

The Yoga of the West

One day, I wandered into a secular bookstore to investigate its religion section. The section was divided into two equal parts. To my left was the heading *Spirituality: New Age*. It respectively contained titles reflecting that viewpoint. To my right was the heading, *Spirituality: Judeo-Christian*. In this section, one would expect to find titles reflecting traditional Judeo-Christian concepts. Not so! The basic principles of the New Age movement were represented, with only a few exceptions, in both parts! How is this possible?

Roman Catholic writer William Johnston elaborates more on this in the following paragraph:

[S]omething very powerful is emerging ... we are witnessing a spiritual revolution of great magnitude in the whole world ... the rise of a new school of mysticism within Christianity ... It is growing year by year.¹

That bookstore presented a perfect example of this new school of mysticism. Where there had always been a clear difference between Eastern spirituality and Christianity, that line had now become blurred.

Many professing Christians have very little awareness of this rapidly growing spiritual revolution. They seem altogether oblivious to this paradigm shift in spirituality. This is understandable since most people do not know much of what goes on beyond their own circles. Historically, and perhaps ironically, God's people have been slow in responding to the shifts that occur in culture. A consequence of this naiveté is a growing spillover effect from this phenomenon into the evangelical church, appealing to those who hunger for ways to walk closer with God. Many Christians sincerely desire to have more full and satisfying spiritual lives for themselves and their loved ones. Thus, it is imperative that Christians come to a clear understanding of just what *is* the nature of this mystical thinking and why it resonates with New Age thought.

God In All Things?

It was Alice Bailey, the famous occult prophetess who coined the term New Age, who made this startling assertion:

It is, of course, easy to find many passages which link the way of the Christian Knower with that of his brother in the East. They bear witness to the same efficacy of method.²

What did she mean by the term “Christian Knower”? The answer is unmistakable! In the first chapter, we saw how occultism is awakening the *mystical faculties* to see God in everything. In Hinduism, this is called reaching *samadhi* or enlightenment. It is the final objective of yoga meditation: God in everything—a force or power flowing through *all* that exists.

William Johnston believes such an experience exists within the context of Christianity. He explains:

What I can safely say, however, is that there is a Christian *samadhi* that has always occupied an honored place in the spirituality of the West. This, I believe, is the thing that is nearest to Zen. It is this that I have called Christian Zen.³

The famous psychologist Carl Jung predicted this system would be the *yoga of the west*.⁴

Christian Zen? Christian yoga? These seem to be oxymorons, like military pacifism or alcoholic sobriety. Christians, conservative ones at least, have always viewed these concepts as heretical and anti-biblical. The word most commonly used for it is *pantheism*—*all is God*. But when one looks at the *Christian Zen* movement one discovers a similar term, which for all practical purposes, means the same thing: This term is called *panentheism*—God is *in* all things.

A highly respected source, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, defines panentheism as a worldview that combines “the strengths of classic theism with the strengths of classic pantheism.”⁵ With panentheism you still have a personal God (theism) coupled with God’s pervasive presence in all creation (pantheism). In other words, with panentheism God is both a personality and an all encompassing substance as opposed to God being an impersonal substance that incorporates all of creation as found in pantheism.

The credibility of *A Time of Departing* rests on whether or not panentheism has a legitimate place in orthodox Christianity. This is a vital question because panentheism is the foundational worldview among those who engage in mystical prayer. Ken Kaisch, a Episcopal priest and a teacher of mystical prayer, made this very clear in his book, *Finding God*, where he noted:

Meditation is a process through which we quiet the mind and the emotions and enter directly into the experience of the Divine.... there is a deep connection between us ... God is in each of us.⁶

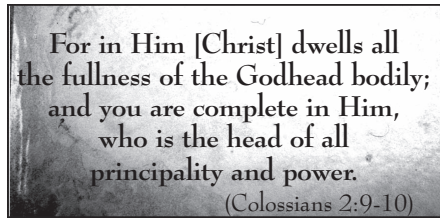
Here lies the core of panentheism: God is in everything and everything is in God. The only difference between pantheism and panentheism is *how* God is in everything.

This position of the panentheist is challenging to understand: Your outer personality is not God, but God is still in you as your true identity. This explains why mystics say, *all is one*. At the mystical level, they experi-

ence this *God-force* that seems to flow through everything and everybody. All creation has God in it as a living, vital presence. It is just hidden.

The theological implications of this worldview put it at direct odds with biblical Christianity for obvious reasons. Only one true God exists, and His identity is not in everyone. The fullness of God's identity, in bodily form, rests in Jesus Christ and Him only!

Scripture clearly teaches the only deity in man is Jesus Christ who dwells in the heart of the believer. Further, Jesus made it clear not everyone will be born again—having God's Spirit (John 3). Yet the pantheist perceives that all people and everything have the identity of God within them.



