⁹

In the early 20th century Gurdjieff began teaching a form of Christian Mysticism called esoteric Christianity and prominent among his teachings was the Enneagram, the underlying philosophy of which is based on a pagan numerology that holds that all things may be divined by the numbers. Central to Gurdjieff's beliefs and the use of the Enneagram is that the essence of the human being is divine, being itself connected and unified with the divine essence of the universe.¹⁶⁰

Chris Heuertz, author of, *The Sacred Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth*, was asked “This isn’t just another personality typing system like Meyers-Briggs or something. You believe the Enneagram is ‘sacred,’ right?” Heuertz responded,

“One of my teachers, Russ Hudson says, ‘Type’ isn’t a “type” of person, but a path to God.’ I believe it’s sacred because as a map of our soul it’s a compassionate sketch of possibilities. The Enneagram is less about nine ‘types of people’ and more about nine paths back to our true selves and nine paths to divine love. If we can’t self-observe, then we can’t self-correct. The Sacred Enneagram helps us self-observe, helps us tell the truth about who we really are coming clean from our

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

delusions and illusions, so that we can locate the authentic source of our identity.”

As a follow up question the interviewer asked, “How does one align one’s Enneagram type with specific types of prayer?”

“In The Sacred Enneagram, I suggest that contemplative prayer practices are framed by three primary postures: solitude, silence, and stillness. I present nine unique contemplative prayer postures and prayer intentions combinations that I think perfectly align with each of the nine Enneagram types as these distinct paths to God.”¹⁶¹

In another interview he states,

“Essentially, the enneagram I’m suggesting in the book is that our enneagram type isn’t fundamentally about the type of person we are, but it’s more of a pathway back to God, a path back to our true selves. What I do in the sacred enneagram is help folks come to terms with one of the nine types where they are dominant and essentially try to suggest that there are nine different ways to pray. There’s nine different ways to do our inner work to nurture our own spiritual lives. And when we can discover what our unique path back to God is, there’s something deeply sacred, very simple, but still deeply sacred in that.”¹⁶²

One of the prayer methods used with the Enneagram is something called Kything Prayer which engages the imagination to focus on the interconnectedness between all people, all creatures, all creation, and God. The Enneagram is recommended by Barbara Metz, SND, and John Burchill, OP, as a way of engaging in kything prayer.

“Kything Prayer can be done with any other person, present or absent, dead or

161 <https://religionnews.com/2017/09/05/what-is-the-enneagram-and-why-are-christians-suddenly-so-enamored-by-it/>

162 <https://relevantmagazine.com/article/what-all-christians-need-to-know-about-the-enneagram/>

*alive, whose Enneagramic reading ‘moves against your numerical arrows’. The key is to ‘let your center find itself within the person with whom you are kything’ and to ‘Picture yourself within the [other] person.’ An alternative form of Enneagramic kything is to ‘invite the other person’s spirit into themselves’.”*¹⁶³

In *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types* Russ Hudson, President of The Enneagram Institute, writes,

“The modern Enneagram of personality type has been synthesized from many different spiritual and religious traditions. Much of it is a condensation of universal wisdom, the perennial philosophy accumulated by Christians, Buddhists, Muslims (especially the Sufis), and Jews (in the Kabbalah) for thousands of years. The heart of the Enneagram is the universal insight that human beings are spiritual presences incarnated in the material world and yet mysteriously embodying the same life and Spirit as the Creator. Beneath surface differences and appearances, behind the veils of illusion, the light of Divinity shines in every individual. Various forces obscure that light, however, and each spiritual tradition has myths and doctrines to explain how mankind has lost its connection with the Divine.

“One of the great strengths of the Enneagram is that it steps aside from all doctrinal differences. It has helped individuals from virtually every major religious faith to rediscover their fundamental unity as spiritual beings. The Enneagram can therefore be enormously valuable in today’s world to show white and black, male and female, Catholic and Protestant, Arab and Jew, straight and gay, rich and poor that if they search beneath the surface differences that separate them, they will find an entirely new level of common humanity. With the help of the Enneagram, we will discover that Sixes are like all other Sixes--and that they share the same values as others of their type. Ones who are black are much more like Ones who are white than they could have imagined, and so forth. A new level of community and compassion emerges that obliterates old ignorance and fear.

163 “Gurdjieff and the Enigmatic Enneagram” by Ed Hird, Anglican Renewal Ministries of Canada

‘The great metaphors from all spiritual traditions—grace, liberation, being born again, awakening from illusion—testify that it is possible to transcend the conditioning of my past and do a new thing’ —Sam Keen

*The Enneagram is not a religion, however; nor does it interfere with a person’s religious orientation. It does not pretend to be a complete spiritual path. Nevertheless, it concerns itself with one element that is fundamental to all spiritual paths: self-knowledge.”*¹⁶⁴

The Bible refers to techniques and tools used to determine God’s will for one’s life, his or her destiny, or his or her identity as divination. And the Bible strictly forbids the use of such devices or techniques. Consider Deuteronomy 18:10, which reads,

“There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer...”

Yoga

Spiritual Directors have long claimed yoga and/or Christian yoga to be a valid form of or avenue to Spiritual Formation; the word ‘yoga’ means ‘union’ and the signature phrase ‘namaste’ used at the beginning and ending of a yoga class means, “the god (or divine) in me bows to the god (or divine) in you.”

Christian yoga classes have sprung up all across America as a way to “quiet the mind.” Time magazine in 2005 described it this way,

“a fast-growing movement that seeks to retool the 5,000-year-old practice of yoga to fit Christ’s teachings. From Phoenix, Ariz., to Pittsburgh, Pa., from Grand Rapids, Mich., to New York City, hundreds of Christian yoga classes are in session. A

164 <http://www.worldcat.org/wcpa/servlet/DCARead?standardNo=0553378201&standardNoType=1&except=true>

national association of Christian yoga teachers was started in July, and a slew of books and videos are about to hit the market."

Susan Bordenkircher began a yoga-based Christian ministry in 2001 entitled *Outstretched in Worship* where she combined hatha yoga stretches and poses with Christian meditations and wrote one of the more popular books on the topic, *Yoga for Christians*, in 2006; while another was published in 2007 written by Brooke Book entitled, *Holy Yoga*. Both women acknowledge the author of a 1989 book written by Nancy Roth, *An Invitation to Christian Yoga*, was instrumental to their journey. Roth wrote,

"The period of relaxation and visualization at the end of class became for me a doorway into prayer. It did not matter that we had chanted 'Om' or that the exercises had Hindu names....The One I encountered, as I lay on the gym floor with my body relaxed and my mind and spirit attentive, was the God I knew in Christ Jesus."

Her conclusion was, "there needed to be a new Christian asceticism that respected the integration of body and mind and reflected both the newest research in psychology and physiology and the wisdom of other, even more ancient spiritual traditions."

Thomas Keating wrote the forward to *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Pathway to Growth and Healing*, which reads in part,

"This book is the first description that I know of in Christian literature about the awakening of kundalini energy in a purely Christian context. Kundalini has long been known in Taoist, Hindu, and Buddhist spirituality. The fact that this complete awakening occurred in the context of a classical development of [Contemplative] Christian prayer makes it an important contribution to East/West dialogue. Given the newness of the kundalini in Christian circles, however, any theological interpretation is bound to be tentative."

Later in the foreward he writes,

“Reading the Christians mystics from the perspective of his [Philip St. Romain] own experience of kundalini energy, the author see many examples of its working in the lives of Christian saints and mystics. Since this energy is also at work today in numerous persons who are devoting themselves to contemplative prayer, this book is an important contribution to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition. It will be of great consolation to those who have experienced physical symptoms arising from the awakening of kundalini in the course of their spiritual journey, even if they have not experienced it to the fullest extant described by the author. His [Philip St. Romain] compelling testimony is a powerful affirmation of the potential of every human being for higher states of consciousness.”

Keating ends the forward with this,

“This book will initiate Christians on the spiritual journey into the important but long neglected dimension of the transforming power of grace.”

The pathway to the Kundalini experience is yoga as we will see. Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), author of *Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga*, writes,

“Who is Kundalini, the Serpent Power? Mythologically, she is an aspect of shakti (power or energy) and consort of Shiva. Philosophically she is the creative energy that forms mind and matter, and comes to rest in the lowest form of matter. She is consciousness: the power of matter to know itself. In terms of Tantric practice, she is the mysterious power that resides in the human body and can be awakened by suitable techniques: special meditations and yogic practices of a particularly powerful nature. She is The Goddess: the ultimate heart of many areas of Eastern religion, not only of Hinduism.”

And then on page one he writes,

“These names refer to the Kundalini-Sakti, or Supreme Power in the human body

by the arousing of which the Yoga is achieved....by the agency of the KundaliniSakti, which, in order to give it an English name , I have here called Serpent Power. Kundala means coiled. The power is the Goddess (Devi) Kundalini, or that which is coiled; for Her form is that of a coiled and sleeping serpent in the lowest bodily centre, at the base of the spinal column, until by the means described She is aroused in that Yoga which is named after Her."

Hans Ulrich Rieker, an authority on yoga who has authored many books on the topic wrote this about yoga, "Kundalini [is] the mainstay of all yoga practices."¹⁶⁵

Clearly there is no evidence that yoga is a Christian practice or, more importantly, a biblical practice but is, rather, what it has always been: an occult practice which seeks to awaken the Serpent.

Yet we can read hear how Phillip St. Romain, the author of *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Path to Growth and Healing*, makes a staggering and shocking claim, "Finally, and by way of wondering out loud, I think it is worth reflecting on the possibility that the Holy Spirit just might be the kundalini energy of the risen Christ."¹⁶⁶

For those who utilize the Enneagram, yoga, or any number of other techniques of a pagan origin, each represents a unique personality pathway to Self-Realization and the revelation of the True Self. One perhaps obvious question about Spiritual Direction, therefore, is this: where do Spiritual Directors learn all of these questionable methods? This matter and others will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁵ Rieker, Hans Ulrich. *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, New York: Seabury Press, 1971, p. 101

¹⁶⁶ Philip St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Path to Growth and Healing*, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994, p. 125

Interfaith Organizations

So many of the troubling and even bizarre techniques which Spiritual Directors utilize they learn from Interfaith Spiritual Direction and Supervision Accreditation Organizations, of which there are dozens with hundreds of affiliates and literally thousands of accredited Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Supervisors operating in the United States. In fact, Spiritual Directors International (SDI), the largest Spiritual Direction Accreditation Organization in the world, has thousands of Spiritual Directors working throughout the United States alone.

Spiritual Supervisors are high-level, highly trained, highly specialized Spiritual Directors who oversee other Spiritual Directors. And no organization churns out more Spiritual Directors and Supervisors than SDI. The list of Interfaith Spiritual Direction Accreditation Organizations which follows is provided so that the interested reader can begin to recognize the pattern of behavior rapidly developing in the Evangelical church today. Unlike previous chapters, in which most of the information is high level, this chapter is designed to reveal in granular detail the beliefs of many of the prominent organizations in the movement today.

Spiritual Directors International (SDI)

Spiritual Directors International defines Spiritual Supervision in the following way:

“Supervision is a reflective practice. A spiritual director engaged in supervision will take time after a spiritual direction session to become aware and notice what transpired with a seeker and what continues to hold energy within the spiritual director following the session. This then becomes the focus of the spiritual director’s reflection, first alone and then with another spiritual director or peer group.

The supervision process invites the spiritual director to take time to explore what is beneath the surface: to better understand oneself, to discover how best to accompany seekers, and to acknowledge how Spirit is present and active in the spiritual direction relationship.

*The goal of supervision is to assist the spiritual director to become more supportive and skilled in accompanying the seeker in a relationship with the Mystery who many name God.”*¹⁶⁷

Language like that found in the last paragraph above is common among Spiritual Direction Accreditation organizations. Frequently, words like “Mystery” or “Absolute” are used to refer to that which “many name God.” For example, Spiritual Directors International speaks of their mission in this way,

*“Throughout human history individuals have been inspired to accompany others seeking the Mystery that many name God. SDI is a learning community that educates and supports this service around the world and across traditions.”*¹⁶⁸

167 <http://www.sdiworld.org/resources/spiritual-direction-supervision>

168 <http://www.sdiworld.org/about-us/purpose-and-history>

The interfaith nature of SDI's work is completely clear. Their stated purpose reads as follows:

*“Spiritual Directors International is an inclusive, global learning community that serves and supports the ministry and service of spiritual direction. As a multi-faith organization, we share a common concern, passion, and commitment to the ministry and service of spiritual companionship.”*¹⁶⁹

SDI's vision has particularly interesting ramifications for Christians; SDI states,

*“The way of processing experience is different...there's less interpersonal talk with Jesus, and more inclination to let the person stay in the broad experience of a small creature in a huge ancient place relating to the Creator. The ways of working with that experience are quite different. God looks different and feels different in each arena.”*¹⁷⁰

SDI heavily promotes contemplative mystic Tilden Edwards, who shares SDI's goal of an interfaith world and who sits on the SDI Presence Review board.¹⁷¹ He writes,

“In the wider ecumenism of the spirit being open to us today we need to humbly accept the learnings of particular eastern religions. What makes a particular practice Christian is not its source but its intent. This is important to remember in the face of those Christians who would try to impoverish our spiritual resources by too narrowly defining them. If we view the human family as one in God's Spirit, then this

169 *ibid*

170 Ludwig, Carol. *Brief_History_of_SDI_Part_1*

171 <https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.sdiworld.org/about-us/servant-leaders/presence-editorial-review-panel&sa=D&ust=1502554053510000&usg=AFQjCNFCpg5xAu-Hy5U1mGmtgI4DAMfqAA>

*historical cross-fertilization is not surprising. Selective attention to Eastern spiritual practices can be of a great assistance to a fully embodied Christian life.”*¹⁷²

The interfaith nature of Christian Contemplative Mysticism is nothing new. In Carl McColman’s review of the history of Christian Contemplative Mysticism, *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism*, McColman writes,

*“It’s important to note that throughout the history of Christianity, Christian mystics have displayed an unusual openness to the wisdom of non-Christian philosophy and religion. In other words, Christian mysticism seems from the beginning to have had an intuitive recognition of the way in which mysticism is a form of unity that transcends religious differences...The 20th century may go down in history as the great age of interreligious spirituality...And many others expressing their Christian faith in ways that reveal the influence of wisdom traditions such as Sufism [Islam], Vedanta [Hinduism], or Zen [Buddhism].”*¹⁷³

SDI’s co-founder, Janet Ruffing, explains the kinds of prayer techniques SDI promotes in churches and religious organizations of all kinds in its interfaith mission:

*“If there are not [already] some kinds of programmatic things like a centering prayer group, or an Ignatian guided contemplation group, or something like that, I really think the Spiritual Directors need to give their directees some prayer exercises—give them some suggestions about how to go about some simple reflective reading, the four steps of Lectio Divina, or the simple steps of Ignatian contemplation.”*¹⁷⁴

172 Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence*, Acknowledgement page.

173 McColman, Carl. *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism*. p 65.

174 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX6ZW0Fey-0>

SDI is a member of The Parliament of the World's Religions.¹⁷⁵ The Parliament of the World's Religions consists of 188-member organizations.¹⁷⁶ Some of the more recognizable organizations include, The Church of Scientology International, World Congress of Faiths, Interreligious Federation for World Peace, Theosophical Society in America, Sufi Order International, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations.

SDI is training and utilizing Spiritual Directors to promote a multi-faith, ecumenical, one-world-religion agenda. Many small, medium, and large local Evangelical churches across the country have SDI Spiritual Directors at work in their midst.

