

# THE ORIGIN OF CONTEMPLATIVE/CENTERING PRAYER

By Rev. Ken Silva, Southern Baptist pastor-teacher, May 3, 2012



*They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them. ([Psalm 106:34-36](#))*

## CSM Was A Core Doctrine Of The Emerging Church

We can point to [Apprising Ministries](#) articles [Beth Moore The Mystic](#) and [Alabama Baptist Convention \(SBC\) Encourages You To Learn Lectio Divina From Apostate Tony Jones](#) as I remind you once again about the growing acceptance of [Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism](#) (CSM) festering within e.g. the apostatizing [Southern Baptist Convention](#).

Of course the **Slowly Becoming Catholic**, an allegedly evangelical Protestant denomination, is hardly alone in their re-embrace of this neo-Gnostic mysticism that originally flowered within the anti-biblical monastic traditions of spiritually bankrupt [Roman Catholicism](#). For example consider new [Acts 29 Network](#) president [Matt Chandler And Village Church Promoting Contemplative Spirituality](#).

Sadly, we watch this false version of Christian spirituality spreading apostasy throughout the professing Christian Church world-wide; so it seems good to give you a working knowledge concerning just where [Contemplative/Centering Prayer](#) (CCP) actually came from. CCP, which is the crown jewel of CSM, is meditation in an altered state of consciousness; transcendental meditation lightly sprayed with Christian terminology.

We begin with the incontrovertible fact that emphasis on some so-called “Christian” mystic tradition was a core doctrine of the warped and toxic theology of the [Emerging Church](#) from its very inception circa 1997. As such the [Emergent Church](#) has proven to be a very fertile ground into which mystics like [Living Spiritual Teacher](#) and [Quaker](#) mystic [Richard Foster](#) along with his spiritual twin [Dallas Willard](#) would plant their neo-pietism masquerading as [Spiritual Formation](#).

## **Emerging Church Authorities Speak On So-Called “Christian” Mysticism**

You also need to realize that this spurious CSM, with its spurious spiritual practices aka “disciplines,” is actually absolutely hostile to the historic Christian faith and still very much an integral part of the theology of the neo-liberal cult operating openly now within the Emerging Church. In laying out this case as would a prosecutor in a court of law I’ll call upon a couple of these leading EC authorities as expert witnesses concerning the origin of CCP, being its one of their core practices.

In an article from *Christianity Today* called “[The Emergent Mystique](#),” [Living Spiritual Teacher](#) and EC guru [Brian McLaren](#), who’s a most prominent theologian within “Emergent, the emerging church network that he and several other church planters and pastors lead,” names Dallas Willard and Richard Foster with their CSM “as key mentors for the emerging church.”[1] As a matter of fact the source link I’m using for this article actually comes from McLaren’s original website where he also provides a running commentary throughout.

Here following is exactly what McLaren says concerning Willard and Foster in the section of *The Emergent Mystique*, which I just quoted above:

“He cites Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, with their emphasis on spiritual disciplines, as key mentors for the emerging church. None of these thinkers has any inclination to throw out the baby of truth with the bathwater of modernity.”

*I’m grateful to Andy for including the preceding, because many people doubt this.*

([Online source](#))

Elsewhere on this McLaren website a reader asks the EC leader to tell him more about the subject of Spiritual Formation, which is simply another way to refer to the CSM of [Foster-Willardism](#):

The reason I am writing you is because I am trying to better understand what spiritual formation is...I think it is important to seek the wisdom of today's leaders. I have heard a lot on this subject from people such as Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, but I was wondering what Spiritual Formation is to you. How would you define Spiritual Formation and what kind of importance would you place on it with the current generation? I appreciate your time.

**A:** I hope to do some writing on this subject in a year or two. In the meantime, I have deep appreciation for what my friend Dallas Willard is saying. He, and those he points to, are great guides. ([Online source](#))

And as evidenced by this answer to a reader's question, Brian McLaren would also appear to have a deep appreciation for what Richard Foster is doing for the "Christian mystical tradition" as well. Please also note below, that in addition to Foster and Willard's work, McLaren also recommends [Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life](#) (SW) by the aforementioned [Tony Jones](#) as a good resource on the subject of CSM as well:

In some of my readings, both of books authored by you and others, I have read about Christian mystics. Who are the predominant Christian mystic authors?

**Answer:** If you pick up Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" and his other work via Renovare, you'll get a great exposure to the Christian mystical tradition. [Foster's] "The Spiritual Formation Workbook" is a great resource too. Tony Jones' "The Sacred Way" is also a sturdy introduction to contemplative practices. ([Online source](#))

### **Emergent Church Authorities Know Christ Didn't Teach Contemplative/Centering Prayer**

So, not only is Richard Foster a recognized expert on contemplative practices and the "Christian" mystic tradition, but now we have also established that he's as a "key" mentor and a source of authority within the Emergent Church. In addition, we have also seen from a leading theologian in the Emerging Church that Tony Jones, heretical "theologian in residence"

at the church of his universalist “pastor” [Doug Pagitt](#), is to be considered a “sturdy” authority on this so-called “Christian” mysticism within the Emergent Church as well.