William Johnston again emphasizes, “For God is the core of my being and the core of all beings.”⁷⁷ This fundamentally eliminates faith in the Gospel as the avenue to reconciliation with God, because God is already there. It effectively leaves out the finished work of Christ as the binding agent and is contrary to the following verses:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (I Corinthians 1:18)

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. (II John 9)

The Bible does reveal, though, that God upholds all things by His powerful word, but He does not do this by being *the substance* of all things. The word of God says, “[F]or in Him [Christ] we live and move and have our being ...” (Acts 17:28). But this speaks of *Him* as sepa-

rate from us yet remaining present with us. The belief that God indwells everything is heresy. God will not, and cannot share His personal essence with anyone or anything outside of the Trinity. Even Christians are only partakers of the Divine Nature and not *possessors* of the Divine Nature. 2 Peter 1:3-4 says:

[A]s His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be *partakers* of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (emphasis mine)

Here the apostle Peter is writing to Christians, not to the world. He acknowledges the *participation* of the believer in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit. The word partaker is taken from the Greek word *koinonos*, which means a sharer (associate), companion, or fellowship partner. In other words, the Christian shares in the promises of the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, being called out and set apart from the corruption of an evil world. Moreover, a partaker or participant is one who has been born again through faith. A possessor, on the other hand, is one who is already in possession of something. In the case of the panentheist and pantheist, the possession they are claiming *is God*. They do not believe a fundamental change is needed, just an awareness of what is already there.

This conclusion becomes quite obvious when we examine such passages as Isaiah 42:8: "I am the LORD, that is my name; and My glory I will not give to another." Creation can *reflect* God's glory (Isaiah 6:3), but it can never *possess* God's glory. For that to happen would mean God was indeed giving His glory to another.

This concept is made crystal clear in author William Shannon's book, *Silence on Fire*. Shannon, a Roman Catholic priest, relates the account of a theological discussion he once had with an atheist groom for whom he was performing a wedding ceremony. He told the skeptical young man:

You will never find God by looking outside yourself. You will only find God within. It will only be when you have come to experience God in your own heart and let God into the corridors of your heart (or rather found God there) that you will be able to ‘know’ that there is indeed a God and that you are not separate from God.⁸

This advice is no different from what any New Age teacher would impart to someone who held an *atheistic* point of view. *You want God? Meditate! God is just waiting for you to open up.* Based on Shannon’s own mystical beliefs, he *knew* this was the right approach. He alluded to this by explaining that the young man would find enlightenment if he would look in the right place or use the right method.

Those who support this heresy draw the same conclusion of mystical pantheism that author Willigis Jager articulated when he said:

The physical world, human beings, and everything that is are all forms of the Ultimate Reality, all expressions of God, all “one with the Father.”⁹

He means not all Christians but *all people*. This is nothing less than Hindu samadhi with Christian spray paint. Those in this movement who are honest have no qualms about acknowledging this—as one adherent did so aptly when he confessed, “The meditation of advanced occultists is identical with the prayer of advanced mystics.”¹⁰

Silence—The Language of God?

For many years during my research, I would come across the term *contemplative prayer*. Immediately I would dismiss any thought that it had a New Age connotation because I thought it meant to ponder while praying—which would be the logical association with that term. But in the New Age disciplines, things are not always what they seem to be to untrained ears.

What contemplative prayer actually entails is described very clearly by the following writer:

When one enters the deeper layers of contemplative prayer one sooner or later experiences the void, the emptiness, the nothingness ... the profound mystical silence ... an absence of thought.¹¹

To my dismay, I discovered this “mystical silence” is accomplished by the same methods used by New Agers to achieve *their* silence—the mantra and the breath! Contemplative prayer is the repetition of what is referred to as a *prayer word* or *sacred word* until one reaches a state where the soul, rather than the mind, contemplates God. Contemplative prayer teacher and Zen master Willigis Jager brought this out when he postulated:

Do not reflect on the meaning of the word; thinking and reflecting must cease, as all mystical writers insist. Simply “sound” the word silently, letting go of all feelings and thoughts.¹²

Those with some theological training may recognize this teaching as the historical stream going back centuries to such figures as Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Julian of Norwich.

One of the most well-known writings on the subject is the classic 14th century treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written by an anonymous author. It is essentially a manual on contemplative prayer inviting a beginner to:

Take just a little word, of one syllable rather than of two ... With this word you are to strike down every kind of thought under the cloud of forgetting.¹³

The premise here is that in order to really know God, mysticism must be practiced—the mind has to be shut down or turned off so that the *cloud of unknowing* where the presence of God awaits can be experienced. Practitioners of this method believe that if the sacred words are *Christian*, you will get Christ—it is simply a matter of *intent* even though the method is identical to occult and Eastern practices.

So the question we as Christians must ask ourselves is, “Why not? Why shouldn’t we incorporate this mystical prayer practice into our lives?” The answer to this is actually found in Scripture.