The Bible never endorses an interfaith agenda and, further, the Bible teaches that where one's treasure is, so also is one's heart. Paying yearly dues to an interfaith organization that actively teaches an interspiritual, interfaith, all-roads-lead-to-God agenda is at minimum questionable behavior for the Christian believer, let alone receiving instructions on how to lead and disciple fellow believers.

It would be impossible to detail all of the connections SDI and organizations like SDI have to smaller organizations which either refer to SDI, were trained by other SDI affiliates, or have SDI members in the organizations. However, the very small sample of organizations below reveals just how intermingled and intertwined the Evangelical church and its Spiritual Directors are with interfaith organizations like SDI.

175 <https://parliamentofreligions.org/organizations/1815>

176 <https://parliamentofreligions.org/interfaith-directory>

Christian Formation and Direction Ministries (CFDM) & Stillpoint Ministries

Although on the surface Christian Formation and Direction Ministries (CFDM) seems to be a Christian organization that admittedly claims to adhere to the Apostles Creed, we must conclude that CFDM, like so many other Spiritual Direction Accreditation Organizations, adheres to an interfaith worldview. In fact, CFDM is merely one of many organizations that operate under the umbrella of SDI.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, CFDM is an SDI member and affiliate¹⁷⁸ and promotes non-Christian mystics like David Benner, Thomas Merton, and Richard Rohr, among many others.¹⁷⁹ They describe themselves in the following way:

*“Christian Formation & Direction Ministries is not affiliated with any particular church or Christian denomination. While it is broadly ecumenical in its Christian focus, CFDM reflects the Contemplative stream of Christian spirituality and is open to people of various faith traditions in its formation and spiritual direction training programs.”*¹⁸⁰

The following individuals serve as examples of how organizations like SDI are active in local evangelical churches.

Sitting on the panel of SDI's Presence Editorial Review Panel is Rev. Douglas H. Gregg, PhD, an ordained Presbyterian minister and consultant to pastors and churches in areas of prayer, spiritual formation, and spiritual direction. He is president and co-director of Christian Formation & Direction Ministries

177 <http://cfdm.org/affiliates/>

178 <http://www.sdiworld.org/maps/?map=programs&filter=cfdm&zoom=2>

179 <http://cfdm.org/bibliography/>

180 <http://cfdm.org/affiliates/>

(CFDM). He also serves alongside his wife, Catherine, an ordained Episcopal Priest, as Associate Pastor at Grace Episcopal Church in Saint George, Utah. He is a certified spiritual director, supervises other directors, and guides the Certificate programs in Christian Formation & Spiritual Direction for CFDM.¹⁸¹

Rev. Care Crawford, MDiv, ThM is the Regional director and faculty spiritual director and supervisor at Christian Formation and Direction Ministries, a two-year formation program. She is also pastor of Congregational Life and Soul Care Ministries at Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, California. She presented at Cultivating Compassion 2014, an SDI sponsored event, where “more than forty presenters from around the world and across traditions will share their wisdom and insights.”¹⁸²

The CFDM list of affiliate partners includes The Parliament of the World’s Religions, SDI,¹⁸³ and Stillpoint.¹⁸⁴ CFDM describes the Spiritual Direction Accreditation Organization known as Stillpoint in these words, “The mission of Stillpoint is to provide a gathering place where everyone is welcome to come and grow in their journey of spiritual development. Stillpoint is broadly interfaith and ecumenical, offering many programs, including days in the desert, spiritual direction, and training in the Enneagram.”¹⁸⁵

Stillpoint’s mission as defined by the organization is, “to provide a gathering place that is hospitable to and nourishing of the spiritual life. Our programs, informed by Incarnational Theology, provide opportunities for spiritual development, personal growth and social transformation. We welcome individuals and groups of all faiths that genuinely seek the Divine, and those who desire to embrace the sacred in their lives and world. Our goal is that all who come to Still-

181 <http://www.sdiworld.org/about-us/servant-leaders/presence-editorial-review-panel>

182 http://www.sdiworld.org/educational-event/cultivating-compassion-river/presenters#annotations:ulVf7u1rEea1pb_2XJ_IMg

183 <https://parliamentofreligions.org/organizations/1815>

184 <https://parliamentofreligions.org/organizations/2165>

185 <http://cfdm.org/affiliates/>

point can experience the invitation: “Be still and know that I am God.”¹⁸⁶

Among their recommended resource websites are: Fr. Thomas Keating’s Contemplative Outreach, The Merton Institute, Parliament of the World’s Religions, Shalem Institute, SDI, and Richard Rohr’s The Center for Action and Contemplation.¹⁸⁷

CenterQuest

Unlike CFDM, CenterQuest is a relative new-comer to the Spiritual Direction and Accreditation scene and has set up a Board of Reference primarily because,

*“As a new organization still very much in the process of inching our way into the arena, we are mindful of the benefit that comes from the open endorsement of people who recognize and support the legitimacy of our existence and calling as an organization. Thus, we recognize the need for us to establish a board of reference comprised of such folks who are willing to stand behind our undertaking and vouch for our unique calling and contribution to the expanding field of Christian spirituality and the ongoing ministry of spiritual formation by lending their reputable name in public support of CenterQuest.”*¹⁸⁸

What types of reputable people does CenterQuest believe will help in this endeavor? On the Board of Reference at CenterQuest are David G. Benner and Richard Rohr,¹⁸⁹ as well as other Contemplative Mystics who promote the Perennial Philosophy¹⁹⁰ (the belief that all religions worship the same god) and the deification of the True Self.¹⁹¹

186 <http://stillpointcsd.org/mission/>

187 <http://stillpointcsd.org/links/>

188 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/about/board-of-reference/>

189 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/about/board-of-reference/>

190 <https://cac.org/the-perennial-tradition-2015-12-20/>

191 <https://twitter.com/richardrohrfm/status/762999495252672512>

Week one of the study guide for CenterQuest's Spiritual Direction training focuses on controlled breathing to quiet the mind and this is continued each week.

“Open with a moment of silence. Be still. Close your eyes. Notice the rhythm of your breathing, in and out, in and out. As you breathe out, release whatever you want to let go of, leaving space in your lungs to breath in the presence of God.”

CenterQuest also lists affiliate sites and recommendations, some of which are now familiar names in Contemplative Mysticism, such as: The Nouwen Legacy, Spiritual Directors International, Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Foster's Renovaré Institute, David G. Benner, and the Henri Nouwen Society.¹⁹²

Together in the Mystery

As discussed above, there are several organizations which specialize in supervision of spiritual directors. One such organization is Together in the Mystery.

Together in the Mystery, itself a member of SDI, provides “a list of the Together in the Mystery interns, graduates, and instructors who invite you to contact them about discerning a supervision relationship.”¹⁹³ Of the 32 spiritual direction supervisors provided by Together in the Mystery, 25 are members of SDI, of those 25 spiritual direction supervisors who are members of SDI, 10 of them specifically with “people of all faiths.”¹⁹⁴

Together in the Mystery is a recommended spiritual direction supervisor training program by Wil Hernandez. Hernandez sits on the Presence Editorial

192 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/offerings-resources/recommended-links/>

193 <http://togetherinthemystery.org/looking-for-a-supervisor/list-of-supervisors>

194 <http://togetherinthemystery.org/looking-for-a-supervisor/list-of-supervisors>

Review Panel¹⁹⁵ at SDI and is the founder of CenterQuest¹⁹⁶ an organization we will return to later. In fact, of the eighteen supervisors at CenterQuest, eight received their supervision training from Together in Mystery, and another, Maria Tattu Bowen is the co-founder of Together in the Mystery.¹⁹⁷ Maria Tattu Bowen's bio reveals she, "...is Catholic and a spiritual director and supervisor who holds a Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality and enjoys working across faith traditions. She is the co-founder of Together in the Mystery..."¹⁹⁸ She is recommended by CenterQuest and is a member of SDI.¹⁹⁹

Another supervisor listed by both CenterQuest²⁰⁰ and Together in the Mystery,²⁰¹ trained at Together in the Mystery, while also being a member of SDI²⁰² is Tammy Ichinotsubo-Ezzi. "Tammy Ichinotsubo-Ezzi is a Catholic convert and an Associate at the Loyola Institute for Spirituality in Orange, CA... a psychologist, spiritual director and supervisor, retreat leader, facilitator of and guide for Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, Tammy was trained under the Together in the Mystery SD supervision training program." From the website, <http://www.willieverbegoodenough.com>, we see she is supervisor who works with all faiths, "For many people, their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices are an integral part of who they are. As such, I honor the religious/spiritual traditions and prac-

195 <http://www.sdiworld.org/about-us/servant-leaders/presence-editorial-review-panel>

196 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/about/community-of-companions/>

197 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/school-of-spiritual-direction/faculty-staff/#annotations:2Bgmeu5CEea0bAeeBADKUw>

198 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/school-of-spiritual-direction/faculty-staff/#annotations:2Bgmeu5CEea0bAeeBADKUw>

199 <http://www.sdiworld.org/maps/?map=seekfind&filter=Together%20in%20the%20Mystery&zoom=1>

200 <http://www.cqcenterquest.org/school-of-spiritual-direction/faculty-staff/#annotations:2Bgmeu5CEea0bAeeBADKUw>

201 <http://togetherinthemystery.org/looking-for-a-supervisor/list-of-supervisors>

202 <http://www.sdiworld.org/maps/?map=seekfind&address=Ichinotsubo-Ezzi&filter=Ichinotsubo-Ezzi&zoom=8>

tices of those I work with by drawing on those beliefs and incorporating practices that are appropriate for the individual.”²⁰³

Grafted Life Ministries (ESDA)

Grafted Life Ministries is the umbrella organization of the Evangelical Spiritual Directors Association (ESDA), a training and accreditation organization. Like CFDM, ESDA claims to be a mainstream Christian organization. However, our research has discovered that of the over 100 Spiritual Directors to whom ESDA sends cohort referrals (as of February 2017) over 25% are members of SDI and approximately half being members of or are trained by Selah, Leadership Transformations, Renovaré Institute, Mercy Center, CFDM, and Organization of Sustainable Faith.

ESDA Spiritual Directors advertise expertise in fields like: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Enneagram, Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, Soul Care, Dark Night of the Soul/Dark Night Experiences, Imaginative Prayer, Heart-Mind Dissonance, 19th Annotation, Self Truth, Spiritual Direction, Spiritual Direction Supervision, Contemplative Prayer, Psycho-Spiritual Integration, Carmelite Spiritual Direction, Immanuel Prayer, and Interior Castle.

This chapter, though brief, has been provided to give the reader a peak into the world of “Christian” Spiritual Directors/Supervisors and to illustrate that no distinction between the beliefs or practices of so called Christian Spiritual Directors and interfaith Spiritual Directors and Spiritual Direction/Director training organizations can be drawn. The evidence suggests that “Christian” training centers in large numbers are rapidly evolving into interfaith training centers. Many of the organizations allow a prospective cohort to choose whichever religion or god he or she desires, and none specifically cater to Protestant beliefs or doctrine about God or the Bible; and most, if not all, are using the practices detailed in this document.

203 <http://www.willieverbegoodenough.com/tammy-ichinotsubo-ezzi-phd-bcets/>

Spiritual Formation in the Local Church

The future and Contemplative vision for the Evangelical church is described in R. Thomas Ashbrook's *Mansions of the Heart*, a book which has grown in popularity in recent years and is regularly used in Evangelical training and small groups across the country. Ashbrook's book is a blueprint to bring Teresa of Avila's mansions four through seven into the church.

Although no reminder is likely necessary, Teresa of Avila was a devout Catholic mystic who used Apophatic and Kataphatic practices in order to shut off first the senses, then the mind, followed by the emotions and the will, and finally the imagination and memory in order to achieve Soul Detachment—a Contemplative Mystical altered state of consciousness in which she levitated, had convulsions and bodily fits that match the descriptions of demon possession, communed with spirits of many kinds, was tortured by Satan and demons for hours, was psychologically dismembered in a hellish dark enclosure, engaged in sexual intercourse with spirits, and claimed to engage in sexual relations with Jesus Christ. These experiences grew in intensity over time as she traversed the corridors of

the spiritual mansions known as the Interior Castle, or what Ashbrook calls the Mansions of the Heart.

R. Thomas Ashbrook's bio is very revealing and reads in part,

*"Tom describes his call to the ministry of spiritual formation. 'While pastoring in Sandy, Utah, I began visiting a Trappist Monastery, where my passion for spiritual formation became kindled and my contemplative side awakened. I discovered the vast journey of a deepening love relationship with God that extends beyond what I had traditionally known as 'discipleship.'"*²⁰⁴

Ashbrook is the cofounder of Imago Christi, whose mission in part is to start, "an order of spiritual formation missionaries,' fostering the spiritual formation of Christian leaders, nurturing spiritual formation communities, and helping the Church embody spiritual formation ministry."²⁰⁵

*Ashbrook, by his own admission, is a Contemplative who became awakened to the mystical path through the Catholic Trappist tradition (Trappists are, for the most part, a silent, vocational, vegetarian, and celibate monastic order)—the same tradition through which Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating came to their own contemplative worldviews. He recognizes that his newly found path extends beyond mere discipleship, and his passion for the teaching of Teresa of Avila, as we will see, is significant. Ashbrook begins his description of the Interior Castle with the first three mansions, which he refers to as a "relatively balanced life of discipleship...regular church attendance and ministry, consistent prayer, a concerted effort to live the Christian life, and a genuine desire to please and honor God."*²⁰⁶

204 <https://www.imagochristi.org/tom-ashbrook/>

205 <https://www.imagochristi.org/what-we-do/>

206 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 1760-1766). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

The Fourth Mansion: Discovering the Love of Jesus

Ashbrook admits that most Evangelical churches can lead believers through mansions one through three. However, Ashbrook notes a change that must occur before a Christian might mature in the faith and enter into the fourth mansion; the Christian must adopt the practice of Contemplative Prayer, which Ashbrook and others refer to as Abiding Prayer. Ashbrook states,

“We are called by God to be still and listen, to just “be still and know” (cf. Ps. 46:10). This “prayer of quiet” increases, as we become more interested in the “words” of the One we love than our own. In this phase of spiritual growth, God intends for contemplation to become an important part of our prayer. Christian contemplation is the term we use for our attentiveness and focus on God alone. It is much like meditation, where we focus on God through Scripture, the beauty of nature, or other parts of His creation. But in contemplation, we move beyond the starting point of meditation, turn our attention toward God, and simply behold Him. This infused prayer is new to us as we explore the room of prayer in the fourth mansion. Our mind finds it almost impossible to simply be still and focus on God; the mind is like an undisciplined child who can’t stop talking or running around. We have to learn to become still and focus on God, letting distractions pass us by.”

