

Light Brings Salt

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Iron Range Bible Church

Dedicated to the Systematic Exposition of the Word of God



The Avalanche of Spiritual Formation Excerpt from Lighthouse Trails Newsletter

"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. Today it is a rare person who has not heard the term. Seminary courses in Spiritual Formation proliferate like baby rabbits. Huge numbers are seeking to become certified as Spiritual Directors to answer the cry of multiplied thousands for spiritual direction." Richard Foster (Proponent of Spiritual Formation)

What is *spiritual formation* and what is its premise? According to Roger Oakland, spiritual formation came upon the church like an unsuspecting avalanche:

A move away from the truth of God's Word to a mystical form of Christianity has infiltrated, to some degree, nearly all evangelical denominations. Few Bible teachers saw this avalanche coming. Now that it is underway, most do not realize it has even happened.

The best way to understand this process is to recall what happened during the Dark Ages when the Bible became the forbidden book. Until the Reformers translated the Bible into the language of the common people, the great masses were in darkness. When the light of God's Word became available, the Gospel was once again understood.

I believe history is repeating itself. As the Word of God becomes less and less important, the rise in mystical experiences escalates, and these experiences are presented to convince the unsuspecting that Christianity is about feeling,

touching, smelling, and seeing God. The postmodern mindset is the perfect environment for fostering spiritual formation. This term suggests there are various ways and means to get closer to God and to emulate him. Thus the idea that if you do certain practices, you can be more like Jesus. Proponents of spiritual formation erroneously teach that anyone can practice these mystical rituals and find God within. Having a relationship with Jesus Christ is not a prerequisite. In a DVD called Be Still, which promotes contemplative prayer, Richard Foster said that contemplative prayer is for anyone and that by practicing it, one becomes "a portable sanctuary" for "the presence of God." Rather than having the indwelling of the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, spiritual formation through the spiritual disciplines supposedly transforms the seeker by entering an altered realm of consciousness.

The spiritual formation movement is widely promoted at colleges and seminaries as the latest and the greatest way to become a spiritual leader. It teaches people that this is how they can become more intimate with God and truly hear His voice. Even Christian leaders with longstanding reputations of teaching God's word seem to be succumbing. In so doing, many Christian leaders are frivolously playing with fire, and the result will be thousands, probably millions, getting burned.

It isn't going into the silence that transforms a person's life. It is in accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and allowing Him to change us, that transformation occurs. (*Faith Undone*, pp. 90-92)

Just how widespread is the spiritual formation movement. Well, as research analyst and author Ray Yungen points out, even Rick Warren is behind the movement:

In [*Purpose Driven Church*], Warren praises a number of parachurch movements he believes God has "raised up" to remedy a "neglected purpose" in Christianity. One of these he mentions is the spiritual formation movement, which promotes contemplative prayer through the "Spiritual Disciplines." Warren names Richard Foster and Dallas Willard as leaders of this movement.

It is interesting that as far back as the early 90s Rick Warren connected Richard Foster to the spiritual formation movement. This is an accurate assessment on Warren's part (Warren's guilt doesn't lie in identifying Foster - it lies in calling the movement "vital" and "needed" and then promoting it ever since.)

To understand spiritual formation, all one needs to do is understand the spirituality of Richard Foster. Lighthouse Trails has documented his beliefs through *A Time of Departing*, *Faith Undone*, and *Running Against the Wind*, as well as through numerous articles on the Lighthouse Trails Research site. In this particular article, let us turn to a small book Richard Foster wrote called *Meditative Prayer*. Foster says that the purpose of meditative prayer is to create a "spiritual space" or "inner sanctuary" through "specific meditation exercises" (p. 9). Foster references several mystics in the book who can point the way to these exercises: Madame Guyon, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, Henri Nouwen, and Thomas Merton. Foster breaks the contemplative process down into three steps. He says:

The first step [into meditative prayer] is sometimes called "centering down." Others have used the term *re-collection*; that is, a re-collecting of ourselves until we are unified or whole. The idea is to let go of all competing distractions until we are truly centered, until we are truly present where we are.

