

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: Something to think about

And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. (Matthew 24:3-5 KJV)

"By now enough water has gone under the Christian Spiritual Formation Bridge that we can give some assessment of where we have come and what yet needs to be done. 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." Spiritual Formation, A Pastoral Letter by Richard Foster.

"It is a backsliding church that lessens the distance between itself and the Papacy." Signs of the Times, February 19, 1894

THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION DESTINATION

In the early 1990s, I had two separate experiences that have recently come to mind. The first was a reunion with a classmate of mine from San Diego Academy. Later, we were roommates at Pacific Union College. In 1969, I left P.U.C. and had lost touch with Ray. More than twenty years later, I had been converted and re-baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church and wanted to look up old friends. He was a naturopathic doctor, living in Portland, Oregon. Ray had been a devout Christian when I had known him, studying for the ministry. As a matter of fact, his dedication to Christ and the church was one of the reasons we had lost touch. I was told that he had developed some strange ideas. But I was an ex-hippie, how strange could they be?

Several things about the visit were memorable. I shared my conversion experience and then asked if he still attended church. He smiled and then chuckled quietly. He said he had grown beyond *church*. He then told me that he was a Rabbinical-Catholic-Methodist-Buddhist-Baptist-Taoist-Trinitarian-Sufi-Seeker. I had never heard that before and thought that it was rather clever. He then told me that he had very much enjoyed returning to P.U.C. a few months before. I mentioned that my memories were not so pleasant of my time there. He said that he loved it; all of his memories were wonderful.

I said, "Ray, how can that be? You are not even a Seventh-day Adventist anymore."

He responded that denominations don't matter to God and that they did not matter to him. He said denominations were artificial and man-made barriers to "community". He then told me how he had entered the college church in Angwin by himself, knelt down by one of the pews and had gone to the *Jesus-place inside himself for a beautiful forty-five minutes of meditation. It was indescribable.* He went on to say that this was more important than doctrine and a place where all peoples of the world could

unite. I told him that since I did not even understand what that meant, I could not agree, but it did not alter the fact that I was genuinely glad to see him after so many years. We had a nice visit and then parted company. His comments sounded like much of the pseudo-religious verbiage used by other friends from the 60s. But then they were Baba Ram Dass wannabes. They thought they could save the world with incense and patchouli oil. I could not take it seriously as a belief system. Certainly no one else would either, would they?

The second experience happened around the same time. Some friends in ministry told me that the pastor of the Loma Linda University Church William Loveless was teaching people how to encounter Jesus by using “visualization”. I was familiar with the visualization phenomenon since I had spent over 14 years in the book business. The book *Creative Visualization* had been a huge bestseller. An oversized paperback, it was written by a New Age practitioner (that is what we called them then) named Shakti Gawain. Businessmen and sports enthusiasts had immediately discovered that it was a way to “think” through a game plan or a game, ahead of the event. You could imagine yourself doing a perfect presentation or a perfect run on a downhill slalom course and then make it happen. I thought to myself, what does this have to do with church? Then I listened to the tape.

Pastor Loveless guided the “students” into a session. First, it was important to relax, and then close your eyes. Imagine that you are sitting on a hillside over-looking the Sea of Galilee. You can see Jesus and the disciples. What things do you hear? What do you smell? What do you see around you? A little later, you are walking down the road. You see Jesus on the road ahead of you. What would you like to ask Him? You can ask Him anything. What is His response? What does He say to you? Dr. Loveless went on to explain that an accurate journal should be kept of these conversations that take place in the imagination. Further, these personal revelations could be equated as valid as revelation in scripture. Perhaps, they might even be more important for it was you to whom they were addressed.

“Dr. Loveless believes that Ellen White was a mystic. He leads workers in mystical meditation at a conference meeting and then instructs them in turn to do the same with their members during one of their 11 o'clock services.”
<http://www.pacificpress.com/books/mainstre.htm>

Again, Dr. Loveless asserted, “Because you see, I believe that your imagination in conjuring up images is dealing with equal truth to scripture...because the Scriptures say the same Spirit that inspired it inspires us to understand it. That’s what we mean by the doctrine of inspiration. People who are not everyday meditators shouldn’t even be discussing the doctrine of inspiration because they don’t know anything about it. And we shouldn’t be talking about things in public that we don’t know anything about.” *A Short Meditational Prayer Exercise, Transcript*, William Loveless.