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Just as with all Contemplative Mystics, Ashbrook suggests that moving through the higher mansions of the heart requires the Christian to enter into Contemplative practices. Ashbrook continues,

“In Imago Christi, we use the term abiding prayer to describe this relational dimension of simply being in Christ. In the Gospel of John 15, Jesus gives us a wonderful analogy for prayer. Communication between the Vine and the branches

207 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2193-2200). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*is not about the exchange of information, but a natural, ongoing, and essential communion of life between the two. Because we have begun to long for closeness to Jesus, we're forced to make lifestyle changes so that our prayer can become more consistent and scheduled. Our desire for extended times of prayer motivates us to plan, structure, and prioritize life more discerningly.”*²⁰⁸

Although Ashbrook's definitions are somewhat vague and offer Christians who are new to the world of mysticism a soft landing, piece by piece he makes his meaning clear. Here Ashbrook cites the Desert Fathers to help clarify his meaning,

*“The Desert Fathers teach that the Holy Spirit communes with our spirit in times of prayer, disclosing insights about ourselves, the world around us, and His will for us. This is spiritual communication, not intellectual. But in time, our spirit communicates to our mind what God has said. So, a while after we have been in abiding prayer, a thought or insight pops into our mind; we have this sense that it came from God. But during our prayer time, we may not have been aware that any communication was going on at all.”*²⁰⁹

Nowhere does Ashbrook ever show scripturally that Contemplative/Abiding Prayer is necessary for God to communicate with the Christian's spirit. Nowhere does the Bible imply that practicing interior silence and solitude is necessary for spiritual growth. Ashbrook, however, cites Dallas Willard's and Richard Foster's writings,

“Spiritual growth in the fourth mansion comes primarily through times of solitude and silence with God. Dallas Willard talks about the importance of a lifestyle that is conducive to spiritual formation: ‘If we have faith in Christ, we must believe

208 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2201-2206). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

209 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2218-2222). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.’ The spiritual disciplines of prayer and contemplation become vital for continued growth in the fourth mansion. Richard Foster says of this need: ‘The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm.’”²¹⁰

The silence and solitude to which Ashbrook is referring is identical to the teachings of Willard and Foster; it is not external silence but interior silence, apophatic silence, the silencing of the mind. Completely missing from Ashbrook’s argument is any proof that Jesus engaged in Contemplative Prayer; Ashbrook simply mashes two ideas together without proving that either of them are valid or true. Ashbrook continues, “Mentors [Spiritual Directors], who can help us interpret God’s movements of love, are very important. The fourth mansion is a significant transition season in which we often need someone who has already been there, to help us realize what is happening.”²¹¹ If these practices are Godly and biblical, why does the practitioner need guidance through the mansions or help to realize what was happening? 1 John 2:27 calls this appeal for a Spiritual Director into question,

“But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.”

Ashbrook, therefore, teaches precisely the same message that so many other Contemplatives before him have taught—that engaging in the Spiritual Disci-

210 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2263-2269). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

211 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2299-2301). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

pline of Contemplative Prayer is the pathway to Spiritual Formation. But does Ashbrook believe the Christian, if he or she hopes to grow spiritually, must ultimately engage in Apophatic and Kataphatic practices to achieve Soul Detachment and altered states of consciousness in order to achieve Union? Yes, just as Teresa of Avila taught. Ashbrook becomes more specific in his examination of the fifth mansion.

The Fifth Mansion: Longing for Oneness with God

In the fifth mansion, Ashbrook claims, God calls us to Union—though Union itself does not occur until after the Christian persists through a trial known as the Dark Night of the Soul. Ashbrook writes,

*“It is important to note that the call to union happens in the fifth mansion while union itself does not take place fully until the seventh. Like engagement in the relationship between a woman and a man, we have totally fallen in love with Jesus and feel called to a commitment to God alone. This singly focused love and commitment are intensified in the following mansions, but it is introduced by the Holy Spirit here. Not everything in this phase of our spiritual growth is bliss. St. John of the Cross makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the fifth, sixth, and seventh mansions by his description of difficult and “dark” times that are experienced here. He calls these times Dark Nights. These experiences may begin to some extent in the fifth mansion, but we’ll save our exploration of the Dark Nights as part of the introduction to the sixth mansion.”*²¹²

In the fifth Mansion, the Christian must push deeper into Contemplative Prayer where Soul Detachment and absorption into the Divine begins. Ashbrook writes,

212 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2475-2482). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*“The responsive nature of prayer increases in the fifth mansion. Contemplation becomes the focus of prayer, and there are times of absorption and silence where distractions cease and we are able to rest in the presence of God without words, thoughts, or mental images. This absorption can last up to ten or fifteen minutes, and sometimes longer.”*²¹³

Ashbrook claims that contemplation becomes the focus of our prayer. However, this concept is strictly unscriptural; we are told in Philippians 4:6 to use words and thoughts as we focus on God, “...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” This would be impossible without words or thoughts as Ashbrook suggests.

Further, Ashbrook affirms that he and Teresa of Avila are both teaching Soul Detachment. In fact, Ashbrook quotes from Teresa of Avila directly,

*“There is no need here to use any technique to suspend the mind since all the faculties are asleep in this state—and truly asleep—to the things of the world and to ourselves. As a matter of fact, during this time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn’t understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely to God.”*²¹⁴

In these altered states of consciousness Ashbrook writes how Satan might try to distract us,

“The devil even attempts to use our deepening compassion for others against us. During prayer, the enemy will still attempt to distract us with thoughts of tasks to be

213 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2571-2574). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

214 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2574-2580). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*done and the needs of others, trying to prevent times of true stillness with God.”*²¹⁵

Ashbrook offers no proof that the tasks to be done, the needs of others, or our sense of compassion for others are necessarily from the devil; certainly, those feelings could be from God. However, the Christian is instructed to ignore those thoughts and, indeed, all thoughts and dwell in a state in which “the soul is left as though without its senses.”

Ashbrook even admits that the experience is dubious enough that the Christian might even question if the experience is from the devil. He writes,

*“Teresa discusses the doubt the fifth mansion believer can have in beginning to experience union in prayer...the soul remains doubtful that it was union. It doubts whether it imagined the experience; whether it was asleep; whether the experience was given by God; or whether the devil transformed himself into an angel of light.”*²¹⁶

Ashbrook’s and Teresa’s last statements above are truly frightening. Below 1 John 4:1-3 tells us to test every spirit, although Ashbrook never tells the reader to do this,

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.”

215 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2625-2627). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

216 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2643-2647). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

By quoting Teresa, Ashbrook clearly believes one can be deceived by the devil while moving through the fifth mansion, and we agree. However, Ashbrook offers no explanation whatsoever for how a person might discern what spirit is present when the mind, “has no power to think even if it wants to.”²¹⁷

Ashbrook appears to attempt to use this opportunity to reinforce the need for Spiritual Direction,

*“As I have said in the prior mansions, mentors and spiritual directors can play an extremely important role in our growth process, lending a listening ear, encouragement, and help with interpretation of our experience.”*²¹⁸

Ashbrook cites Benjamin Groeschel, a psychologist who has written about the spiritual phases of purgation, illumination, and union. Groeschel tells us why we need a Spiritual Director,

*“[He] discusses this need for healing as one enters the ‘illuminative way,’ which is equivalent to the fourth through seventh mansions: ‘The journey through the purgative way usually leaves an individual with a badly battered self-image. Often a spiritual traveler has a poor self-image to begin with, and although it is not worsened by purgation, at the end of purgation one appears like an infected person who has been shaved and deloused. The result is an antiseptic but not attractive image. . . The illuminative way is usually an experience of the late middle life which is also the period during which an individual normally encountered the psychological resolution of opposites.’”*²¹⁹

Ashbrook recommends a few authors whom he trusts to guide a person through the fifth mansion, a predictable and recognizable recommended reading list which includes: Madame Guyon (a 16th century Catholic mystic discussed

217 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2574-2580). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

218 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2643-2647). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

219 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2650-2656). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

in Appendix A), Eckhart, Nouwen, Pennington, and Willard.²²⁰

It is important to note that by the time Ashbrook finishes his teaching on the fifth mansion, the reader has been exposed to all five steps in the Contemplative Mystical process by name: Awakening, Purgation, Illumination, the Dark Night of the Soul, and Union. No doubt at all remains that Ashbrook is simply teaching the same Contemplative Mysticism that Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, Ignatius of Loyola, Meister Eckhart, Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, William Menninger, Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Richard Rohr, Evelyn Underhill, and so many other mystics teach. Ashbrook is teaching Christians to follow those practices outlined in detail in this paper.

The Dark Night of the Soul

In the chapter entitled, *The Long Dark Corridor: The Dark Night of the Soul*, Ashbrook describes the Dark Night and introduces a phenomenon that he calls, “dark light,”

“Even though we have all had experiences of feeling distant from God, the Dark Night of the Senses is a particular experience with identifiable symptoms, described by Saint John of the Cross. Although not every person necessarily experiences all these symptoms, we can get a good feel for this painful time by looking at the characteristics he describes:

The Dark Night of the Senses usually comes after a season of consistent and satisfying meditative prayer, and we have been experiencing some detachment from old dependencies on worldly things.

In the darkness, we no longer derive real satisfaction or consolation from spiritual

220 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2668-2686). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

practices or from other people.

The darkness does not have any apparent causes; it is not the result of depression or newly committed sins or imperfections.

We feel as though we are not serving God well, but backsliding in our faith, and we become concerned about failing God.

We experience a powerlessness to meditate on God's Word and to make use of our imagination to relate to the truths of Scripture. God doesn't seem to speak to us through our analysis and synthesis of the ideas in the text. Prayer may well feel like a waste of time.

In the midst of our spiritual dryness and the absence of God's consolations, a "dark light" shines that brings us even greater pain. As this dark light shines on us, we gain a greater awareness of our own sinful nature and the extent to which every thought and action is tainted with self.

We find ourselves deeply grieved over our sinful nature and the sins of others. In the light of our greater self-knowledge, we find ourselves humbler and more patient with the struggles of others.

The Dark Night season often feels even emptier by the absence of qualified spiritual direction to help interpret what is happening, or worse, by bad advice from others.

Whether the Dark Night time is relatively short or extends for years, it is terribly painful, like that endured by a lover separated from her beloved."²²¹

Ashbrook recounts his own experience,

"Then I tried repenting for what I thought might be a narcissistic self-preoccupa-

221 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2897-2907). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*tion. But the dark light continued to shine with searing intensity. It is one thing to know that you are a sinner, and to have it show up now and then, but to live 24/7 in this awareness is torturous.”*²²²

In this chapter Ashbrook introduces the reader to Saint John of the Cross who describes a new way we are fed—through Soul Detachment,

*“It feels as though we are not being fed at all. John says: “At the time of the aridities of this sensory night, God makes the exchange we mentioned by withdrawing the soul from the life of the senses and placing it in that of the spirit—that is, He brings it from meditation to contemplation—where the soul no longer has the power to work or meditate with its faculties on the things of God.” John is talking about more than our experience of prayer here. In meditation, we use our own faculties to relate to God, but in contemplation God relates to us in the spirit, beyond thoughts, words, and pictures.”*²²³

Ashbrook relates how Teresa of Avila described what Saint John of the Cross says is the Dark Night of the Soul,

*“The Lord, it seems, gives the devil license so that the soul might be tried and even be made to think it is rejected by God. Many are the things that war against it with an interior oppression so keen and unbearable that I don’t know what to compare this experience to if not to the oppression of those that suffer hell, for no consolation is allowed in the midst of this tempest.”*²²⁴

The Bible says in John 10:10,

222 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2926-2928). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

223 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2978-2983). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

224 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3053-3056). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Then Ashbrook tells us how Saint John of the Cross described the Dark Night of the Soul,

*“John says that the Dark Night of the Spirit [a part of the Dark Night of the Soul] can feel like divine rejection, so vivid that the soul feels as though it is in hell. He also likens what God does to a mother who has breastfed her child but then puts bitter herbs on her breasts to enable the child to grow up. We no longer feel delight in God. Again there are no other explanations or apparent causes for this darkness apart from God’s action. We are forced to live in the darkness and rely totally on faith.”*²²⁵

And later,

*“In this night both the sensory and spiritual parts are despoiled of all its apprehensions and delights, and the soul is made to walk in dark and pure faith, which is proper and adequate means to divine union... He leaves the intellect in darkness, the will in aridity, the memory in emptiness, and the affections in supreme affliction, bitterness, and anguish, by depriving the soul of the feeling and satisfaction it previously obtained from spiritual blessings.”*²²⁶

Ashbrook goes on to say,

“John believes that if the Dark Night is to truly have its effect, it must last for

225 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3048-3051). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

226 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3057-3061). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*some years, no matter how intense it may be...Saint John of the Cross insists that these Dark Nights are not optional; nor may they be avoided if we are to grow in relationship to God, beyond a certain point...Until a soul is placed by God in the passive purgation of the dark night, which we shall soon explain, it cannot purify itself completely from these imperfections nor from the others.”*²²⁷

Ashbrook explains that one of the reasons this is necessary is that Jesus continues to suffer perpetually as the Lamb of God, and so we too must suffer with Christ.

*“But the painful feelings from our experiences often remain. We might think that, once sins were confessed in repentance, forgiveness extended and received, and healing accomplished, the pain of our memories would go away. God does deliver us from the control of these experiences, but the memories may still remain places of tenderness and pain. Why? We are called to share not only the resurrection joy of Jesus but His suffering as well. Those places in our lives caused His suffering and death on the cross. Jesus continues to suffer, as the Lamb of God, because He so profoundly loves those who continue to choose death over life, those who hurt and wound themselves and others through sin. If all feeling of our pain were gone, we might easily look at others with pride and judgment. Instead, our hearts become soft, loving, and compassionate—like Jesus. We are conformed into the image of Christ, even in the uniqueness of our sin experience. What a wonderful and amazing Lord we have.”*²²⁸

Here Ashbrook echoes mystic Richard Rohr as he writes in his book, *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment*,

227 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3078-3089). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

228 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4042-4049). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*“The dark night is part of purgation and purification. That is not just medieval Catholic language. Purgatorio is a stage you must go through to let go of the lie. The dark night of the senses is primarily a purgatory experience... We desperately need spiritual direction that teaches us to walk through that kind of terrain and trust it... Those who can help us through the dark night are great teachers. Those who say the dark night must be avoided or that it is always the result of sin or some problem are not good teachers at all.”*²²⁹

Rohr’s scriptural proof for the sanctity of the Dark Night is Romans 8:28, from which he quotes, “...all things work out for good . . .” and so “all things” includes the Dark Night;²³⁰ Rohr claims that this verse applies to all people, “God will work together with any person who seeks the good.”²³¹

The entire verse though has some qualifiers and cannot be applied to all people as Rohr stated,

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Where are the descriptions in the Bible of any apostles or disciples going through this experience? In fact, why is all of this completely missing from the Bible? Jesus promised that His followers would be persecuted (John 15:20), but His promise is peace (John 14:27) not desolation and despair. Peace is available right now without any need for the Dark Night of the Soul (Romans 5:1). What greater glory is offered to the Christian than being seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6)? Quite to the contrary, the Bible is clear that the Christian is already seated in heavenly places. No special process is required. The church is the body of Christ by definition; the church is the bride of Christ already. The Dark Night of the Soul is simply not necessary to grow in Christ

229 Rohr, Richard. *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment*. pp14-15

230 Ibid. p16

231 Ibid. p12

Jesus; if it were necessary, Jesus would have told us.

Ashbrook speaks authoritatively on the topic and declares that maturity in the faith requires Abiding Prayer, Soul Detachment, moving through concentric circles of spiritual growth—each accordingly named—Dark Night experiences, and Spiritual Directors to make sense of it all. If this is fundamental to the Christian faith, why is it completely absent from Scripture? God did not withhold the Scriptures from us even though many treat scriptural truth in a performance-oriented manner. Further, Spiritual Formation teaching is so fraught with potentially and actually dangerous practices that no one should embark on the Contemplative path without full disclosure.

The Sixth Mansion: The Passion of God's Love

Ashbrook tells us what a sixth-mansion-Christian should expect while in altered states of consciousness.