Foster suggests that practicing visualization methods help us center down (p. 17). In the second step of meditation, Foster suggests that mystic Richard Rolle experienced "physical sensations" during meditation which perhaps we may or may not experience as well (p. 18). Step three of meditation, Foster says, is that of "listening" to God. Once the meditative exercises

have been implemented and the "spiritual ecstasy" is reached, this entered realm is where the *voice of God* can be heard (p. 23). However, as any New Age meditator knows, this ecstatic state is an altered state of consciousness where everything is supposed to be unified and one with God. Foster acknowledges the inter-spiritual attribute linked to contemplative prayer when he states: "[Jesus] showed us God's yearning for the gathering of an all-inclusive community of loving persons" (p. 5). Foster defines more of what he means by "all-inclusive" in his book *Streams of Living Water* when he says this "all-inclusive community" includes everything from a "Catholic monk" to a "Baptist evangelist." In other writings, he says that contemplative prayer (and its results) are for everyone and anyone.

Interestingly, Foster discusses the practice of *lectio divina* in his book, which is being heralded in many Christian settings as a Christian, biblical practice. People are persuaded to believe that repeating phrases and words of Scripture over and over again is a deeper way to know God. They believe that since it is Scripture being repeated (and not just any words), then this validates the practice and that this sacred reading is sacred because it is the Bible being used. But Foster himself proves that it has nothing to do with Scripture. It's the repetition that is effective, not the words. He states: "[L]ectio divina includes more than the Bible. There are the lives of the saints and the writings which have proceeded from their profound [mystical] experiences" (p. 25). Foster obliterates the supposed premise of *lectio divina* by saying this. That is because as a meditation proponent he knows that meditation has nothing to do with which words are repeated over and over; it is the repetition itself that puts one into an altered state. Thus whether you say Jesus, Abba, Buddha, or OM, it produces the same effect.

Just in case there is any doubt in the reader's mind, Richard Foster tells readers to study Thomas Merton for a deeper understanding of meditation, calling his book, *Contemplative Prayer* a "powerful analysis of the central nature of contemplative prayer."

Spiritual formation *is* contemplative spirituality, and it is sweeping quickly throughout Christianity

today. If a college, a seminary, a church, or an organization (like Focus on the Family) wants spiritual formation, may they keep in mind, they will get eastern meditation and the occultic realms that accompany it.

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel. (Colossians 1:21-23)

As Roger Oakland states:

We are reconciled to God only through his "death" (the atonement for sin), and we are presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable" when we belong to Him through rebirth. It has nothing to do with works, rituals, or mystical experiences. It is Christ's life in the converted believer that transforms him. (Faith Undone)

News Note:

Sometimes you just have to wonder where this nation is headed. And if you think about it for any amount of time, the answer is none too pleasing. The Democratic leadership in Congress is upholding a decision by the Architect of the Capital to not allow references to God to be included in the certificates that accompany American flags that have been flown over the Capital. Usually, when someone requests through a congressman that a flag be flown over the Capitol, a certificate and a note from the person is included. It has just recently come to the attention of the public about this ban on mentioning God in the personal notes from individuals who may be donating the flag to someone.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has decided that God should not be a part of the flag and is upholding the Architect of the Capital, even though she has the power to rescind the policy. House Republicans are outraged. They believe that since there are many religious expressions throughout the Capitol that it is not right to ban

them from notes that accompany flags that are flown over the Capitol. They also point out that many of the notes are written from the private citizen donating the flag to another private citizen who is receiving the flag. They believe that especially in these cases the mention of God should be allowed.

The Bible says in Psalm 33:12, "Blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord." For well over 200 years, the United States was considered a nation under God. Our Judeo-Christian values put legs and feet in motion toward evangelizing the modern world. Our nation was blessed with tremendous protection from its enemies. Our people are among the most prosperous and blessed in the world. In the past generation, however, the nation has quickly drifted away from God and has maligned His precepts by condoning abortion, promoting homosexuality, the banning of God from the public square and many other offenses against God.

And the result of that is a rescinding of the blessing this nation has had. It can be seen with the 9/11 attacks, the move toward the repopulation of the nation with illegals, and the advance of Islam, which declares itself an enemy to Jews and Christians. In fact, somehow, America has become so twisted that we are honoring our enemies in the city where they killed over 2,500 people. New York's Empire State Building is to be lit up green from Friday until Sunday in honor of the Muslim holiday of Eid, marking the end of Ramadan. A statement by city officials says this is the first time the Empire State Building will be illuminated for the Muslim holiday and it will become an annual event "in the same tradition" of Christmas and Hanukah.