While certain instances in the Bible describe mystical experiences, I see no evidence anywhere of God sanctioning man-initiated mysticism. Legitimate mystical experiences were always initiated *by* God to certain individuals for certain revelations and were never based on a method for the altering of consciousness. In Acts 11:5, Peter fell into a trance while in prayer. But it was God, not Peter, who initiated the trance and facilitated it.

By definition, a mystic, on the other hand, is someone who uses rote methods in an attempt to tap into their inner divinity. Those who use these methods put themselves into a trance state outside of God’s sanction or protection and thus engage in an extremely dangerous approach. Besides, nowhere in the Bible are such mystical practices prescribed. For instance, the Lord, for the purpose of teaching people a respect for His holiness and His plans, instated certain ceremonies for His people (especially in the Old Testament). Nonetheless, Scripture contains no reference in which God promoted mystical practices. The gifts of the Spirit spoken of in the New Testament were supernatural in nature but did not fall within the confines of mysticism. God bestowed spiritual gifts without the Christian practicing a method beforehand to get God’s response.

Proponents of contemplative prayer would respond with, *What about Psalms 46:10?* “Be still and know that I am God.” This verse is often used by those promoting contemplative prayer. On the surface, this argument can seem valid, but once the meaning of “still” is examined, any contemplative connection is expelled. The Hebrew meaning of the word is to slacken, cease, or abate. In other words, the context is to slow down and trust God rather than get in a dither over things. Relax and watch God work. Reading the two verses just before Psalms 46:10 puts it in an entirely different light from that proposed by mystics:

Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth

the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. (KJV)

This isn't talking about going into some altered state of consciousness!

It should also be pointed out that being born again, in and of itself, is mystical. But it is a direct act of God, initiated by *Him*—the Holy Spirit has regenerated the once-dead spirit of man into a living spirit through Christ. Yet, we notice that even in this most significant of experiences when one is “passed from death into life” (John 5:24), God accomplishes this without placing the individual in an altered state of consciousness.

We can take this a step further by looking at the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts, chapter 2 where those present were “all filled with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 4). Notice that they were “all with one accord in one place” (vs. 1) when the Holy Spirit descended on them. From the context of the chapter, it is safe to assume this was a lively gathering of believers engaged in intelligent conversation. Then, when those present began to speak in other tongues, it was not an episode of mindless babbling or vain repetition as in a mantra. Rather it was an event of coherent speech significant enough to draw a crowd who exclaimed, “we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God” (vs. 11). Other observers who suspected they were in an altered state of consciousness said, “They are full of new wine (vs. 13). Notice that Peter was quick to correct this group in asserting that they were all fully conscious. Would it not then stand to reason that their minds were not in any kind of altered state? Next, Peter delivered one of the most carefully articulated speeches recorded in Scripture. This was certainly not a group of men in a trance.

So, through the lens of perhaps the two most meaningful *mystical* experiences recorded in the New Testament (i.e., being born again and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), an altered state of consciousness was never sought after nor was it achieved. In fact, a complete search of both Old and New Testaments reveals there

were only two types of experiences sanctioned by God where the recipient is not fully awake—namely dreams and visions—and in each case the experience is initiated by God. Conversely, every instance of a self-induced trance recorded in Scripture is adamantly condemned by God as we see summarized in the following verses:

When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. (Deuteronomy 18:9-11)

An examination of the Hebrew meanings of the terms used in the above verses shows that much of what is being spoken of is the invoking of spells. And a spell, used in this context, refers to a trance. In other words, when God induces a trance it is in the form of a dream or a vision. When man induces a trance, it is in the form of a spell or hypnosis.

And remember, nowhere in the Bible is the silence equated with the “power of God,” but the “message of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18) most certainly is!

The Extent of Contemplative Spirituality

While many Christians are still not even aware that a practical Christian mystical movement exists, momentum is picking up, and an obvious surge towards this *contemplative spirituality* is surfacing. Evidence regarding the magnitude of this mystical prayer movement is now within reach of the average person. In 1992, *Newsweek* magazine did a cover story called “Talking to God,” which made a clear reference to it. The article disclosed:

[S]ilence, appropriate body posture and, above all, *emptying the mind* through *repetition* of prayer—have been the practices of mystics in all the great world religions. And

they form the basis on which *most modern spiritual directors* guide those who want to draw closer to God. (emphasis mine)¹⁴

It is amazing to me how *Newsweek* clearly observed this shift in the spiritual paradigm nearly fifteen years ago, while many Christians (even some of our most prominent leaders) still lived in abject ignorance of this change. Are the teachings of the practical *Christian* mystic actually being assimilated so well that even our pastors are not discerning this shift?

In September 2005, *Newsweek* carried a special report called “Spirituality in America.” The feature story, titled “In Search of the Spiritual,” is seventeen pages long, and for anyone who thought that a Christian mystical movement did not exist, this article is all the proof needed to show it not only exists but is alive, well, and growing like you wouldn’t believe.