*“Now, this silent abiding—the contemplation of God alone—has become the very nature of our prayer life. In this wonderful “silence,” we may experience ecstasy, rapture, locutions, transport, and flight of the spirit.”*²³²

“Let me explain briefly what they mean. Ecstasy is an experience of intense joy... These experiences can be unnerving and even frightening. Teresa warns us to be constantly vigilant against the schemes of the enemy and the tricks of the mind. She gives three tests to ensure that the experiences are from God, explaining them in great depth. Here’s a summary statement: “[Concerning words from God] The first and truest is the power and authority they bear, for locutions from God effect what they say. . . The second sign is the great quiet left in the soul, the devout and peaceful recollection, the readiness to engage in the praises of God. . . The third sign is that these words remain in the memory for a very long time, and some are never forgotten, as are those we listen to here on earth—I mean those we hear from

232 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3353-3355). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

men.”²³³

Contrary to Ashbrook’s benign definition of ecstasy as merely ‘intense joy,’ the Catholic Encyclopedia defines it as something quite different:

*“...when the activity of the senses is suspended, so that not only are external sensations incapable of influencing the soul, but considerable difficulty is experienced in awakening such sensation, and this whether the ecstatic himself desires to do so, or others attempt to quicken the organs into action.”*²³⁴

Notice that Teresa instructed us to discern, but nowhere do we read that either Teresa or Ashbrook instruct us to go back to the Bible as the tool and guide to discern whether this is Godly and Biblical, neither do they describe how it might be possible to discern while we are, by their own admission, completely unconscious.

Which definition—Ashbrook’s or the Catholic Encyclopedia’s—seems more like what Teresa describes below?

“Now let us return to raptures, and to their most usual characteristics. Very often they seemed to leave my body as light as if it had lost all its weight, and sometimes so light that I hardly knew whether my feet were touching the ground. But during the rapture itself, the body is very often like a corpse, unable to do anything of itself. It remains all the time in whatever attitude it was in when the rapture came on it; seated, for example, and with the hands open or closed. The subject rarely loses consciousness; I have occasionally lost it entirely, but not very often and only for a short time. Generally the senses are disturbed; and though absolutely powerless to perform any outward action the subject still sees and hears things, though only dimly, as if from far away. I do not say that he can see and hear when the rapture is at its height; and by ‘its height’ I mean those times when the faculties are lost,

233 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3356-3365). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

234 <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4153>

*because closely united with God. Then, in my opinion, it neither sees nor hears nor feels. But, as I said in describing the previous prayer of union, this complete transformation of the soul in God is of short duration. While it lasts, however, none of the senses perceives or knows what is taking place...And very often the soul is absorbed, or-to put it better-the Lord absorbs it into Himself...What I am describing lasts only a moment. But as the surge and impulse of the spirit have been violent, the will remains absorbed, even when the other faculties begin to stir again, and remains mistress over all these workings in the body. For though the two restless faculties try to disturb it, it thinks that the fewer enemies it has the better, and so takes care that they shall not do so. Therefore it suspends them entirely, that being the Lord's wish. The eyes are generally closed, although we may not wish to close them, and if occasionally they remain open, the soul, as I have just said, does not perceive anything or pay attention to what it sees."*²³⁵

We leave Ashbrook's quotes below to speak for themselves. Notice the focus on 'misery' and 'suffering,' the admission that Satan will give us an 'experience' which is hardly discernible as well; the focus on a Spiritual Director to play a key role in the discernment process; and finally, a cursory nod to the Scripture before emphasizing a focus to continue reading authors like Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross to inspire, teach, and encourage.

*"Our brokenness and woundedness is ever before us, and at times it feels almost unbearable: 'Our great God wants us to know our own misery and that He is king; and this is very important for what lies ahead. . . This suffering comes so that the one may enter the seventh dwelling place.'"*²³⁶

"Conversely, the enemy may try to induce us to think that God is unjust and unloving to allow such an experience. It is also clear from Teresa's discussion of the tests for legitimate mystical experiences that the devil attempts to counterfeit these experiences and lead us astray. Even apart from the dark nights, discouragement

235 http://www.mcah.columbia.edu/monographs/bernmon/pdf/art_hum_reading_28.pdf

236 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3383-3385). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*is always a line of attack. We must discern, resist, and persevere.”*²³⁷

*“Times for extended prayer and reflection are essential for this discerning process, because the intellect (thought life and will) and memories have not become completely absorbed in God. Mentors are still helpful, maybe more so than ever before. But because there are fewer Christians at these depths of spiritual formation, capable mentors are harder to find. Nevertheless, the right spiritual director can be very helpful.”*²³⁸

*“Spiritual reading [Lectio Divina] of the Scriptures is an ongoing opportunity to hear from God personally. Continued reading of the Christian mystics, particularly Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, and Bernard of Clairvaux, will help to furnish sources of inspiration, teaching, and encouragement.”*²³⁹

Seventh Mansion Union with the Trinity

For Ashbrook the purpose of Contemplative Mysticism is to lead the Christian into Union with God, and Ashbrook is not alone. Below Richard Foster answers the question, “what is the purpose of Contemplative Prayer?”

*“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.’”*²⁴⁰

237 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3390-3393). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

238 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3402-3406). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

239 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3411-3413). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

240 Foster, Richard J., *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992) p. 159

Relatively speaking, Ashbrook offers very little detail about the seventh mansion. He admits that he does not understand everything that Teresa of Avila taught. He fails to provide a detailed description of the Union experience aside from the promise of a kind of tranquility. Ashbrook uses Romans 8:38-39 to support the concept of Union with the Divine, although we leave it to the reader to decide how convincingly this passage defends the notion of Union within the context of the teachings of Mysticism.

*“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*²⁴¹

What little Ashbrook does describe, however, is full of scriptural error. Ashbrook describes the seventh mansion in the following way,

*“The seventh mansion represents the ultimate degree of intimacy with God that one can experience in this life: spiritual union with the Trinity. As is true with each of the prior mansions, this is still a season of our journey, not a milestone or destination. But in this season, we come to experience a complete integration of mind, body, and spirit in the life of Christ.”*²⁴²

1 John 3:2, however, paints a completely different picture, one which shows in this life we never experience “complete integration of mind, body, and spirit in the life of Christ” until Christ Jesus returns.

“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him

241 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 2485-2487). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

242 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Location 3510). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

as he is.”

Paul says we will not know fully until we see Jesus face to face at his return in 1 Corinthians 13:12,

“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

Ashbrook continues, explaining that the purpose of the Dark Night is to prepare us for Unity, “Through the experiences of the Dark Nights, our hearts have been purified.”²⁴³

What does the Scripture say about this? We see the answer in 1 Peter 1:22-23,

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.”

In John 17:17-19 we are told what the truth is and how we are sanctified,

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth...”

According to the Scriptures, we are sanctified by the word of God. The Christian has no need for Contemplative practices, Soul Detachment, and the Dark Night of the Soul.

Ashbrook writes,

²⁴³ Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Location 3693). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*“In the seventh mansion, prayer has primarily become trusting silence, an adoring attentiveness to the Holy Trinity. In this silence, there is full union with the Trinity, an experience of the spiritual marriage that happens at our deepest soul center. Remember that Jesus in His humanity, and the Trinity in their community, have been revealed to us.”*²⁴⁴

Even when we are instructed to pray alone, the Bible does not mention a trusting silence as an aspect of prayer, to the contrary we see in Matthew 6:5-14 instructions on how to pray using words, in other words an active role.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.””

Ashbrook writes,

“The devil does not abandon his schemes against us in the seventh mansion. However, the ongoing temptations, accusations, and lies are automatically repulsed and resisted.” Teresa says, ‘His Majesty reveals Himself to the soul and brings it to Himself in that place where, in my opinion, the devil will not dare enter, nor will

244 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3759-3761). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

*the Lord allow him to enter.”*²⁴⁵

This claim of “temptations, accusations, and lies are automatically repulsed and resisted” is quite different than what the Bible says in 1 Peter 5:7-9 where Satan is continually at work against us and we actively resist,

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

And in Ephesians 6:11-20 we learn about the active role of a Christian,

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

245 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 3823-3827). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

The Local Church According to Ashbrook

It is impossible to cover every troubling aspect of Ashbrook's *Mansions of the Heart* in this book; however, it is important that every reader understand that a stream of thinking flows throughout the entire book, a stream of thinking in which Ashbrook redefines the beliefs and practices taught in Scripture, replacing those beliefs and practices with Contemplative Mysticism as taught in the Spiritual Formation movement. Perhaps most notably, Ashbrook reinvents what the church should look like. The summary that follows itemizes a few of these changes:

1. Discipleship is redefined as Spiritual Formation and the transversal of the seven mansions (classical discipleship, according to Ashbrook, only leads the Christian through the third mansion). Ashbrook calls the seven-mansions style of discipleship, Spiritual Formation Mapping.²⁴⁶
2. Leadership are those who embrace and help others on the path of Spiritual Formation.²⁴⁷
3. Prayer is redefined as Centering Prayer/Abiding Prayer.²⁴⁸
4. Spiritual Warfare is redefined to mean “meditation, contemplation, and silence.”²⁴⁹
5. Small Groups become “Authentic Community Spiritual Formation

246 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4327-4335). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

247 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4360-4363). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

248 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4327-4335). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

249 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4420-4422). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

Groups.”²⁵⁰

6. Bible Study does not appear at all and is replaced with a Resource Center for Reading and Study. Recommended resources include Basil Pennington, Richard Foster, James Wakefield, Ignatius of Loyola, and Teresa of Avila.^{251 252}
7. Mentors or Accountability Partners are reimagined to include Spiritual Direction.²⁵³
8. Christian Retreats become Spiritual Formation retreats.²⁵⁴
9. Even Evangelism and Missions are now redefined from a Spiritual Formation perspective.²⁵⁵

In Ashbrook’s vision of the church, Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Disciplines, Contemplative Mysticism, and Spiritual Direction are all that remain. Even the Word of God takes a back seat to Contemplative Mystical resources. Is this the church that we desire to become?

Youth Ministry

As mentioned in the Spiritual Disciplines section of this paper, informed

250 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4327-4335). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

251 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4428-4433). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

252 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4451-4458). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

253 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4327-4335). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

254 Ibid.

255 Ibid.

parties on all sides recognize the dangers of Imaginative Prayer and Visualization in religious practice; yet author Jared Boyd intends to use precisely these techniques—Imaginative Prayer and Visualization, or as Jesuit priest Anthony de Mello calls it, “fantasy prayer,” saying that many of the Catholic saints practiced it.²⁵⁶ We read in Boyd’s newly published book, *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child’s Spiritual Formation*, how he plans to make Contemplative Mysticism accessible to children.

Jared Boyd is not alone in bringing Imaginative Prayer and Visualization to children and youth. Larry Warner, co-authored a book endorsing Imaginative Prayer for children and youth titled, *Imaginative Prayer for Youth*, which is utilized widely in evangelical circles.

*“The second book that we recently used was “Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry” by Jeannie Oestreicher and Larry Warner. There is one particular activity called “Slow Down” that we have recently used. This is a breathing and quieting technique that places a structure to a student’s silence. Not only does it quiet their hearts and minds, but it also invites the Holy Spirit to enter and speak to them. (This book also has a TON of great prayer activities. I highly recommend this book if you don’t already use it).”*²⁵⁷

The problem with imaginative prayer, as we have mentioned, is that what we might imagine is not necessarily the reality that we see in the Bible; instead, we are placing our expectation onto the biblical text. Below are a few examples of Imaginative Prayer from St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises, Thomas Merton, and Richard Foster which illustrate the danger.

*“Imagine Christ our Lord present before you upon the cross, and begin to speak with him....”*²⁵⁸

256 De Mello, Anthony. *Sadhana: A Way to God*. Image, 1984. pp 79, 82, 93.

257 <http://www.vineyardyouthusa.com/2017/06/05/supernaturally-silent/>

258 The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Vintage Books edition. First Week. p 53.

*“Here it will be to see in imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell. ... to see in imagination the vast fires, and the souls enclosed ... to hear the wailing ... with the sense of smell to perceive the smoke ... to taste the bitterness ... to touch the flames.”*²⁵⁹

*“I will see and consider the Three Divine Persons, seated on the royal dais or throne of the Divine Majesty ... I will see our Lady and the angels saluting her. ... [I will see] our Lady, St. Joseph, the maid, and the Child Jesus after His birth. I will make myself a poor little unworthy slave, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them...”*²⁶⁰

*“While one is eating, let him imagine he sees Christ our Lord and His disciples at the table, and consider how He eats and drinks, how He looks, how He speaks, and then strive to imitate Him.”*²⁶¹

In the best case, a person might imagine each of the scenarios above, but be no closer to truth for the effort. Nothing ensures that the product of imagination is accurate; therefore, taking these mental constructs to heart is dangerous and untrustworthy, likely leading the person down a pathway to error or misapprehension. In the worst case, the person imagines lies or invents falsehoods about Jesus Christ—putting words in his mouth, attributing actions to his person, and inventing characteristics that do not flow from His genuine character. Further, given the Kataphatic and passive condition of the mind in the imaginative exercises, nothing at all—least of all discernment—prevents the enemy from whispering lies to the person for his own ends.

Thomas Merton in his book, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, imagines

259 Ibid. First Week, fifth exercise, pp 65-70.

260 Ibid. Second Week, 106, 114

261 Ibid. Third Week, 214

speaking with Jesus as an infant,

*“In simple terms, the nativity of Christ the Lord in Bethlehem is not just something that I make present by fantasy. Since He is the eternal Word of God before whom time is entirely and simultaneously present, the Child born at Bethlehem ‘sees’ me here and now. That is to say, I ‘am’ present to His mind ‘then.’ It follows that I can speak to Him as to one present not only in fantasy but in actual reality. This spiritual contact with the Lord is the real purpose of meditation.”*²⁶²

In this last example, the problem is laid out for us. Calvin Miller claims,

*“I drink the glory [of Christ’s] hazel eyes ... his auburn hair. ... What? Do you disagree? His hair is black? Eyes brown? Then have it your way. ... His image must be real to you as to me, even if our images differ. The key to vitality, however, is the image.”*²⁶³

Another way churches are trying to reach youth in order to teach them about Spiritual Formation and the Spiritual Disciplines is with programs like Heroic Leadership Institute and Project Timothy.

Here is an excerpt from an HLI website blog post entitled, “Where did the vision for this school come from? Who is behind it and what is the mission?”:

*“The Heroic Leadership Institute is a place for young adult leaders in the body of Christ. It is a 9 month full-time training program hosted in local Vineyard Churches around the world. The dream of HLI is to create a path within the Vineyard movement for our young leaders to be trained and released into significant ministry and as life-long lovers of Jesus and people. The hope is to create a greenhouse affect where the students are exposed in an intense way to three strategic venues of training.”*²⁶⁴

262 Spiritual Direction and Meditation p 96.

263 Miller, Calvin. *The Table of Inwardness*. InterVarsity Press. 1984. p 93.

264 <http://www.godogreatthings.com/what-is/>

One of these three venues of training is Spiritual Formation,

*“Spiritual Formation is a unique touch and at the core of the Heroic Leadership Institute. With exposure to and participation in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius, the student will have the opportunity to create a launching pad of self-awareness, ingenuity, heroism and LOVE, that may well serve them the rest of their lives.”*²⁶⁵

*“The spiritual formation portion of HLI is quite possibly the most important part of the whole process...We understand that each person experiences God in different ways and much of the 9 months is spent exposing students to different disciplines and sacred pathways to aid them in that life-long journey.”*²⁶⁶

Three US cities host HLI courses: Duluth, Minnesota; Lewiston, Maine; and Overland Park, Kansas. Jackson Gatlin, director of the Duluth HLI site, states,

*“The entire program is based off the book “Heroic Leadership” by Chris Lowney. But we use a bunch of other books as well, including: Sacred Pathways, The Art of Neighboring, Thrive, The S-Turns of Leadership, God’s Relentless Pursuit, Good News About Injustice, Breakthrough, Fool for Christ.”*²⁶⁷

Fr. Kevin O’Brien, S.J. (Society of Jesuits) and vice president of mission and ministry at Georgetown University describes Lowney’s book, *Heroic Leadership*, as, “the [emphasis his] book on Jesuit-inspired leadership today.” *Heroic Leadership* includes the history of the unique formula for molding leaders that have guided the Jesuits for more than 450 years. An in-depth examination of the four key elements of Jesuit formation: self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and hero-

265 <http://www.godogreatthings.com/what-is/>

266 <http://www.godogreatthings.com/2014/01/hli/>

267 <http://www.godogreatthings.com/Sites/duluth/>

ism. Modern-day examples of how successful leaders in today's culture are best served when these guiding principles are applied.²⁶⁸

As Jackson Gatlin, quoted above, pointed out, we see the Jesuit pillars which Lowney writes about listed on the HLI website, "HLI follows these four leadership principles: Self-awareness, Ingenuity, Heroism, and Love."²⁶⁹ This book blurb does not call this process Spiritual Formation but, rather, Jesuit Formation. HLI even had these four Jesuit pillars as their Facebook profile pic,²⁷⁰ but has since replaced it.

