

What is contemplative prayer? Basically, a good definition for it would be: a belief system that uses ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (the silence) and is often wrapped in Christian terminology. We shall soon see this definition to be true when continuing on about this topic. Some of its meditation techniques would be labyrinths, yoga, and breath prayers. By doing these practices, the Emergents claim they can feel and maintain a closer relationship with God's presence. But the problem with these forms of meditation is that they are prayers to devils, not to the Almighty God. The roots of them are from Hinduism, Buddhism, the New Age, and the occult.

Richard Foster is famously known for his book *Celebration to Discipline*. In this work, he recommends contemplative prayer for all churches by writing, "[W]e should all without shame enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer."¹ How contemplative prayer operates is through the key of silence. This silence is not referring to external silence, for Foster applauds the practice of breath prayers, which is picking a single word or short phrase and repeating it in conjunction with the breath (footnote). Here are some quotes to explain the silence in breath prayers. In his *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Foster referred to a mystic's quote fitting the description of breath prayers, "You must bind the mind with one thought."² He makes the clear description of it in his *Celebration of Discipline*, "Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it."³ Foster's advice for his type of prayer is that "Every distraction of the body, mind, and spirit must be put into a kind of suspended animation before this deep work of God upon the soul can occur."⁴

So, the summary is that breath prayers are all about the emptying or silence of the mind while repeating words or short phrases through each breath. [There is another similar technique to breath prayers, which is the "Jesus" prayer. The method is the same as breath prayers, and they will constantly repeat the word "Jesus" while emptying the mind in silence]. Now, the problem with practices like breath prayers is that its origins are from New Agers, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Richard Foster tried to convince one assembly that he does not have any ties to New Age

doctrine. He said his teaching of prayer is to “hear the voice of Jehovah” and not the “loose, nutty kind of a thing” of the New Age.⁵ But a former New Age member exclaimed about Foster’s breath prayers, “That’s what I did when I was into ashtanga yoga!”

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Also, Foster promoted Thoms Merton’s style of prayer in his *Celebration to Discipline*, who has taken his learning from Buddhist meditation. Foster claimed, “Thomas Merton has perhaps done more than any other twentieth-century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood.”⁷ Unknowingly to many, Foster’s prayer example Thomas Merton believed, “I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity . . . I intend to become as good a Buddhist as I can.”⁸ He proudly said, “I’m deeply impregnated with Sufism.”⁹ Merton further explained about prayer as, “In order to guide persons having this experience [divine oneness], Christian spiritual directors may need to dialogue with Eastern teachers in order to get a fuller understanding.”

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Anthony de Mello stated in *Sadhana: A Way to God*:

“To silence the mind is an extremely difficult task. How hard it is to keep the mind from thinking, thinking, thinking, forever thinking, forever producing thoughts in a never ending stream. Our Hindu masters in India have a saying: one thorn is removed by another. By this they mean that you will be wise to use one thought to rid yourself of all other thought that crowd into your mind. One thought, one image, one phrase or sentence or word that your mind can be made to fasten on.”¹¹

Tilden Edwards from the top contemplative prayer school in America (Shalem Institute) reveals contemplative prayer as “This mystical stream is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality.”¹²

Not only Foster, but Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church and supporter of Emergent leaders, suggests the use of breath prayers for Christians in his famous book *The*

Purpose-Driven Life:

“The Bible tells us to ‘pray all the time.’ How is it possible to do this? One way is to use ‘breath prayers’ throughout the day, as many Christians have done for centuries. You choose a brief sentence or a simple phrase that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath.”¹³

Moreover, Warren placed Tricia Rhodes in his “Book List” section and described her work, “This book is a quiet-time companion for those who hunger for a greater intimacy with God. It offers fresh insight into little understood aspects of prayer and introduces a step-by-step journey of learning contemplative prayer.”¹⁴ How does this kind of prayer operate? Rhodes explains in that book, “Take deep breaths, concentrating on relaxing your body. Establish a slow, rhythmic pattern. Breathe in God’s peace, and breathe out your stresses, distractions, and fears. Breathe in God’s love, forgiveness, and compassion, and breathe out your sins, failures, and frustrations. Make every effort to ‘stop the flow of talking going on within you—to slow it down until it comes to a halt.’”¹⁵

Of no doubt, Warren is for the method of breath prayers, which originated from Buddhism, Hinduism, and New Age mysticism.

Endnotes:

- 1 Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978. p. 13.
- 2 Foster, Richard. *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992. p. 160.
- 3 Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1978. p. 15.
- 4 Ibid. Revised Edition 1988. p. 103.
- 5 Foster, Richard. *Renovare Conference*. Salem, OR. Nov. 1994.
- 6 Yungen, Ray. *A Time of Departing*. Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2008. p. 75.
- 7 Foster, Richard and Emilie Griffin. *Spiritual Classics*. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2000. p. 17.
- 8 Steindl-Rast, David. “Recollection of Thomas Merton’s Last Days in the West.” *Monastic Studies*, 7:10, 1969.
- 9 Baker, Rob and Gray Henry, Editors. *Merton and Sufism*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999. p. 69.
- 10 Keating, Thomas. *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality by Philip St. Romain*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991. Foreword.
- 11 Mello, Anthony de. *Sadhana: A Way to God*. St. Louis, the Institute of Jesuit Resources, 1978. p. 28.
- 12 Edwards, Tilden. *Spiritual Friend*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980. p. 18.
- 13 Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. p. 89.
- 14 Rick Warren’s Ministry Toolbox. September 3, 2003. <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=118>.
- 15 Rhodes, Tricia. *The Soul at Rest*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996. p. 28.