The article begins by describing the origin of the contemporary contemplative prayer movement, which began largely with a Catholic monk named Thomas Keating:

To him [Keating], as a Trappist monk, meditation was second nature. He invited the great Zen master Roshi Sasaki to lead retreats at the abbey. And surely, he thought, there must be a precedent within the church for making such simple but powerful spiritual techniques available to laypeople. His Trappist brother Father William Meninger found it in one day in 1974, in a dusty copy of a 14th-century guide to contemplative meditation, “*The Cloud of Unknowing*.”¹⁵

The most obvious integration of this movement can be found in Roman Catholicism. Michael Leach, former president of the *Catholic Book Publishers Association*, made this incredibly candid assertion:

But many people also believe that the spiritual principles underlying the New Age movement will soon be incorporated—or rather reincorporated—into the

mainstream of Catholic belief. In fact, it's happening in the United States right now.¹⁶

Incorporating it is! And it is assimilating primarily through the contemplative prayer movement.

Contemplative leader Basil Pennington, openly acknowledging its growing size, said, "We are part of an immensely large community ... 'We are Legion.'"¹⁷ Backing him up, a major Catholic resource company stated, "Contemplative prayer has once again become commonplace in the Christian community."¹⁸

William Shannon, went so far as to say contemplative spirituality has now widely replaced old-style Catholicism.¹⁹ This is not to say the Mass or any of the sacraments have been abandoned, but the underlying spiritual worldview of many in the Catholic church is now contemplative in its orientation.

One of my personal experiences with the saturation of mysticism in the Catholic church was in a phone conversation I had with the head nun at a local retreat center who told me the same message Shannon conveys. She made it clear *The Cloud of Unknowing* is now the basis for nearly all Catholic spirituality, and contemplative prayer is now becoming widespread all over the world.

I had always been confused as to the real nature of this advance in the Catholic church. Was this just the work of a few mavericks and renegades, or did the church hierarchy sanction this practice? My concerns were affirmed when I read in an interview that the mystical prayer movement not only had the approval of the highest echelons of Catholicism but also was, in fact, the *source* of its expansion. Speaking of a meeting between the late Pope Paul VI and members of the Catholic Trappist Monastic Order in the 1970s, Thomas Keating, disclosed the following:

The Pontiff declared that unless the Church rediscovered the contemplative tradition, renewal couldn't take place. He specifically called upon the monastics, because they lived the contemplative life, to help the laity and those in other religious orders bring that dimension into their lives as well.²⁰

Just look at the latest official catechism of the Catholic church to see contemplative prayer officially endorsed and promoted to the faithful by the powers that be. The new catechism firmly states: “Contemplative prayer is hearing the word of God . . . Contemplative prayer is silence.”²¹

I realized just how successfully Pope Paul’s admonitions have been carried out when I discovered the following at one popular Catholic bookstore. Many shelves were marked as *spirituality*—the focal point of the entire store. Eighty to ninety percent of the books on those shelves were on mystical prayer. It was clearly the overriding theme.

In response to this turnabout, non-mystic Catholics have become very alarmed at what is happening to their church. What seems to be a glorious renewal to those like Shannon is viewed by other Catholics as a slide into apostasy.

One Catholic layman who is outspoken about this is author Randy England. In his book, *Unicorn In the Sanctuary*, England made plain just how pervasive these practices are in his church. He warned:

The struggle is difficult. It is more likely than not that your pastor is open to New Age ideas . . . Even Catholics with no interest in New Age practices are becoming accustomed to its concepts; they should be well primed by the time Creation-Centered Spirituality becomes the norm in our churches.²²

Let there be no mistake about it that a pope was responsible for what Randy England and others like him are witnessing in their church. This is not an aberration—an unwitting wandering from the church but part of the program from the top down.

Contemplative spirituality reaches far beyond the walls of the Catholic church. Mainline Protestant traditions (Episcopalians, United Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, United Church of Christ, etc.) have dived into the contemplative waters too. Their deep tradition of twentieth-century liberalism and sociopolitical activism has left them spiritually dry and thirsting for supernatural experiences. This school of practical mysticism gives them a sense of spirituality while still

allowing them a liberal political correctness. Marcus Borg, professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University and a member of the New Age oriented Living Spiritual Teachers Project understood the popularity of mystical prayer. He stated:

In some mainline denominations, emerging-paradigm [contemplative] Christians are in the majority. Others are about equally divided between these two ways of being Christian.²³

A sales person at a bookstore that caters to these denominations once told me the contemplative prayer view has found a large audience in the Protestant mainstream, and many pastors are very open to these practices. She added that some members of the clergy did show resistance, but a clear momentum towards the contemplative direction was nevertheless occurring. An article in *Publisher's Weekly* magazine addressing the move toward contemplative prayer in mainstream religious circles confirmed her observation. One woman in the publishing field was quoted as saying, “[M]any Protestants are looking to satisfy that yearning by a return to the Western contemplative tradition.”²⁴ Another college professor pointed out:

My students have been typically middle-aged and upper middle class Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, active in the lay leadership of their churches. To outward appearances, they are quite conventional people. Yet I have found that virtually every one of my students has encountered the new age in one of its many forms and has been attracted by its mystery.²⁵

Contemplative spirituality provides a seemingly profound experience of God without having to adhere to a conservative social outlook. It also gives its practitioners comfort to know they draw on a so-called Christian well of tradition. This dilutes any reluctance some might have about the orthodoxy of these practices.