Another book that HLI utilizes—*Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas—heavily promotes Contemplative Prayer:

*"It is particularly difficult to describe this type of prayer in writing, as it is best taught in person. In general however, centering prayer works like this: Choose a word (Jesus or Father, for example) as a focus for contemplative prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing."*²⁷¹

Project Timothy is a similar youth leadership training program hosted in five locations around the country. The attendees are ages 14-17 and/or those students who have been identified as having leadership potential. Starting in year two, training in the Spiritual Disciplines begins.

The "Pray As You Go" app, and website of the same name, has as its focus Ignatian Spirituality, Imaginative Contemplation, and the Examen, as well as reflective focus on the Stations of the Cross and the Rosary.²⁷²

268 <http://www.loyolapress.com/products/books/ignatian-spirituality/heroic-leadership-paperback>

269 <http://www.godogreatthings.com/2014/03/heroic-leadership/>

270 <https://www.facebook.com/VineyardHLI/photos/a.109778132422336.9599.109777992422350/1239850142748457/?type=3&theater>

271 Thomas, Gary L. *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God*. p 185.

272 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/go-deeper/>

This app is “produced by Jesuit Media Initiatives, with material written by a number of Jesuits, both in Britain and further afield, and other experts in the spirituality of St Ignatius of Loyola.”²⁷³ Both the app and website utilize the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV),²⁷⁴ the same version used by the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, which was documented in the Spiritual Formation section. It bears repeating that among the contributors and editors of the *Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*, also called *The Life with God Bible*, are Richard J. Foster, Dallas Willard, Walter Brueggemann, Eugene H. Peterson, and many other Contemplatives.²⁷⁵

The NRSV Bible, used by the “Pray as You Go” app and website, contains the Apocrypha (meaning ‘hidden’), also called the Deuterocanonical books, from which the Roman Catholic Church justifies its teachings on purgatory, prayers for the dead, purchasing the forgiveness for sins, worship of angels, and prayer to the saints. Although the app does not claim these additional books are inspired, many Apocryphal writings have been added to canonical Bible texts,

*“The Catholics have 46 Old Testament books rather than the 39 found in our Bibles. However, they have added much more material to other books which does not appear under separate titles. That material follows: The Rest of Esther added to Esther; The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon added to Daniel; Baruch; 1 and 2 Maccabees; Tobias; Judith; Ecclesiasticus; and the Wisdom of Sirach.”*²⁷⁶

The New Testament quotes the Old Testament 263 times and alludes to the Old Testament 370 times but nowhere quotes or alludes to any of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books; to include these texts is a dangerous step—especially when the app is being recommended for Protestant/Evangelical youth.

273 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/about/>

274 Ibid.

275 <https://renovare.org/bible>

276 <http://www.bible.ca/catholic-apocrypha.htm>

The “Pray As You Go” app and website are wholly Jesuit and Catholic²⁷⁷ in their beliefs and resources and, because the content of beliefs and doctrines matter, deserves no place in a Protestant church or its youth ministry.

The app and website include as a list of topics: Acts of the Apostles, Preparing for Prayer (Body Exercise and Breathing Exercise), Imaginative Contemplation Exercises, The Rosary, Stations of the Cross, and The Examen.

In the Preparing for Prayer “Body Exercise,” portion of the app the first thing the listener is instructed to do is,

*“Be aware of the crown of your head. Feel it, sense it, don’t just think about it, don’t think with it, just be aware of it and in it and through it now. . . Be aware of your nose, ears, mouth . . . right down through the soles of your feet.”*²⁷⁸

The parallels between these teachings and those in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are unmistakable. In these traditions the seventh chakra is located on the top, or the crown, of the head,

*“The most commonly accepted location for the seventh chakra is at the top of the head or slightly above the head. It sits like a crown, radiating upwards, hence its name,”*²⁷⁹

And,

*“It gives us access to higher states of consciousness as we open to what is beyond our personal preoccupations and visions. The function of the Crown chakra is driven by consciousness and gets us in touch with the universal.”*²⁸⁰

277 “Pray As You Go.” Android app | About Us.

278 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/prayer-resources/prepare/>

279 <http://www.chakras.info/crown-chakra/>

280 Ibid.

The crown of the head or the Sahasrara is described here,

*“Sahasrara or crown chakra is the topmost chakra in the subtle body, located in the crown of the head. In esoteric Hinduism and New Age western systems, it is generally considered to be the highest spiritual center and the state of pure consciousness, within which there is neither object nor subject. When the feminine Kundalini Shakti rises to this point, it unites with the masculine Shiva, the yogi or yogini achieves self realization and a state of liberating samadhi is attained. The chakra is symbolized by a lotus with one thousand multi-coloured petals.”*²⁸¹

*“In esoteric Buddhism, it is called Mahasukha and is generally considered to be the petal lotus of ‘Great Bliss’ and corresponding to the fourth state of Four Noble Truths.”*²⁸²

Nowhere in the Bible are we instructed to participate in this type of exercise nor the “Breathing Exercise” from the “Pray As You Go” app and website, which are summarized below:

*Breathe in through the nose if possible or mouth if you can’t
Be aware of your breathing
Focus all your attention on your breathing.
Sense the air on your lips or better feel it touch your nostrils.
Be aware of its warmth or coolness
Attend intently on normal, ordinary, everyday breathing.
Be aware of the breathing. It may deepen at first and then become shallower later,
but be aware of breathing.*²⁸³

281 Grimes, John A. A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy: Sanskrit Terms Defined in English. State University of New York Press. 1996 p 265.

282 Geoffrey Samuel; Jay Johnston (2013). Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body

283 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/prayer-resources/prepare/>

*“Vietnamese Zen Master and author, Thich Nhat Hanh, talks about mindful meditation as a way to develop deep insight, which leads to awakening and enlightenment. ‘Meditative breathing’, he says, ‘is a tool to calm the mind so it can see into itself and gain that insight. It strengthens mind concentration and stimulates compassion, awakening each person’s true nature.’”*²⁸⁴

*“The process of healing begins when we mindfully breathe in.”*²⁸⁵

*“Breathing is the connecting link between the conscious and the subconscious, between body and mind. In fact, the ability to control our body and mind, and to change our lives, our karma, depends upon this breathing. One must concentrate on the breathing, or more specifically upon the out-breath. All schools of Buddhism agree that anapanasati (mindfulness of our breathing) was the Buddha Shakyamuni’s first teaching.”*²⁸⁶

None of these techniques are taught in the Bible. This app places a determined focus on breathing as the means by which the body is healed and lives are changed.

Within the “Pray As You Go” app and website there are a couple more categories for study. For the sake of brevity we will not cover the topic of Imaginative Prayer again but will briefly cover the “Daily Examen for Young Adults.” The participant, while practicing this exercise, is merely supposed to tell God you are sorry for “not living up to all you could be.” No mention of sins committed or of asking for forgiveness is ever mentioned or suggested during this time of examination.²⁸⁷

The website, “Pray As You Go,” has a series of links for further learning

284 <https://eocinstitute.org/meditation/meditation-and-breathing-benefits-of-mindful-breathing/>

285 Hanh, Thich Nhat. No Mud, No Lotus: The Art of Transforming Suffering. p 24.

286 Deshimaru, Taisen. Mushotoku Mind: The Heart of the Heart Sutra.

287 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/prayer-resources/the-examen/>

under the Ignatian Spirituality tab.²⁸⁸ None of the links send the user to Protestant Christian sites, but rather to Jesuit/Catholic sites. These include: Sacred Space, Pathways to God, Other 6, Finding God, Online Ministries at Creighton University, Universalis, The Daily Gospel, Online Guide to Jesuit Spirituality Resources, and Christian Life Community.²⁸⁹

At the bottom of the same page is a list of retreat centers recommended by the creators of the website and app youth are using or recommended to use. These include, again all Jesuits or Catholic sources: St. Bueno's Jesuit Spirituality Centre, Mount Street Jesuit Centre, Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, Jesuit Centre of Spirituality and Culture, and 35 others.

The reasons that any Protestant church leader would recommend the "Pray As You Go" app are unclear—especially considering that both the internet and Android/iOS/Windows app stores are full of reputable Protestant Christian help for kids, teens, and adults who wish to learn about how to pray more effectively or foster a deeper relationship with Jesus. We are concerned that youth and teens are being pointed to an app, website, and mystical practices which are not only unbiblical but are clearly promoting Eastern religious practices.

For more information on the Jesuits, please see Appendix A in the section entitled, *At One Point the Catholic Church Was the Only Christian Church*, and Appendix B in the section entitled, *The Society of Jesus*.

Why This Matters

Many pastors and leaders have embraced Ashbrook's and Teresa of Avila's mansions and consider their teachings to be Godly and biblical. We believe that the evidence shows that pastors have used Bible passages out-of-context and doctrines of men in order to support their new Contemplative worldview. Pastors,

288 <https://pray-as-you-go.org/ignatian-spirituality/>

289 *Ibid.*

teachers, and training resources commonly utilize Lectio Divina, Imaginative Prayer, Visualization/Guided Visualization, Breath Prayer/Centering Prayer/Contemplative Prayer, as well as other Kataphatic and Apophatic techniques. Many pastors appear to have washed their hands of their biblical responsibility to protect their flock as shepherds, offering simplistic defenses like, “we eat the meat and spit out the bones,” and, “we take the best and throw out the bad,” (this is discussed further in the Answers to Common Critiques section). Many church leaders have dismissed any suggestion that these practices are potentially dangerous—dangers foreseen and discussed even by Richard Foster, Teresa of Avila, R. Thomas Ashbrook, and many others; these are dangers for which we have provided evidence in this book.

For example, Roger Oakland writes about Foster’s warning in his book entitled, *Faith Undone*,

*“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? ... 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?”*²⁹⁰

John Michael Talbot, a Roman Catholic contemplative monk provides a sterner warning. From an article entitled *Many Religions, One God*, on his website, he writes,

“It [Contemplative Practices] can be most destructive if used unwisely. I can almost

290 Oakland, Roger. *Faith Undone*, pp 99-100.

*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.”*²⁹¹

For Talbot, this seems to have come true. He writes,

*“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...”*²⁹²

Rather than listen to these warnings, some pastors apparently was their hands of the responsibility to warn fellow brothers and sisters with statements like, “we leave it to the Holy Spirit.” In our opinion, this statement demonstrates a lack of foresight, leadership, and integrity. Pastors often use statements like, “we leave it to the Holy Spirit” to apparently absolve themselves of any culpability, while ostensibly affording themselves the freedom to teach these practices, unencumbered by any personal responsibility—a belief and practice which is in opposition to the teaching of Scripture.

Acts 20:28-30, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

291 <https://johnmichaeltalbot.com/many-religions-one-god>

292 Talbot, John Michael. *Come to the Quiet*. p 237.

Matthew 15:8-9, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

Conclusions

In the end the Spiritual Formation movement and its Contemplative practices cannot be described as anything other than spiritual fornication.

What is spiritual fornication? Fornication is defined as, “Sexual intercourse between partners who are not married to each other.” In essence, spiritual fornication is the mixing of Christianity with other religions or beliefs. It is fornication, or spiritual fornication, because the foreign ideas or beliefs are not biblical beliefs. Theologians call this syncretism, which means a “combination of different forms of belief or practice; the fusion of two or more original forms.” Spiritual fornication blends the worship of the one true God with the worship of false gods, and the resulting syncretism is said to be worship of which the true God approves. This is the attempt to join, like in marriage where “the two shall become one flesh,” a false teaching with a true teaching and to call it good and just and right. But it is fornication, regardless of how one feels about it.

Have many people in Christian leadership have crossed the line and have begun promoting a different gospel? We ask each reader to decide. In any case, the evidence demands that hard questions be asked of our pastors and teachers and authors who promote Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation. Questions like:

1. What biblical defense can you provide to support your engagement in Spiritual Formation, Kataphatic and Apophatic Spiritual Disciplines, Contemplative Mysticism, and Spiritual Direction?

2. What actions can be taken to help people in your congregation who may have already been led astray into Perennial Philosophy, Eastern religions, or the occult based on the sources you endorsed from the pulpit or in the books from which you quote, referenced in sermons, or in books you recommended?
3. Now, having been shown that a different gospel is being taught or promoted by the individuals and organizations you endorse, will you reject, turn away, and abandon the path on which you have set yourself or your church?

Galatians 1:6-10, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."

Matthew 15:8-9, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

2 Timothy 4:1-5, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

What Can be Done?

We will not presume to suggest a prescriptive course of action for every church or situation. However, we do believe that the Scriptures have much to say about the role of pastors, elders, and church leaders. The Bible also has a great many things to say about false teaching and teachers, doctrines of men and demons, and wise discernment. If these matters are concerning to you, reach out to the pastors, leaders, and elders and make your concerns known. Finally, and most importantly, the Bible encourages us to pray in 2 Chronicles 7:14-15,

“If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.”

Our God is a God who spoke the universe into being, who spoke in times past to the prophets and writers the Old and New Testaments. To the believers in the church of Acts and to true believers throughout history He has proclaimed His wisdom by His Holy Spirit. God the Son is the Logos, the Word, the Name, which is spoken eternally of the Father. The one true God is not a silent God and he has not created a silent man.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that Christ accomplished all that was necessary for man to find an intimate relationship with God and that we enter into this relationship by faith. Contemplative Mysticism teaches that unity with God is achieved through spiritual exercises by substituting imagination and encounter theology for the biblical teaching of Faith—that is, standing upon the teaching of the Scriptures. With faith no special prayer practices are necessary to reach God’s ear nor to receive from God. The weakest prayer from the weakest saint touches His heart, and He will not withhold Himself but pour Himself out over and over again in greater measure until the weak are made perfect. And we know that God has heard us because we believe the promise of the Bible, which is Faith. Nothing else is required and nothing else is taught in Scripture.

For the Mystics, Spiritual Formation by means of Contemplative Mysticism is the true and only Christianity. But we will let Mystic, Karl Rahner say it in his own words:

“The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he will not exist at all.”

