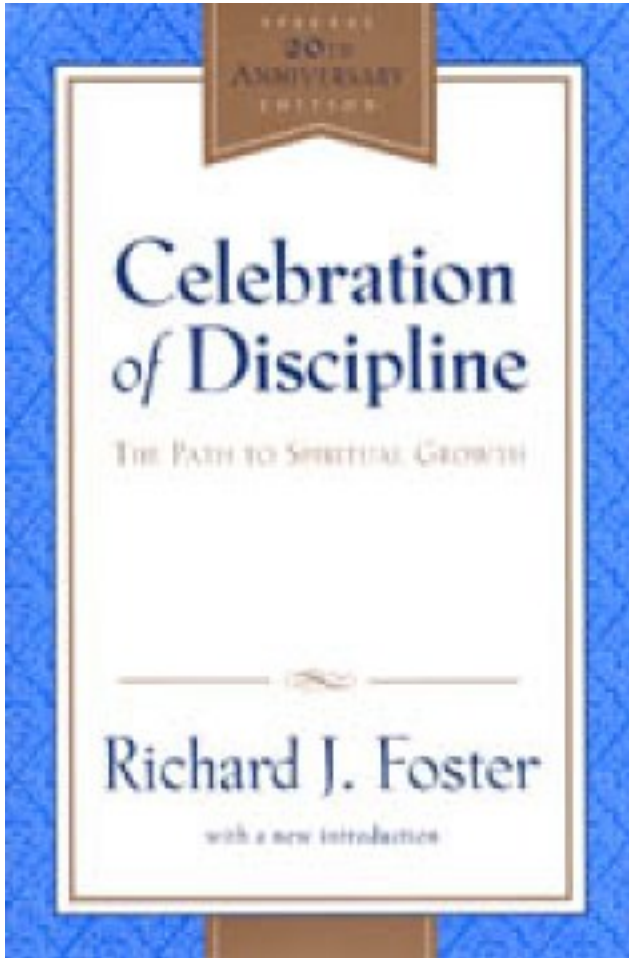


Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" – Does Your Pastor Have a Copy?

Posted by Amy Spreeman | May 22, 2013]



An excellent research article from Lighthouse Trails on the problems with mystic Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, which birthed today's man-made Spiritual Formation/Transformation Movement being embraced by many progressive/seeker churches: First published in 1978, *Celebration of Discipline* has had a massive influence on today's Christianity. Unfortunately, the influence has helped to saturate the church with mystical contemplative prayer and the New Age. Most likely, your pastor has a copy of this book sitting on his library shelves. He may even have it sitting on his desk for easy reach and reference. Richard Foster, a Quaker and the founder of an

organization called Renovare (meaning renewal), wrote the book and even he may have had no idea the impact this book would have. But 35 years later, it is still being read, and in fact, Christian leaders and organizations are promoting the book like never before.

Foster said in the book, that we “should all without shame enroll as apprentices in the school of contemplative prayer” (p. 13, 1978 ed.). In other books and writings of Foster’s, he makes it very clear that this “contemplative prayer” is the eastern style mantra meditation to which mystic monk Thomas Merton adhered. In fact, Richard Foster once told Ray Yungen (author of *A Time of Departing*) that “Thomas Merton tried to awaken God’s people” (at a conference in Salem, OR).

Thomas Merton, who said he was “impregnated with Sufism” (Merton and Sufism, p. 69) and wanted to “become as good a Buddhist” as he could be (David Steindl-Rast, “Recollection of Thomas Merton’s Last Days in the West”), believed that “God’s people” lacked one thing . . . mysticism and this is to what they needed “awakening.” Of Merton, Foster says: “Thomas Merton has perhaps done more than any other twentieth-century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood.” (Spiritual Classics, p. 17) And yet, Thomas Merton once told New Age Episcopal priest Matthew Fox that he felt sorry for the hippies in the 60s who were dropping LSD because all they had to do was practice the mystical (contemplative) stream to achieve the same results. (Interview) We couldn’t agree with him more. Both altered states are the same, and neither lead to God.

Celebration of Discipline – 35 Years of Influence! – Does Your Pastor Have a Copy?

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Listed under “excellent books on spirituality,” in some editions of *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster says of Tilden Edwards’ book, *Spiritual Friend* that it helps “clear away the confusion and invites us to see that we do not have to live the spiritual life in isolation.” And yet, Tilden Edwards, founder of the Christian/Buddhist Shalem Institute in Washington, DC, said that contemplative spirituality was the “Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality” (*Spiritual Friend*, p. 18). On the Shalem Institute website you can find numerous quotes, references, articles, and recommendations to panentheism, universalism, interspirituality, New Age, and Eastern thought.

In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster tells us “we must be willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation” (COD, p.13.) He goes on to say that the “masters of meditation beckon us.” Just prior to that remark, he quotes Carl Jung and Thomas Merton.

Celebration of Discipline has helped to pave the way for Thomas Merton's panentheistic belief system. It has opened the door for other Christian authors, speakers, and pastors to bring contemplative spirituality into the lives of millions of people. The late Henri Nouwen, a popular contemplative who also followed the teachings of Thomas Merton, made a telling statement towards the end of his life:

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 (emphasis added – Sabbatical Journey, p. 51).

Today, countless ministers and ministries are promoting and endorsing Celebration of Discipline. If they really knew what Foster's "celebration" was all about, we think many of them would race away from the teachings of Thomas Merton and Richard Foster and back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.