To underscore the scope and reach of the contemplative prayer

movement let's look at the numbers put out by an organization called Spiritual Directors International (SDI). On their website this group gives ample evidence of what their practices are. In one national conference, the following was presented:

This workshop offers an opportunity to study and experience the director's role in a person's move into the beginning and early stages of contemplative prayer, silence, and openness to new sorts of praying.²⁶

One of the objectives of SDI is "Tending the holy around the world and across traditions." A 2005 membership list showed 531 Episcopalians, 223 Presbyterians, 201 United Methodists, 154 Lutherans, and a whopping 2,355 Roman Catholics; counting another forty or so "traditions," the total was nearly 5000. To show the nature of just what they mean by "across traditions" the list included Buddhist, Gnostic Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Siddha Yoga, and even Pagan/Wiccan.*

The Desert Fathers—Borrowing From the East

Catholic priest William Shannon in his book, *Seeds of Peace*, explained the human dilemma as being the following:

This forgetfulness, of our oneness with God, is not just a personal experience, it is the corporate experience of humanity. Indeed, this is one way to understanding original sin. *We are in God, but we don't seem to know it. We are in paradise, but we don't realize it.* (emphasis mine)²⁷

Shannon's viewpoint defines the basic underlying worldview of the contemplative prayer movement as a whole. One can find similar quotations in practically every book written by contemplative authors. A Hindu guru or a Zen Buddhist master would offer

*Information taken from the Spiritual Directors International website—"Demographics of our Learning Community."

the same explanation. This conclusion becomes completely logical when tracing the *roots* of contemplative prayer. Let us look at the beginnings of this practice.

In the early Middle Ages, there lived a group of hermits in the wilderness areas of the Middle East. They are known to history as the *Desert Fathers*. They dwelt in small isolated communities for the purpose of devoting their lives completely to God without distraction. The contemplative movement traces its roots back to these monks who promoted the mantra as a *prayer tool*. One meditation scholar made this connection when he said:

The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest Christian monks bear strong similarity to those of their Hindu and Buddhist renunciate brethren several kingdoms to the East ... the meditative techniques they adopted for finding their God suggest either a borrowing from the East or a spontaneous rediscovery.²⁸

Many of the Desert Fathers, in their zeal, were simply seeking God through trial and error. A leading contemplative prayer teacher candidly acknowledged the haphazard way the Desert Fathers acquired their practices:

It was a time of great experimentation with spiritual methods. Many different kinds of disciplines were tried, some of which are too harsh or extreme for people today. Many different methods of prayer were created and explored by them.²⁹

Attempting to reach God through occult mystical practices will guarantee disaster. The Desert Fathers of Egypt were located in a particularly dangerous locale at that time to be groping around for innovative approaches to God, because as one theologian pointed out:

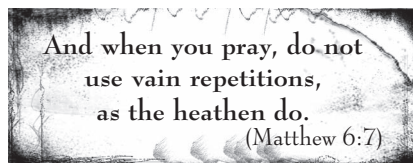
[D]evelopment of Christian meditative disciplines should have begun in Egypt because much of the intellectual,

philosophical, and theological basis of the practice of meditation in Christianity also comes out of the theology of Hellenic and Roman Egypt. This is significant because it was in Alexandria that Christian theology had the most contact with the various Gnostic speculations which, according to many scholars, have their roots in the East, possibly in India.³⁰

Consequently, the Desert Fathers believed as long as the desire for God was sincere—anything could be utilized to reach God. If a method worked for the Hindus to reach their gods, then Christian mantras could be used to reach Jesus. A current practitioner and promoter of the Desert Fathers' mystical prayer still echoes the logical formulations of his mystical ancestors:

In the wider ecumenism of the Spirit being opened for 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 historical cross-fertilization is not surprising ... selective attention to Eastern spiritual practices can be of great assistance to a fully embodied Christian life.³¹

Do you catch the reasoning here? Non-Christian sources, as avenues to spiritual growth, are perfectly legitimate in the Christian life, and if Christians only practice their Christianity based on the Bible, they will actually impoverish their spirituality. This was the thinking of the Desert Fathers. So as a result, we now have contemplative prayer. Jesus addressed this when he warned His disciples:



It should be apparent that mantra meditation or *sacred word* prayer qualifies as “vain repetition” and clearly fits an accurate description of the point Jesus was making. Yet in spite of this, trusted evangelical Christians have often pronounced that Christian mysticism is different from other forms of mysticism (such as Eastern or occult) because it is focused on Jesus Christ.