Appendix A: Answers to Common Critiques

1. At One Point the Catholic Church Was the Only Christian Church

Most of the information in this section is readily available in any encyclopedia or church history reference. A common defense for the use of essentially Catholic, mystical, and ascetic practices and the utilization of like resources within the Evangelical sphere is that before the Protestant Reformation, Catholicism was “the only game in town.” This argument is commonly used to defend the use of Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. Two major flaws in this argument exist.

First, the dominant role of Roman Catholicism in Europe for a thousand years in no way implies that its teachings were correct. Even if it were true that Ignatius of Loyola was teaching his Spiritual Exercises during a period of time when only Roman Catholicism existed, that fact has no bearing on the accuracy of his teachings. Before God called Abram, for example, the Bible teaches that the “whole earth” was united in rebellion against God. Using the logic of Spiritual Formation proponents, we would be forced to conclude that the pagans who existed at the time of Abram were the “only game in town,” and their teachings should be incorporated into the Christian faith. This rationale does not work.

Second, the truth is that Protestant ideals were already rapidly spreading across Europe before Ignatius of Loyola was even born. The groundwork for the Protestant Reformation began in the late 1300s and early 1400s with the popular adoption of the work of Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, and Jan Hus—with Martin Luther later building upon their ideas. Ignatius of Loyola was 28 years old and was not yet a devout Catholic when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in 1517, an act which “formally” started the Protestant Reformation. Not until 1521-1522, when Ignatius suffered a serious battle injury, which destroyed his military career, did he turn to the Catholic Church. Pre-Protestantism or Prot-

estantism spread rapidly across Northern Europe from 1420 through the 1600s. By 1545, Protestantism was so widespread that the Roman Catholic church launched a military counter-Reformation led in part by (of all people) Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits.²⁹³ Some scholars put the number of Protestants killed in the counter-Reformation at nearly 50 million.²⁹⁴ The Church of England became Protestant and separated from the Catholic Church in 1547, a year before Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* was published.

2. Church Tradition Provides the Standard for Christian Belief and Practice

Regarding the historical roots of Contemplative practices it is claimed that these originated within the Christian tradition and are, therefore, Christian. Supporters will even go so far as to say that pagans and occultists stole the practices from Christianity. On this last point we have provided evidence that shows that this claim is false and that even the earliest, so-called “discoverers of the mystical path”—the Desert Fathers—were actually participating in Gnostic practices and pagan practices in existence in North Africa for centuries. Setting aside those facts, however, even if one were to grant that a practice did originate within the Christian tradition, would that fact justify its adoption and general acceptance into Christian thought and practice? Certainly not. Christian history is replete with examples of horrors invented in the name of Jesus Christ.

- The veneration of Mary and the saints.
- The Immaculate Conception
- Transubstantiation

293 Wiggan, Greg. *In Search of Canon: European History the Imperialist State*. Sense Publishers, 2015. p 53.

294 Kim, Elijah J.F. *The Rise of the Global South: The Decline of Western Christendom and the Rise of Majority World Christianity*. Wipf & Stock Pub, 2012. p 189.

- Arianism (4th Century)—a belief that Christ was a creature made by God.
- Pelagianism (5th Century)—a belief which denied that we inherit original sin from Adam’s sin in the Garden.
- Jansenism (17th Century) from Jansenius, bishop of Ypres, France, which redefined the doctrine of grace and denied that Christ died for all men.

The danger of adopting, participating in, or prescribing a set of practices based on church tradition is clear: the Bible is the measure of Christian belief and practice—not church tradition. Following the traditions of men—even men in the church—is something the Bible warns us against.

Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

3. Connections to Interfaith Organizations Like SDI Do Not Matter

A common point of contention in the Spiritual Formation conversation surrounds the financial support which Spiritual Directors and Supervisors provide to Interfaith Organizations like Spiritual Directors International (SDI). Several kinds of arguments seem to form around this discussion. Below we outline the arguments and reply:

Claim 01: The Spiritual Director who pays dues to an Interfaith Organization is only doing so to help Christians looking for a Spiritual Director on the internet.

Response: The best-case scenario is that a Spiritual Director’s financial contribution to the Interfaith Organization is counter-productive. He or she is attempting to help a handful of Christians by supporting an organi-

zation working toward the ruin of thousands of Christians. This argument has no merit.

Claim 02: The Spiritual Director who pays dues to an Interfaith Organization has evangelistic ends in mind.

Response: The same rebuttal that was given in claim one above applies here; however, this argument seems to imply that the Spiritual Director who financially supports the Interfaith Organization is actually trying to undermine the Organization. Those same financial resources could be spent warning people about a particular Interfaith Organization rather than supporting it. This argument too has no merit.

Claim 03: Giving to an Interfaith Organization is no different than buying coffee at Starbucks or deodorant at Target.

Response: Unlike corporate entities like Target or Starbucks, which have no stated religious affiliations or objectives, SDI (and many other Interfaith Organizations) admits that its allegiance is to an interfaith, one-world-religion agenda and is actively working toward those ends. Although one might believe the same to be true about Starbucks or Target, the fact is that these corporations donate to many organizations, each of which might hold incompatible worldviews with another organization. This fact tends to lend credence to the probability that the corporation is motivated by profit instead of ideology. If it could be shown that the corporation did have an interfaith, one-world-religion agenda, we should happily play our part to defund the corporation, and so money should not be paid to Interfaith Organizations. This argument has no merit.

SDI, for example, by its own admission as previously cited, downplays the role of Jesus in order to provide an open community for people of all faiths. There are several reasons one might give to Interfaith Organizations:

Claim 01: The giver does not know that the organization is interfaith.

Response: This is possible but unlikely. SDI, for example, does not hide their interfaith agenda—it is in their about page multiple times and even in their mission statement. It is hard to imagine voluntarily paying dues to an organization without reading their mission statement.

Claim 02: The giver adheres to the same philosophy as the Interfaith Organization.

Response: This is far more likely. Many people give to organizations that share their beliefs and worldview.

Claim 03: The giver is willing to stick his or her proverbial head in the sand.

Response: This too is quite likely. Many people for professional profit, career advancement, personal prestige or celebrity, to achieve personal goals, and/or for any number of other reasons will look the other way or bury personal qualms that get in the way.

Of course, the Bible is clear about these matters in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18,

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty.”

4. We Should Pay for Spiritual Direction

In this section we respond to two related topics. The first topic relates to the distinction between Spiritual Direction and discipleship. The second topic relates to whether or not a person should charge or pay for Spiritual Direction.

Many in the Evangelical community seem to be confused about what Spiritual Direction is. Many Evangelical Christians claim that Spiritual Direction is nothing more or less than discipleship. If this is true, however, it would seem that Spiritual Directors need to explain why they are charging other Christians money or an hourly rate for what has otherwise historically and biblically been the clear call to all Christians, “go into all the world and make disciples.” Nowhere in the Bible do we read that the apostles or disciples charged money for discipleship. In fact, all evidence points to the fact that every Christian—out of love and obedience to Christ Jesus—is to train other believers to become disciples.

In Matthew 10:5-15 Jesus teaches the disciples the proper code of conduct when ministering, “You received without paying; give without pay.” Acts 8:14-24 seems to be a warning to the layperson that he or she should not treat spiritual things as a transaction, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” Clearly the situation in Acts is not perfectly analogous to Spiritual Direction and the payment involved; however, it does seem to indicate that payment for the things of God is something we should not expect to receive or offer in exchange. To be clear, we are not commenting on the condition of Simon’s heart in the passage in Acts nor the hearts of Spiritual Directors nor those who seek Spiritual Direction.

Although the definition of Spiritual Direction is nuanced, Spiritual Directors International’s definition is clear and broadly accepted. The only question left to answer would be, “is Spiritual Direction the same as discipleship?”

Spiritual Directors International covers this on their website in a section titled, What is Spiritual Direction?

Spiritual direction is not counseling.

Spiritual direction is not therapy.

Spiritual direction is not financial advice.

Like psychotherapy, it is often offered as a one-to-one or group experience in private sessions with spiritual mentors who have most likely completed extensive formation for the ministry and service of spiritual direction.

It is up to you to choose a spiritual director who has the training, formation and experience that suits your needs. Spiritual direction includes your deity or higher power as a third partner in the process.²⁹⁵

It is in this last point that the difference between Christian discipleship and Spiritual Direction emerges. As we have seen, Spiritual Direction—both in its intent and practice—is focused on silence, solitude, and self-knowing. Spiritual Formation and Direction takes the view that the historically biblical Christian focus on discipleship by means of prayer, Scripture, and fellowship is insufficient and is too outwardly focused. A *Desiring God* article entitled, “What is Discipleship and How is it Done,” illustrates what discipleship looks like:

Titus 2:4 — Older women are to train younger women.

Second Timothy 2:2 — Paul trained Timothy to train others to train others.

Ephesians 6:4 — Fathers are to train their children.

Matthew 28:20 — Missionaries are to teach the nations everything Jesus commanded.

Hebrews 3:13 — All Christians are to exhort each other every day to avoid sin and to stir each other up to love and good works (see also Hebrews 10:24–25).

First Peter 4:10 — All Christians are to use their gifts to serve others.

Acts 18:24–26 — Priscilla and Aquila, on the spur of the moment it seems, explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos.²⁹⁶

295 <http://www.sdiworld.org/find-a-spiritual-director/what-is-spiritual-direction>

296 <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-discipleship-and-how-is-it-done>

The website, *All About Following Jesus*, defines discipleship using Scripture as well and states that the Foundational Values of Discipleship are:

Evangelism (sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ) (Matthew 28:18-20)

Being changed by renewing your mind (Romans 12:2)

Worshipping God in all you do (Romans 12:1)

Serving God toward His purpose (Romans 1:9)

*Demonstrating to the world the Power given us by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 2 Peter 1:3-8)*²⁹⁷

Given the stated intents of Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation, it would seem unlikely that Spiritual Direction meets the biblical description of discipleship.

If a church's leadership seeks to define Spiritual Direction as biblical discipleship, no evidence in Scripture supports the notion that one should pay or be asked to pay for the privilege.

5. We Take the Best Ideas and Practices from Many Traditions and Throw Out the Bad.

The idea that one can borrow and infuse ideas from sources outside of the Christian Church tradition is strictly forbidden in Scripture, as we have seen; however, is it safe for Protestants to adopt beliefs and practices from other Christian traditions, such as Roman Catholicism? Certainly not. Consider, for example, the words of Theodore Maynard, a man whom many Catholics call the greatest Catholic historian of all time; he said,

297 <http://www.allaboutfollowingjesus.org/what-is-discipleship.htm>

*"It has often been charged...that Catholicism is overlaid with many pagan incrustations. Catholicism is ready to accept that accusation—and even to make it her boast...The great god Pan is not really dead, he is baptized."*²⁹⁸

The famous multi-volume set, *Church History*, puts it this way,

*"Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire and took the place of Paganism...Christianity as it existed in the Dark Ages might be termed Baptized Paganism."*²⁹⁹

Catholic historian, John F. Sullivan, said of Roman Catholic rituals and practices,

*"It is interesting to note how often our Church has availed herself of practices which were in common use among pagans ... Thus it is true, in a certain sense, that some Catholic rites and ceremonies are a reproduction of those of pagan creeds..."*³⁰⁰

Church tradition is not and cannot be the standard by which the Christian determines whether a belief or practice is Godly. However, within the Spiritual Formation movement lifting practices from other Christian traditions and even other religions seems almost normal and in line with Contemplative Mystic, Tilden Edward's, belief,

"...we need to humbly accept the learnings of particular Eastern religions. What makes a particular practice Christian is not its source but its intent...a selective at-

298 Maynard, Theodore, *The Story of Catholicism*. p 37.

299 *Church History*, Cent. 2, Ch. 2, Sec. 7.

300 Sullivan, John F. *The Externals of the Catholic Church, Her Government, Ceremonies, Festivals, Sacramentals and Devotions*. P.J. Kennedy, NY, 1942. p 156.

*tention to eastern spiritual practices can be of great assistance to a fully embodied Christian life....”*³⁰¹

The Bible teaches something quite different. Consider Colossians 2:8,

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Often 1 Thessalonians 5:21 is used to defend a liberal interpretation of “eat the meat and spit out the bones.” The passage reads, “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” Although ‘prove’ requires a testing or an examination to determine what is good, the passage itself is taken out of context. This verse is not referring to Christian doctrine and practice but, rather, is referring to prophecy. Verses 20 and 21 read, “Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good.”

Doctrines of men and demons have no meat, only bones. Pagan practices cannot be baptized. Good intentions do not convert doctrines of men and demons into Godly practices. The Bible is the inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient source for all Christian faith, teaching, and practice; truly, the Holy Spirit will not teach anything contrary to the Scriptures.

6. The Content Does Not Matter as Much as the Intent

During our research on this topic and through our conversations with pastors and Spiritual Formation proponents we have heard it repeatedly stated that they understand our concerns but that their intentions are good, and that is what matters. This defense seems to be used as one of several excuses by which they ap-

301 Edwards, Tilden. Living in the Presence. Acknowledgement page.

pear to absolve themselves of any responsibility for questionable or false teaching—teaching such as Imaginative Prayer, Guided Visualization, Ritual Prayer, Centering Prayer, and Breath Prayer, *Lectio Divina*, as well as the “sacred” words used in prayer(s), sources used in sermons, and supporting materials used by Spiritual Directors.

The implication is that the content of their messages or books does not matter as much as the intent of their message—an idea that is hugely problematic. For example, the teaching that there is no hell, which has become prevalent in the Christian church, is taught under the guise of good intentions—a way to show that God is all-loving. The problem is obvious: who defines a good intention? For that matter who defines good? Good becomes a subjective standard, and we end up with a situation in which almost any atrocity can be casually defended with an appeal to intention.

Error cannot be converted into truth with an appeal to intention. If it could, then anything could be labeled as Christian and taught as biblical because the appeal to intention leaves no standard by which two distinctly different world-views can be distinguished when both are offered with good intentions. Worse still is that the Bible cautions us against putting too much weight in our own perspectives:

Proverbs 16:2, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.”

Proverbs 21:2, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.”

Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

7. We Leave Discernment Up to the Individual and the Holy Spirit

Although we briefly covered this statement toward the end of the book, we expand upon the matter of discernment and the role of the Holy Spirit here. Some pastors in response to inquiries about the unbiblical or pagan origins of certain teachings from certain questionable teachers, have dismissed these concerns, claiming, “We leave it up to the Holy Spirit.” Although we would never doubt the role the Holy Spirit plays in revealing to the individual whether something is right or wrong, we deny that this phrase is a defense which permits church pastors to teach or promote the tenants of Spiritual Formation while accepting no responsibility for the outcome; this is especially true when the books or authors promoted, as we have already shown, warn about the dangers of practicing certain Spiritual Disciplines. The Bible has much to say about the role of leaders and pastors.

Many pastors hold that Spiritual Direction and/or Spiritual Formation is for the mature Christian, and they will only recommend it to those mature enough to use the process responsibly. We find this line of reasoning to be fraught with problems. In many churches Spiritual Formation is being actively taught or promoted to everyone in attendance, including in youth ministry. Some of the techniques promoted include but are not limited to: breath prayer and Imaginative Prayer/Visualization. We can envision no meaningful way for a pastoral staff to determine the maturity level of every person who attends a Sunday morning service, worship night, or youth group service and to decide whether Spiritual Formation Disciplines are right for each person.

Further, given the plenitude of potential dangers and the prominence of the individuals offering the warnings, we submit that where it is within a leader’s power to warn a person or congregation about the potential dangers, her or she has a responsibility to do so. The role of the Holy Spirit is to make up the difference between what is the truth and the limits of our understanding; on the contrary, handing the Holy Spirit all the responsibility for the consequences of one’s own willful omission is not in alignment with Scripture. Consider Ezekiel 33:2-6,

“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand.”