Foster writes about “The Discipline of Meditation” in his book [Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth](#), which is his classic dissertation on these so-called “spiritual disciplines” and key textbook of [The Cult of Guru Richard Foster](#). But unfortunately Foster is guilty of using circular reasoning below when he laments:

Often there is a question as to whether meditation can be spoken of as Christian. Is it not the exclusive property of Eastern religions? Whenever I speak to a group on meditation as a classic Christian Discipline, there is the inevitable raising of eyebrows,... It is a sad commentary on the spiritual state of modern Christianity that meditation is a word so foreign to its ears. Meditation has always stood as a classical and central part of Christian devotion, a crucial preparation for and adjunct to the work of prayer.[2]

Don't you find it odd that, as Foster goes around speaking to “a group” they are surprised how something that has allegedly “always stood as a classical and central part of Christian devotion” like meditation [read: CCP], always seems “so foreign” to these people to whom he is speaking in “modern Christianity.” And how do we know that, “Meditation has always stood as a classical and central part of Christian devotion”? Answer: We don't. This is because CCP hasn't ever even been a part of the historic orthodox Christian faith to begin with.

In his own mind Foster believes CCP/meditation is “crucial” to prayer; and so, therefore it is. But without any proof from history whatsoever he is simply begging the question when he states that, “Meditation has always stood as a classical and central part of Christian devotion.” Foster does go on to say, “Meditation was certainly not foreign to the authors of Scripture” and he then cites [Genesis 24:63](#); [Psalm 1:2](#); [63:6](#); and [119:148](#), which do use the word meditation in most translations of the Bible.

Unfortunately, it's beyond the scope of this piece to go into this further at this point. However, suffice to say that Foster is clearly forcing his own definition of this mind-emptying Eastern-style meditation of CCP into these verses; because this type of meditation is absolutely unknown to orthodox Judaism. So just where did this Contemplative/Centering Prayer aka

“Christian” meditation actually come from? Let’s now bring in Tony Jones our Emergent expert and Emerging Church authority on “contemplative practices.”

In SW Jones does give us an accurate historical background concerning this spiritual discipline of meditation practiced by apostate (at best) Roman Catholic mystics and Quakers like Richard Foster. In his chapter entitled “Centering Prayer” Jones tells us:

“Like the Jesus Prayer, Centering Prayer **grew out of the reflections and writings of the Desert Fathers**. John Cassian (c.360-c.430) came from the West and made a pilgrimage to the desert to **learn the ways of contemplative prayer** ... Cassian was deeply influenced by his time in the desert, and he wrote his book *The Conferences* about his conversations with the Desert Fathers to acquaint Western Christians with their teachings.[3]

We can see in the above that “the Jesus Prayer,” as well as “Centering Prayer,” actually arose through “the reflections and writings of the Desert Fathers.” And further we find out that this type of mystic meditation of CCP was unknown prior to these apostate Desert Fathers circa the 3rd century. One might also observe here that Jones makes no mention whatsoever of this meditation of CCP being an Apostolic doctrine; nor is there reference to Christ or His Apostles ever employing these practices themselves.

This is for good reason; the simple fact is this CCP wasn’t taught by Christ, it was never Apostolic doctrine in the New Testament, and there is no evidence extant that the Master or His Apostles ever practiced this so-called Christian meditation. Please also note above that Jones equates “Centering Prayer” with “Contemplative Prayer”; it is really the same type of oxymoronic “wordless prayer.” You’ll often hear these mystics refer to the mediation of CCP as entering “the silence.” Hence all the talk of “silence and solitude.”

Let me also bring to your attention that history shows [John Cassian](#) would go on in his own contemplative version of mysticism to develop the man-centered form of [semi-pelagian theology](#) at the root of this whole emerging rebellion against sola Scriptura which is currently crippling contemporary evangelicalism. In closing this, for now, sadly this warped and toxic teaching would then be brought into the mainstream of the visible church through Zondervan, a publisher of CSM—as well as a financial

supporter of [Emergent Village](#) (EV), at their [2006 National Pastors Conference](#) (NPC).

You also need to know that this NPC 2006 was also sponsored by InterVarsity Press[4], another company publishing CSM and yet another financial supporter of EV. And it would be through NPC 2006 providing teachers of a counterfeit Christianity like Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt a legitimate forum that these leading purveyors of the [Big Tent Circus Of Postmodern Liberalism](#) in the Emergent Church would then go on to present this spurious type of Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism to your pastors and youth ministers. Tragically, it's now corrupted virtually the entire younger sector of Christendom.

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End notes:

[1] <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/000271.html>, accessed 5/3/12.

[2] Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* [New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978], 14.

[3] Tony Jones, *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* [Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties and Zondervan, 2005], 70, emphasis mine.

[4] <http://bit.ly/J4soJL>, accessed 5/3/12.