This logic may sound credible on the surface, but Christians must ask themselves a very simple and fundamental question: What really makes a practice Christian? The answer is obvious—does the New Testament sanction it? Hasn’t Christ taught us, through His Word, to pray in faith in His name and according to His will? Did He leave something out? Would Jesus hold out on His true followers? Never!

Understanding this truth, God has declared in His Word that He does not leave it up to earnest, yet sinful people, to reinvent their own Christianity. When Christians ignore God’s instructions in following Him they end up learning *the way of the heathen*. Israel did this countless times. It is just human nature.

The account of Cain and Abel is a classic biblical example of spiritual infidelity. Both of Adam’s sons wanted to please God, but Cain decided he would experiment with his own method of being devout. Cain must have reasoned to himself: “Perhaps God would like fruit or grain better than a dead animal. It’s not as gross. It’s less smelly. Hey, I think I will try it!”

As you know, God was not the least bit impressed by Cain’s attempt to create his own approach to pleasing God. The Lord made it clear to Cain that God’s favor would be upon him if he *did what is right*, not just what was intended for God or God-focused.

In many ways, the Desert Fathers were like Cain—eager to please but not willing to listen to the instruction of the Lord and do what was right. One cannot fault them for their devotion, but one certainly can fault them for their lack of discernment.

New Age or Christian?

Before writing this book I made sure I could prove, beyond a doubt, that contemplative prayer had not only slipped into the

Christian faith, but also prove it *is* an integral part of the New Age movement. In fact, New Agers see contemplative prayer as one of their own practices. Why would both New Agers and Christians claim contemplative prayer as their own? Certainly you will not find the New Age movement promoting someone like Francis Schaeffer or Oswald Chambers, but you will find many instances such as this in which New Age therapist Jacquelyn Small cites contemplative prayer as a gateway to the spirituality to which she belongs. She explains it as:

A form of Christian meditation, its practitioners are trained to focus on an inner symbol that quiets the mind . . . When practitioners become skilled at this method of meditation, they undergo a deep trance state similar to auto-hypnosis.³²

The editors of the magazine *New Age Journal* have put together a book titled *As Above, So Below*—which they promote as a handbook on “Paths to Spiritual Renewal,” according to their worldview. Along with chapters on shamanism, goddess worship, and holistic health, there is a chapter devoted to contemplative prayer. In it they openly declare:

Those who have practiced Transcendental Meditation may be surprised to learn that Christianity has its own time-honored form of mantra meditation . . . Reliance on a mantric centering device had a long history in the mystical canon of Christianity.³³

New Age author Tav Sparks lays out an array of *doorways* in one chapter of his book, *The Wide Open Door*. Again, along with a variety of occult and Eastern practices we find what Sparks calls *Spiritual Christianity*. He says, “The good news is that there are some forms of Christianity today that are alive with spiritual power.”³⁴ He then uses a few contemplative prayer advocates as examples.

Perhaps the most compelling example of all is one by a prominent figure in the contemplative prayer movement itself, Tilden Edwards. Edwards is the founder of the prestigious Shalem Institute in Washington D.C.—a center which turns out spiritual directors from

its training programs. In his book, *Spiritual Friend*, Edwards suggests those who practice contemplative prayer and have begun experiencing “spiritual unfolding” and other “unusual experiences,” should turn to a book titled *Psychosynthesis* in order to understand the “dynamics” at “certain stages.”³⁵ For the Christian, there is a major problem with this advice. The book Edwards recommends is a book written by a world famous occultist, Roberto Assagioli.

These dynamics for certain stages of “spiritual unfolding” may be desirable by those in tune with occultism, but remember, Edwards is seeking to draw Christians into this form of prayer. Edwards himself puts to rest any pretense that this is *truly* Christian when he openly admits, “This mystical stream [contemplative prayer] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality.”³⁶

In answer to the well-meaning but folly-laden attempts of the Desert Fathers and their spiritual descendants, I must refer to the deep observations of Charles Spurgeon who penned:

Human wisdom delights to trim and arrange the doctrine of the cross into a system more artificial and more congenial with the depraved tastes of fallen nature; instead, however, of improving the gospel carnal wisdom pollutes it, until it becomes another gospel, and not the truth of God at all. All alterations and amendments of the Lord’s own Word are defilements and pollutions.³⁷

“Christian” Kundalini

Many Christians might have great difficulty accepting the assessment that what is termed Christian mysticism is, in truth, not Christian at all. They might feel this rejection is spawned by a heresy hunting mentality that completely ignores the love and devotion to God that also accompanies the mystical life. To those who are still skeptical, I suggest examining the writings of Philip St. Romain, who wrote a book about his journey into contemplative prayer called *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality*. This title is revealing because kundalini is a Hindu term for the mystical power or force that underlies Hindu spirituality. In Hinduism it is commonly referred to as *the serpent power*.