8. It Does Not Have to be in the Bible to be Biblical; the Bible is Silent on Many Things. (It is in the White Spaces of the Bible)

While defending the use of Spiritual Formation practices and their apparent absence from the Bible, proponents will claim that “the Bible is silent on many things.” In saying that the Bible is silent on many things, we believe, Spiritual Formation proponents are echoing a common Contemplative trope well summarized in the words of R. Thomas Ashbrook in his book, *Mansions of the Heart*,

*“It is important that we distinguish between the clear teaching of Scripture and speculation about some element of spiritual growth. There are many circumstances in which we must speculate, where Scripture is either unclear or does not address the topic or context; but we must always be able to ensure that we are at least consistent with the clear teachings of Scripture.”*³⁰²

302 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 4318-4321). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

While this might sound good on the surface, in the quote above Ashbrook is discussing Christian beliefs and practices. Although topics like internet-use or car-buying options are not specifically addressed in the Bible and, therefore, require some speculation, Christian religious beliefs and practices are topics about which the Bible has a great many things to say. As Ashbrook points out, it is important to verify everything with Scripture, but it seems impossible to biblically support the speculative contemplative practices he endorses. Ashbrook cannot have it both ways. One cannot speculate and be sure at the same time; if one is speculating, there is no certainty; therefore, the Christian must accept or dismiss a practice based upon biblical evidence. And the Bible itself encourages us to approach the Bible in exactly this way: 1 Timothy 3:16-17,

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Very little is left out of this passage. The Christian receives everything from the Bible that is necessary to be complete, equipped for every good work. As it relates to prayer specifically, Jesus instructs us on how to pray in Matthew 6:5-15,

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And

lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Not only does this passage affirm active, thoughtful, and fully conscious dialogue with God, it also seems to instruct us not to use repetitive prayers like those in the Spiritual Formation movement teach. Bible.org provides a detailed analysis about the topic of prayer as taught in Scripture,

“‘Pray’ is the Greek word proseucomai from pros, stressing direction, closeness, and eucomai, ‘to ask, request.’ The basic meaning of this word (along with its uses) looks at prayer as an avenue of drawing near to God in worship and dependence because we see Him as the all-sufficient one and ourselves as insufficient. Prayer becomes one of the means by which we draw near to the Lord and His sufficiency and submit to Him. ‘Say’ is the Greek word, ‘legw.’ It gives prominence to the thought processes in choosing the words spoken because of their meaning. Originally, it meant ‘to pick and choose’ and this is precisely what we generally do in speech unless we are talking gibberish. Legw reminds us of our need to carefully choose our words as opposed to praying as mere religious rote without careful thought. It should remind us of the conversational nature of our prayer or communication with God. ‘Say’ is what we call in Greek grammar, a present iterative imperative. As an iterative present it describes an event which is, as a command, to occur repeatedly, over and over again. The idea is when you pray, consistently pray in the following manner or example, but not repetitiously by rote, reciting these words as a mere repeated ritual, the problem Jesus addressed earlier in Matthew 6:7.”³⁰³

The Bible is the complete, full, and final truth on matters of Christian belief and practice; on such matters the Bible is silent on nothing.

303 <https://bible.org/article/principles-prayer-luke-11>

9. Accusations of Logical Fallacies

One common accusation leveled against those who disagree with the tenants of Spiritual Formation, Spiritual Disciplines, Contemplative Mysticism, and Spiritual Direction is that the dissenters are guilty of committing the genetic fallacy. The genetic fallacy is the term used to describe a logical error in which the substance of an argument is dismissed because the information comes from a certain source.³⁰⁴ For example, the phrase, “do not take financial advice from a homeless person,” is an example in which the genetic fallacy is used. There is no way of knowing whether the advice that the homeless person gave was good or bad based upon the fact that it came from a homeless person; in every case, one must look at the content of the message not the messenger to determine the value of the message.

Those who disagree with tenants of Spiritual Formation are often accused of committing the genetic fallacy. However, at no time have we argued that the teachings of anyone in the Spiritual Formation movement are incorrect because they come from, for example, Thomas Merton or Richard Foster. In every case, we have quoted the people directly and examined the content of specific claims in order to determine whether the content was accurate and scriptural. Further, we have ensured that the primary source(s) agree with what the secondary source(s) believe. Where relationship between people are concerned, rather than simply showing that the primary source(s) can be linked to the secondary source(s) through a series of cursory connections, we have shown and cited that direct lines of substantial and meaningful connections do exist.

Another common accusation is that arguments against Spiritual Formation are based upon cherry picking—selecting only evidence that supports a claim and then tying all of those together to form a narrative. We have been clear that the world of Spiritual Formation is broad and constantly changing. In order to avoid being accused of cherry picking, we have gone to great lengths to do the

304 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetic_fallacy

following:

1. Cite every source so that anyone can easily double check.
2. Use only primary sources from leaders within the world of Spiritual Formation.
3. Use only Spiritual Formation leaders whom we found frequently cited within the Christian evangelical community.
4. Derive definitions directly from the Spiritual Formation sources.
5. Provide many sources which say the same thing, using similar or identical language.
6. Provide many sources that cross reference one another or use one another to defend their own views.
7. Rely on direct quotes from Spiritual Formation proponents which carry clear and unmistakable meanings.
8. Avoid many deeply philosophical/theological arguments—relying instead on center-of-the-road Christian beliefs and practices.
9. Limiting the conversation to topics on which the Bible speaks directly.

10. “I’ve Never Been Closer to God”

Many people try to defend the practice of Spiritual Disciplines by claiming, “I’ve never been closer to God.” Although we would never completely discount the testimony of anyone involved in Spiritual Formation, Contemplative Mysticism, or Spiritual Direction, we ultimately do not find this argument compelling. The reason is that people from many religions and faith traditions from around the world claim to have had powerful and life-changing spiritual experiences using Kataphatic and Apophatic techniques to achieve altered states of consciousness. Many traditions claim to be getting “closer to God.” For the Christian, what makes a particular practice profitable is its adherence to the Bible, not how it makes the person feel or how close to God he or she perceives himself or herself to be.

11. Contemplative Practices and Spiritual Formation are Neutral and as Such Can be Used for Either Good or Evil.

A common argument that Spiritual Formation proponents use in order to defend the use of Kataphatic and Apophatic techniques not found in the Bible goes something like this, “Contemplative practices and Spiritual Formation are neutral, in and of themselves neither good nor bad, and as such can be used for good or evil.” The truth is that not even R. Thomas Ashbrook buys into this argument; he writes,

*“You see, everyone is on a spiritual formation journey. We don’t live in a neutral world, with church or God as our only spiritual influence. We are bombarded by influences—some good and many bad—constantly seeking to form us into the world’s mold.”*³⁰⁵

If we do not live in a neutral world, then influences are either good or evil. The Bible, for instance, is perfectly good. If we do what the Bible tells us to do, we can expect a close relationship with God; we can expect to be changed into the image of Jesus; we can expect to hear God’s voice in our life; we can expect to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. We expect to receive the full measure of what Christ Jesus has for us; no Kataphatic and Apophatic techniques—of which none are taught in Scripture—are required. When it comes to Christian belief and practice, the Bible is the full, final, sufficient, and authoritative Word of God.

305 Ashbrook, R. Thomas. *Mansions of the Heart: Exploring the Seven Stages of Spiritual Growth* (Kindle Locations 549-551). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

Appendix B: Christian Mysticism's Intellectual Leaders

Appendix B is a compilation of sources endorsed or promoted by many prominent Christian pastors and leaders, Christian authors, and Spiritual Directors. We include them here to illustrate that these leaders teach or practice a different gospel than the one found in the Bible; and the Bible calls every believer to disassociate with those who preach a different gospel, Galatians 1:6-10,

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard (September 4, 1935 – May 8, 2013) was an American philosopher and theologian also known for his writings on Christian spiritual formation.³⁰⁶

From an interview with Dallas Willard and conducted by John Ortberg.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dallas_Willard

³⁰⁷ <https://thereforeispeak.wordpress.com/2011/03/01/dallas-willard-interview/>

Ortberg: Is Jesus God?

Willard: It's not like God has a huge list of things to believe that if you don't believe them you're not "in." God looks at our heart. We don't become righteous by having the correct beliefs. We become righteous by trusting God and living from Him. I believe the best way to do that is learn about Christ and put your confidence in Him. I like to define salvation as participating in the life that God is living on earth. You don't have to have it all right to have that.

Ortberg: How is anyone, Christian or not, assured of their salvation?

Willard: What fixes you with God? Scriptures teach us you have to have the gift of eternal life. What about devout Buddhists and Hindus? I believe that everyone who deserves to be saved will be saved no matter where they are or what they do and our Scriptures talk about that. For all who seek God with all of their heart, and defined in terms of coming to love Him, not just having the right beliefs about Him, but coming to love Him and their neighbor as themselves. To align yourself experientially with Jesus and learn to live in this world by the creative power of God, which is eternal living.

Ortberg: Why is His way the true way? Why is Jesus' way the truest way?

Willard: Anyone who deserves to be saved by God will be. You're not saved because you are a good Christian or a good Buddhist. You are saved because of the heart. Who you are on the inside. Because you love God and love others out of your love for God. It is really important to emphasize that whoever deserves to be saved, God will save them.

Ortberg: What do you tell someone who asks, "What next step should I take in my seeking of God?"

Willard: I wouldn't encourage them to read a book. Do the next thing that you know to be right. I'd say to do what you think the next step is. Do what is good and you will be throwing yourself onto His mercy. If you want to go to heaven, go now, because it's already here, you just have to step into. You do that by just doing the things that you know to be right.

Ortberg: Why does God send people to Hell?

Willard: I don't think he sends anyone to Hell. He is concerned with getting people into Heaven. God will let anyone in who in his considered opinion can stand it. Some people believe they are in charge and this is why God shuts some people off. Some people want to be in charge. I believe that people choose hell. I think this happens in this life.

Ortberg: Isn't Christianity arrogant to claim that the only way is through Jesus? Jesus' quote in John 14:6 sounds narrow, exclusive, and dogmatic.

Willard: Is that a claim for Christianity or for Christ? He doesn't say "Jesus is the way." He says "I am." "I am" points back to Exodus 3. People assume that when Jesus states his exclusiveness that he's talking about the exclusiveness of Christianity. People think that anyone that does not have knowledge of the historical Jesus is automatically closed off from God. We thought of salvation as having the right beliefs and that was what made God let us in. That leaves most people out. Christ is in charge of His people...and He is going to do right by everyone. Jesus doesn't just come in the form that we're most familiar with. Being saved is being involved in the life Jesus is now living on earth. That's sharing his life. That's something we can know and do now.

Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton (January 31, 1915 – December 10, 1968) was an American Catholic writer, theologian, and mystic. A Trappist monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, he was a poet, social activist, and student of comparative religion. In 1949, he was ordained to the priesthood and given the name Father Louis.³⁰⁸

Thomas Merton, like Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross, was a Catholic contemplative mystic. Unlike Teresa and John, however, Thomas is a 20th cen-

308 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Merton

ture figure. So catastrophic are the theological beliefs of Thomas Merton that we literally cannot begin to catalogue or even categorize all of them. Below we have just selected a few things in no particular order.

Merton believed that the Bible does not and cannot reveal the truth of God. Merton, like Saint John of the Cross before him, held that the Bible could not lead us into a relationship with God, for God is completely other and beyond describing. The only way to know God is through experience. This theology is known as “the path of the negative.”³⁰⁹

Merton believed that God is both male and female. Merton was also influenced by Julian of Norwich, who called Jesus “our Mother.” This mystic “helped to open the door to Merton’s exploration of God’s feminine dimension.”³¹⁰

Merton believed that Sufism (Muslim mysticism) is a path to God. Not only did Merton believe Sufism is a path to God, but Merton actively practiced Sufism. Merton said, “I’m deeply impregnated with Sufism.”³¹¹ Sufism is a practice in which a person will chant the name of Allah as a kind of breath prayer, go into altered states of consciousness and trances, and have an experience of god, usually of a pantheistic nature.

Merton believed that Buddhism is a path to God.

“I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity. The future of Zen is

309 Forest, Jim. *Living With Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*. Orbis Books, Revised edition. 2008. p 144.

310 Forest, Jim. *Living With Wisdom: A Life of Thomas Merton*. Orbis Books, Revised edition. 2008. p 144.

311 Baker, Rob and Gray Henry. *Merton and Sufism*. 1999. p 109.

*in the West. I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can.”*³¹²

Merton believed that all religions worship the same God.

*“It is in surrendering a false and illusory liberty on the superficial level that man unites himself with the inner ground of reality and freedom in himself which is the will of God, of Krishna, of Providence, of Tao.”*³¹³

Merton’s life was dedicated to extreme ecumenism. “Thomas Merton was perhaps the greatest popularizer of interspirituality. He opened the door for Christians to explore other traditions, notably Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism.”³¹⁴

*“Merton was consciously trying to relate the mystical insights of other traditions with his own Christian faith.”*³¹⁵

Merton believed that experience is more important than doctrine.

*“Personally, in matters where dogmatic beliefs differ, I think that controversy is of little value because it takes us away from the spiritual realities into the realm of words and ideas ... But much more important is the sharing of the experience of divine light ... It is here that the area of fruitful dialogue exists between Christianity and Islam.”*³¹⁶

“I am able to approach the Buddhas barefoot and undisturbed, my feet in wet grass, wet sand. Then the silence of the extraordinary faces. The great smiles. Huge and yet subtle. Filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing

312 Baillie, John, Lucius Hatfield Bugbee, Charles Kendall Gilbert. *Religion In Life*, Volume 48. 1979. p 69.

313 “The Significance of the Bhagavad-Gita,” *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, appendix ix, p 353.

314 Teasdale, Wayne. *Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions*.

315 Teasdale, Wayne. *A Monk in the World*, New World Library. 2003. p 181.

316 Baker, Dan and Gray Henry. *Merton and Sufism*. 1999. p 109.

*everything, rejecting nothing ... without trying to discredit anyone or anything—without refutation—without establishing some other argument.”*³¹⁷

During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was put to Thomas Merton: “How can we best help people to attain union with God?” His answer was very clear: “We must tell them that they are already united with God . . . Contemplative prayer is nothing other than coming into consciousness of what is already there.”³¹⁸

Meister Eckhart

Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), according to Father John Hardon’s Catholic Encyclopedia, was a German Dominican mystic who was tried for heresy.

In 1329, Pope John XXII condemned twenty-eight of Eckhart’s sentences as heretical or dangerous:

*“We are totally transformed into God and changed into Him . . . Though a person commits a thousand mortal sins, if he is rightly disposed, he should not wish not to have committed them ... A good man is the only begotten Son of God.”*³¹⁹

*“I pray God to make me free of God, for [His] unconditioned Being is above God and all distinctions.”*³²⁰

“The authorities say that God is a being, an intelligent being who knows everything. But I say that God is neither a being nor intelligent and He doesn’t ‘know’

317 Pennington, M. Basil. Thomas Merton My Brother. New City Press. 2002. p 233.

318 (The Signature of Jesus, pp 211, 218 , as cited in A Time of Departing).

319 <http://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=55936>

320 http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Meister_Eckhart.html

*either this or that. God is free of everything and therefore He is everything.”*³²¹

*“If I had a God I could understand, I would no longer consider him God.”*³²²

Madame Guyon

Madame Guyon (April 13, 1648 – June 9, 1717) was a French mystic and was accused of advocating Quietism, although she never called herself a Quietist. Quietism was considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church, and she was imprisoned from 1695 to 1703 after publishing the book, *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*.³²³ She remains one of the most popular mystics among modern Evangelical Christians.

Guyon’s contemplative mysticism led her to the heresy of panentheism, that God is in all things,

*“Here everything is God. God is everywhere and in all things”*³²⁴

Guyon also advocated passive prayer in which the role of the mind is removed.

“May I hasten to say that the kind of prayer I am speaking of is not a prayer that comes from your mind. It is a prayer that begins in the heart . . . Prayer offered to the Lord from your mind simply would not be adequate. Why? Because your mind is very limited. The mind can pay attention to only one thing at a time. Prayer that

321 Ibid

322 http://www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Meister_Eckhart.html

323 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeanne_Guyon

324 Willigis Jager. *The Search for the Meaning of Life*, 1995. p 125.

*comes out of the heart is not interrupted by thinking.”*³²⁵

Guyon advocated a works-based process for achieving union with God, saying,

*“God is, indeed, found with facility, when we seek Him within ourselves.”*³²⁶

*“ . . . any and all active contemplation on your part is also just preparation for bringing you to a passive state. They are preparations. They are not the end. They are a way to the end. The end is union with God.”*³²⁷

This is in stark conflict with the teaching of the Scriptures, which teach that Christians are made one spirit with Christ by the grace and work of God, a reality into which we enter by faith when we are saved or born again. Nothing else is taught or required in the Bible.

Saint John of the Cross

John of the Cross (1542 – 14 December, 1591) was a major figure of the Counter-Reformation, a Spanish mystic, a Roman Catholic saint, a Carmelite friar and a priest, who was born at Fontiveros, Old Castile.³²⁸ The use of the term, Dark Night of the Soul, stems from a poem by John of the Cross entitled “Dark Night.”

Saint John of the Cross denied Christ Jesus as mediator. The mystical teachings of John of the Cross are essentially pseudo-Dionysian. “It has rarely been

325 Guyon, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*. p 4.

326 *The Life and Religious Experience of the Celebrated Lady Guyon*

327 Guyon, *Experiencing Union with God through Inner Prayer*

328 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_the_Cross

disputed that the overall structure of John's mystical theology, and his language of the union of the soul with God, is influenced by the pseudo-Dionysian tradition."³²⁹

The pseudo-Dionysian tradition claims that the union of the human soul with God is achieved not by means of Christ Jesus alone as mediator but also by means of a contemplative process to achieve theosis,³³⁰ a classical form of divinization in which man becomes a god, although not the eternal God in essence.³³¹ Theosis, or becoming a god, is the condition under which unity with God is achieved. Under these premises what separates man from God is not his sin but his prayer methodology.

Saint John of the Cross utilized unbiblical meditative practices. Saint John of the Cross, being himself the student of Saint Teresa of Avila, utilized her meditative practices, with the exception that he uses slightly different words in describing the methodology.

Richard Rohr

Fr. Richard Rohr is a globally recognized ecumenical teacher bearing witness to the universal awakening within Christian mysticism and the Perennial Tradition. He is a Franciscan priest of the New Mexico Province and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fr. Richard's teaching is grounded in the Franciscan alternative orthodoxy—practices of contemplation and self-emptying, expressing itself in radical compassion, particularly for the socially marginalized.³³²

329 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_the_Cross

330 https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius_the_Areopagite

331 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosis_\(Eastern_Orthodox_theology\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theosis_(Eastern_Orthodox_theology))

332 <https://cac.org/richard-rohr/richard-rohr-ofm/>

*“Some form of death, psychological, spiritual, relational, or physical is the only way we will loosen our tie to our small and separate false self. Only then does it return in a new shape, which I am calling the Risen Christ, or the soul, or the true self.”*³³³

In his book *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment*, Rohr lists more than 12 paths to God. These include the way of: Mysticism, Religious Life, Friendship, Artist, Erotic, Warrior, Parenting, Science and Technology, and Enneagram, as well as others.³³⁴

From *Relevant Magazine* – “The Mysticism of Prayer,” an interview with Aaron Cline Hanbury and Richard Rohr. September/October 2016:

Aaron Cline Hanbury: “How would you describe your differences with Protestant Christians?”

Richard Rohr: “In terms of humanity’s relation to God, [Protestants teach] some kind of necessary transaction of blood sacrifice that was needed by God to forgive or to love or to accept humanity. The Franciscan school never accepted that. Our Christology is much more of a nonviolent theory of atonement.”

Aaron Cline Hanbury: “‘Converts’ as in salvation? What are the requirements for someone to become a Christian in your view?”

Richard Rohr: “First of all, let me tell you what it is not. I do not think that the New Testament is talking about Jesus taking people to Heaven. This is so corrupt, the whole notion of the freedom, enlightenment and eternal life—I’m not denying eternal life. By pushing this whole thing into the future and making salvation a reward-punishment system where a few win and most lose, I think that’s destroyed the transformative power of the Gospel. So for me, salvation is a present experience of living in loving union with God and your neighbor and the freedom to love God and the freedom to love your neighbor—which is a lot of surrendering of your own agenda and anger and things that we’ve been talking about. The one, always-valid function of religion is to awaken people to their true selves. That’s our job, and

333 Rohr, Richard. *Immortal Diamonds: The Search for Our True Selves*. p 62.

334 Rohr, Richard. *Enneagram II: Advancing Spiritual Discernment*. pp 21-27.

*what we do so much is simply stir the false self: Try to make the person more Catholic or more evangelical or more law-abiding. That naked, foundational identity is what you come to rest in the longer you can live in contemplative prayer—you let go of all these passing identities and learn to rest in the one that never dies.”*³³⁵

In *Contemplation and Compassion: The Second Gaze*, Rohr uses a quote from Dr. Gerald May,

“Contemplation happens to everyone. It happens in moments when we are open, undefended, and immediately present.”³³⁶ And then Rohr states, “On my better days, when I am “open, undefended, and immediately present,” I can sometimes begin with a contemplative mind and heart.”³³⁷

Teresa of Avila

Teresa of Avila (28 March 1515 – 4 October 1582) was a prominent Spanish mystic, Roman Catholic saint, Carmelite nun and author during the Counter Reformation, and theologian of contemplative life through mental prayer. She was a reformer in the Carmelite Order of her time and the movement she initiated and was later joined by Saint John of the Cross.³³⁸

From the entry in the *New World Encyclopedia*,³³⁹ as taken from Saint Teresa’s autobiography:

335 <http://archives.relevantmagazine.com/god/mysticism-prayer>

336 <https://cac.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2-CONTEMPLATION-AND-COMPASSION-THE-SECOND-GAZE.pdf>

337 Ibid

338 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa_of_%C3%81vila

339 http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Teresa_of_Avila

“The first, Devotion of Heart, is mental prayer of devout concentration or contemplation. It is the withdrawal of the soul from without and especially the devout observance of the passion of Christ and penitence (Autobiography 11.20).

“The second, Devotion of Peace, is where human will is surrendered to God. This is by virtue of a charismatic, supernatural state given by God, while the other faculties, such as memory, reason, and imagination, are not yet secure from worldly distraction. While a partial distraction is due to outer performances such as repetition of prayers and writing down spiritual things, yet the prevailing state is one of quietude (Autobiography 14.1).

“The third, Devotion of Union, is absorption in God. It is not only a supernatural but an essentially ecstatic state. Here there is also an absorption of the reason in God, and only the memory and imagination are left to ramble. This state is characterized by a blissful peace, a sweet slumber of at least the higher soul faculties, or a conscious rapture in the love of God.

“The fourth, Devotion of Ecstasy, is where the consciousness of being in the body disappears. Sense activity ceases; memory and imagination are also absorbed in God or intoxicated. Body and spirit are in the throes of a sweet, happy pain, alternating between a fearful fiery glow, a complete impotence and unconsciousness, and a spell of strangulation, sometimes by such an ecstatic flight that the body is literally lifted into space. This after half an hour is followed by a reactionary relaxation of a few hours in a swoon-like weakness, attended by a negation of all the faculties in the union with God. The subject awakens from this in tears; it is the climax of mystical experience, producing a trance. Indeed, she was said to have been observed levitating during Mass on more than one occasion.”

These descriptions are very similar to symptoms that experienced yoga meditation practitioners report when moving through the chakras of the kundalini, a condition known as kundalini awakening: “stress and fear accompanies such a process...itchy creepy crawly [feelings], intense pressure in the forehead, spontaneous orgasms...”³⁴⁰ And what precisely did she experience in these trances?

340 Mehta, Anmol. Signs and Symptoms of the Kundalini Awakening Experience. <http://anmolmehta.com/>

Saint Teresa writes in her autobiography,

*“I would see beside me, on my left hand, an angel in bodily form ... He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afire ... In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by the intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, nor will one’s soul be content with anything less than God.”*³⁴¹

Teresa of Avila was overcome by the devil. During these meditative states, Saint Teresa of Avila was additionally tortured by the devil mercilessly. She writes in her autobiography,

“...the devil was with me for five hours torturing me with such terrible pains and both inward and outward disquiet that I do not believe I could have endured them any longer. The sisters who were with me were frightened to death. . . for the devil had made me pound the air with my body, head and arms and I had been powerless to resist him. But the worst thing had been the interior disquiet. I could find no way of regaining my tranquility.”

Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner (1904-1984) was one of the most important Catholic theologians of the 20th century and laid the philosophical ground work for the 20th century mystics. Karl Rahner was born in March 1904. He was the fourth of seven

signs-and-symptoms-of-the-kundailni-awakening-experience/

341 New World Encyclopedia. “Saint Teresa of Avila.” Source, Saint Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography*.

children, the son of a local college professor and a devout Christian mother. In 1922 Karl followed his older brother Hugo and entered the Jesuit community. As a Jesuit novice Rahner was formed in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. This formation had a lasting influence on his spiritual and intellectual development.³⁴²

*“But I think that the spirituality of Ignatius himself, which one learned through the practice of prayer and religious formation, was more significant to me than all the learned philosophy and theology inside and outside of the Order.”*³⁴³

On Death and Resurrection,

*“Rahner states that the death and the resurrection of Jesus are two aspects of a single event not to be separated (Rahner, p. 266), even though the resurrection is not a historical event in time and place like the death of Jesus. What the Scripture offers are powerful encounters in which the disciples come to experience the spirit of the risen Lord Jesus among them, provoking a resurrection faith of the disciples as ‘a unique fact’ (Rahner, p. 274). The resurrection is not a return to life in the temporal sphere, but the seal of God the Father upon all that Jesus stood for and preached in his pre-Easter life. ‘By the resurrection... Jesus is vindicated as the absolute saviour’ by God (Rahner, p. 279): it means ‘this death as entered into in free obedience and as surrendering life completely to God, reaches fulfillment and becomes historically tangible for us only in the resurrection’ (Rahner, p. 284). Thus, in the resurrection, the life and death of Jesus are understood as ‘the cause of God’s salvific will’ (Rahner, p. 284) and opens the door to our salvation: ‘we are saved because this man who is one of us has been saved by God, and God has thereby made his salvific will present in the world historically, really and irrevocably’ (Rahner, p. 284). In this sense, Jesus of Nazareth becomes a God-Man, the absolute saviour.”*³⁴⁴

342 <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/20th-century-ignatian-voices/karl-rahner-sj>

343 Rahner, Karl and William Dych. Continuum 2000. p 7.

344 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rahner

On Non-Christian Religions,

*“Rahner’s transcendental Christology opens another horizon which comprises non-Christian religions, as God’s universal saving will in Christ extends to non-Christians: since Christ is the saviour of all people, salvation for non-Christians comes only through Christ (anonymous Christians). Just as importantly, it is possible to say that Christians can learn from other religions or atheistic humanism because God’s grace is and can be operative in them. The presence of Christ in other religions operates in and through his Spirit (Rahner, p. 316) and non-Christians respond to the grace of God through ‘the unreflexive and ‘searching Christology’ (searching “memory” of the absolute saviour) present in the hearts of all persons (Rahner, pp. 295, 318). Three specific attitudes become involved: 1) an absolute love towards one’s neighbours; 2) an attitude of readiness for death; and 3) an attitude of hope for the future (Rahner, pp. 295–298). In practising these, the person is acting from and responding to the grace of God that was fully manifest in the life of Jesus.”*³⁴⁵

Ignatius of Loyola

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born in 1491. In 1521 Ignatius was gravely wounded in a battle with the French. While recuperating, Ignatius Loyola experienced a conversion. Reading the lives of Jesus and the saints made Ignatius happy and aroused desires to do great things. Ignatius realized that these feelings were clues to God’s direction for him. Over the years, Ignatius became an expert in the art of Spiritual Direction. With a small group of friends, Ignatius Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. Ignatius conceived the Jesuits as “contemplatives in action.”³⁴⁶

345 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Rahner

346 <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/st-ignatius-loyola>

Ignatius writes,

*“The third [way to satisfy the debt of sin is], to chastise the flesh, that is, giving it sensible pain, which is given by wearing haircloth or cords or iron chains next to the flesh, by scourging or wounding oneself, and by other kinds of austerity. Note. What appears most suitable and most secure with regard to penance is that the pain should be sensible in the flesh and not enter within the bones, so that it give pain and not illness. For this it appears to be more suitable to scourge oneself with thin cords, which give pain exteriorly, rather than in another way which would cause notable illness within.”*³⁴⁷

He then explains the reasons for which he suggests self-flagellation,

*“...the exterior penances are done chiefly for three ends: First, as satisfaction for the sins committed; Second, to conquer oneself — that is, to make sensuality obey reason and all inferior parts be more subject to the superior; Third, to seek and find some grace or gift which the person wants and desires...the person finds himself.”*³⁴⁸

The Society of Jesus

The Society of Jesus, whose members are called Jesuits, was founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540 as a military arm of the Roman Catholic Church and whose stated purpose was the destruction of Protestantism worldwide in order to bring the entire world back into the fold of the Roman Church. To become a Jesuit, the initiate must take several vows including one in which he swears obedience to the Pope as a corpse is obedient to death. This vow is still in effect

347 Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. p 50.

348 Ibid

to today and Pope Benedict the XVI referenced it in a speech to the Jesuits just three years ago.

Within thirty years of the founding of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits had systematically captured, tortured, and/or killed almost 4 million Protestant men, women, and children throughout Europe. These atrocities were deemed acceptable so that the so-called heresy and apostasy of the Protestants did not spread. And what was this heresy?

The Protestants believed in:

1. Faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing. Protestants rejected the Papacy who claimed the right to decree or change scripture and forgive sins, and who claimed to personally be Christ on Earth, the vicar or replacement of Christ. Protestants rejected the veneration of and prayer to Mary and the Saints. Protestants rejected Church hierarchy which claimed that the priesthood belonged solely to them and not the body of believers.
2. The Bible plus nothing. Protestants rejected the Papal dictates, which called for complex and costly penance to be paid or extracted, decreed that the Roman Church alone could read and interpret the Bible, which elevated Church tradition to the level of biblical doctrine, and finally which taught non-canonical texts as Scripture.

Martin Luther believed that Christ accomplished all that was necessary for man to find an intimate relationship with God and that we enter into this relationship by faith. Ignatian Spirituality taught that unity with God was to be achieved through spiritual exercises by substituting imagination and encounter theology for the biblical teaching of Faith—that is, standing upon the teaching of the Scriptures. Encounter theology is the idea that true revelation of the divine comes through emotional and physical experience of the supernatural. With faith no special prayer practices are necessary to reach God's ear nor to receive from God.