St. Romain, a substance abuse counselor and devout Catholic lay minister, began his journey while practicing contemplative prayer or *resting in the still point*, as he called it. What happened to him following this practice should bear the utmost scrutiny from the evangelical community—especially from its leadership. The future course of evangelical Christianity rests on whether St. Romain’s path is just a fluke or if it is the norm for contemplative spirituality.

Having rejected mental prayer as “unproductive,”³⁸ he embraced the prayer form that switches off the mind, creating what he described as a mental passivity. What he encountered next underscores my concern with sobering clarity:

Then came the lights! The gold swirls that I had noted on occasion began to intensify, forming themselves into patterns that both intrigued and captivated me . . . There were always four or five of these; as soon as one would fade, another would appear, even brighter and more intense . . . They came through complete passivity and only after I had been *in the silence* for a while. (emphasis mine)³⁹

After this, St. Romain began to sense “wise sayings” coming into his mind and felt he was “receiving messages from another.”⁴⁰ He also had physical developments occur during his periods in the silence. He would feel “prickly sensations” on the top of his head and at times it would “fizzle with energy.”^{41*} This sensation would go on for days. The culmination of St. Romain’s mystical excursion was predictable—when you do *Christian* yoga or *Christian* Zen you end up with *Christian* samadhi as did he. He proclaimed:

No longer is there any sense of alienation, for the Ground that flows throughout my being is identical with the Reality of all creation. It seems that the mystics of all the world’s religions know something of this.⁴²

*See page 16.

St. Romain, logically, passed on to the next stage with:

[T]he significance of this work, perhaps, lies in its potential to contribute to the dialogue between Christianity and Eastern forms of mysticism such as are promoted in what is called New Age spirituality.⁴³

Many people believe St. Romain is a devout Christian. He claims he loves Jesus, believes in salvation, and is a member in good standing within his church. What changed though were his sensibilities. He says:

I cannot make any decisions for myself without the approbation of the inner adviser, whose voice speaks so clearly in times of need . . . there is a distinct sense of an inner eye of some kind “seeing” with my two sense eyes.⁴⁴

St. Romain would probably be astounded that somebody would question his claims to finding truth because of the positive nature of his mysticism. But is this “inner adviser” St. Romain has connected with really God? This is a fair question to ask especially when this prayer method has now spread within a broad spectrum of Christianity.

As articulated earlier in this chapter, this practice has already spread extensively throughout the Roman Catholic and Protestant mainline churches. And it has now crossed over and is manifesting itself in conservative denominations as well—ones that have traditionally stood against the New Age. Just as a tidal wave of practical mystics has hit secular society, so it has also in the religious world. St. Romain makes one observation in his book that I take very seriously. Like his secular practical mystic brethren, he has a strong sense of mission and destiny. He predicts:

Could it be that those who make the journey to the True Self are, in some ways, demonstrating what lies in store for the entire race? What a magnificent world that would be—for the majority of people to be living out of the True Self state. Such a world cannot come, however, unless

hundreds of thousands of people experience the regression of the Ego in the service of transcendence [meditation], and then restructure the culture to accommodate similar growth for millions of others. I believe we are only now beginning to recognize this task.⁴⁵

A book titled *Metaphysical Primer: A Guide to Understanding Metaphysics* outlines the basic laws and principles of the New Age movement. First and foremost is the following principle:

You are one with the Deity, as is all of humanity ...
Everything is one with everything else. All that is on Earth is an expression of the One Deity and is permeated with Its energies.⁴⁶

St. Romain's statement was, "[T]he Ground [God] that flows throughout my being is identical with the Reality of all creation."⁴⁷ The two views are *identical!*

St. Romain came to this view through standard contemplative prayer, not Zen, not yoga but a *Christian* form of these practices. The lights were also a reoccurring phenomenon as one contemplative author suggested:

Christian literature makes reference to many episodes that parallel the experiences of those going a yogic way. Saint Anthony, one of the first desert mystics, frequently encountered strange and sometimes terrifying psychophysical forces while at prayer.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, this experience was not confined to St. Anthony alone. This has been the common progression into mystical awareness throughout the centuries, which also means many now entering the contemplative path will follow suit. This is not just empty conjecture. One mystical trainer wrote:

[T]he classical experience of enlightenment as described by Buddhist monks, Hindu gurus, *Christian mystics*, Aboriginal

shamans, Sufi sheiks and Hebrew kabalists is characterized by two universal elements: radiant light and an experience of oneness with creation. (emphasis mine)⁴⁹

Without the mystical connection there can be no oneness. The second always follows the first. Here lies the heart of occultism.

This issue is clearly a serious one to contend with. Many individuals, using terms for themselves like *spiritual director*, are showing up more and more in the evangelical church. Many of them teach the message of mystical prayer.

Interspirituality

The final outcome of contemplative prayer is *interspirituality*. If you have truly grasped the portrait that I have painted throughout this chapter, you have begun to see what this term signifies. The focus of my criticism of mystical prayer must be understood in the light of interspirituality.

Just what exactly *is* interspirituality? The premise behind interspirituality is that divinity (God) is in all things, and the presence of God is in all religions; there is a connecting together of all things, and through mysticism (i.e., meditation) this state of divinity can be recognized. Consequently, this is a premise that is based on and upheld by an experience that occurs during a self-hypnotic trance linking one to an unseen world rather than to the sound doctrine of the Bible.

Former New Age medium, Brian Flynn, in his fascinating book, *Running Against the Wind*, explains it as a uniting of the world's religions through the common thread of mysticism. Flynn quotes the late Wayne Teasdale (a lay monk who coined the term interspirituality) as saying that interspirituality is "the spiritual common ground which exists among the world's religions."⁵⁰ Teasdale, in talking about this universal church also states:

She [the church] also has a responsibility in our age to be a bridge for reconciling the human family ... the Spirit is inspiring her through the signs of the times to open to Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Taoists,

Confucians, and indigenous peoples. As *matrix* [a binding substance], the Church would no longer see members of other traditions as outside her life. She would promote the study of these traditions, seek common ground and *parallel insights*. (emphasis mine)⁵¹

A article in my local newspaper revealed just how well received interspirituality has become in certain circles. One Presbyterian elder who was described as a “Spiritual Director” made it clear when she said:

I also have a strong interest in Buddhism and do a sitting meditation in Portland as often as I can. I considered myself ecumenical not only in the Christian tradition, but with *all religions*. (emphasis mine)⁵²

Pastor and author John MacArthur summed up this profound and imminent danger brilliantly in his book, *Reckless Faith*:

The evangelical consensus has shifted decidedly in the past two decades. Our collective message is now short on doctrine and long on experience. *Thinking* is deemed less important than *feeling* . . . The love of sound doctrine that has always been a distinguishing characteristic of evangelicalism has all but disappeared. Add a dose of mysticism to this mix and you have the recipe for unmitigated spiritual disaster.⁵³

Sound doctrine must be central to this debate because New Ageism has a very idealistic side to it, offering a mystical approach to solve human problems. Everyone would like to have his or her problems solved. Right? That is the practical aspect I wrote about in the last chapter—a seemingly direct route to a happy and fulfilled life. However, one can *promote* the attributes of God without actually *having* God.

People who promote a presumably godly form of spirituality can indeed come against the truth of Christ. Then how can you be assured what you believe and practice *is* of God?

The Christian message has been clear from the beginning—God

has sent a *Savior*. If man only had to practice some kind of mystical prayer to gain access to God then the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a fruitless, hollow endeavor.

Sound Christian doctrine comes from the understanding that mankind is sinful, fallen, and separated from God. Man needs a saving work by God! A teaching like pantheism (God is in everybody) cannot be reconciled to the finished work of Christ. How could Jesus be our Savior then? New Age constituents will say He is a model for *Christ consciousness*, but the Bible teaches He is the Savior of mankind. Therefore, pantheism cannot be a true doctrine.

The problem is that many well-intentioned people embrace the teachings of pantheism because it sounds so good. It appears less bigoted on God's part. No one is left out—all are connected to God. There is a great appeal in this message. Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach a universal salvation for man. In contrast, Jesus said:

Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Christ's message is the polar opposite of these universalist teachings. Many people (even Christians) today think only a few really bad people will be sent to hell. But in Matthew, the words of Jesus make it clear that this just is not so.

While God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world, He did not say all would be saved. His words are clear that many would reject the salvation He provided. But those who are saved have been given the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18) making an appeal to those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:3). The Christian message is not samadhi, Zen, kundalini, or the contemplative silence. It is the power of the Cross!

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Yes, perishing, and not just unaware of their true self.

In an opinion poll, the startling results describe how Americans actually view God. *Spirituality and Health* magazine hired a reputable pollster organization to gauge the spiritual beliefs of the American public. This national poll revealed that 84 percent of those questioned believed God to be “everywhere and in everything” rather than “someone somewhere.”⁵⁴ This means panentheism is now the more popular view of God. If true, then a high percentage of evangelical Christians in America already lean towards a panentheistic view of God. Perhaps many of these Christians are fuzzy about the true nature of God.

How could this mystical revolution have come about? How could this perspective have become so widespread? The answer is that over the last thirty or forty years a number of authors have struck a deep chord with millions of readers and seekers within Christendom. These writers have presented and promoted the contemplative view to the extent that many now see it as the only way to “go deeper” in the Christian life. They are the ones who prompt men and women to plunge into contemplative practice. It is their message that leads people to experience the “lights” and the “inner adviser!”