When I had these two experiences so long ago, I thought that they were unrelated. I thought that no one in the Seventh-day Adventist Church could be moved to accept the misguided philosophy of my New Age friend from the 60s. Could they? Dr. Loveless was exposed, somewhat discredited and moved out of the limelight, end of story. Right? How little did I understand the tenacity of the enemy of souls.

30 YEARS EARLIER...

Most Seventh-day Adventists in the 50s were only vaguely aware of the burden on the hearts and minds of some General Conference administrators. The burden was to gain a wider acceptance among the churches – particularly the thought leaders - of the mainline Protestant and evangelical world. We were afraid of being characterized or stigmatized as a cult. There was an effort to bridge this gap between Seventh-day Adventists and the greater portion of the body, considered “Christian Orthodoxy”. The result of this combination of fear and desire for favor was applied in a number of ways. I will touch on only three, but I believe they are significant.

First, a series of meetings were held with two key evangelicals (Donald G. Barnhouse and Walter Martin) in an effort to convince them that Seventh-day Adventist beliefs were orthodox. Secondly, at their suggestion, we started to alter, de-emphasize, and re-explain some key points of long-held Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine. The result of that process, and it took several years, was the book *Questions on Doctrine*. When we published this book, Walter Martin kept his promise to declare our orthodox status in his book, *Kingdom of the Cults*. Thirdly, in response to their accusation of “inbreeding”, some of our pastors began to take their graduate school education from universities and seminaries other than Seventh-day Adventist.

Of course, much more could be said on this topic. Books have been written about this period of time in Seventh-day Adventist history. It is worth the mention because this was the time when we started blending our teachings with the concepts of those outside of Seventh-day Adventist culture and mission. After all, some, perhaps many, of our doctrines were held in common. We all loved Jesus and wanted the same thing, did we not? It is important to be friendly, not withdrawn from the world in a sort of pious exclusiveness. What perhaps began as a sincere desire for dialog and fellowship (strengthened by the fear of censure) became something else. It initiated a pattern of tacit agreement with some interpretations of scripture from Bible scholars outside of Adventism. These were men who, though highly educated, had rejected the Ten Commandments as still binding on Christians. They also rejected the urgency of the soon coming Saviour as seen in Revelation 14. Finally, these men all thought that the Sanctuary Message was a face-saving device developed by the Millerite movement to cover the embarrassment of the Great Disappointment in 1844. Further, since these other denominations believed that the atoning work of Jesus was “completed at the cross”, Jesus’ intercession in the heavenly sanctuary was unnecessary and unbiblical. For the first time, we heard these ideas expressed in our institutions and schools. Although many other factors were involved, this was one of the reasons Desmond Ford was able to do so much damage when he arrived from Australia. His audience had been primed.

LATER THAT SAME DECADE...

A few years past the high-water mark of the charismatic movement, some Pentecostal preachers and seminarians were puzzled. They had predicted and taught that the “third wave” of Pentecostal popularity would wash over and unify the Christian world. The charismatic phenomenon never did reach the serious and the sober-minded. It did, however, in the 90 or so years since its “first wave”, become mainstreamed into the Christian vocabulary. This was possible so long as it was not subjected to close scrutiny. Many were (and are) uncomfortable with the barking, laughing, and rolling around on the floor. Also troubling are the sometime dubious miracles and slaying “in the spirit” as demonstrated by Benny Hinn and others. Be that as it may, this variety of

believer has settled in to every Christian denomination. The majority can be found in the Roman Catholic system, but they can also be found in every other denomination, including Seventh-day Adventists. They have moved well beyond the branding as “Holy Rollers” that we remember from childhood. Charismatics have gained a general acceptance even if not all understand why. Though never completely fulfilling the promise to unify all Christians, it is important to note that in 1975 Pope John Paul VI spoke in tongues and endorsed his followers who did the same. The Spiritual Formation writers have given status to charisma by naming it one of the foundational Christian “traditions” even though its origin is rather recent.

What was accomplished by charismatics was the establishment of a practice and an experience that crossed all denominational barriers. Those who partook of the *charisma* were able to bond with others of similar experience without a doctrinal divide. The charismatic group of phenomena was the chosen platform that the ecumenical movement and the Roman Catholic hierarchy used as the “unification” practice for all Christians. For the first time, a religious experience could be shared throughout Christendom with no membership barriers. It was the first time we started to hear the term inter-denominational. Not just non-denominational which usually means we subscribe to no creed, but inter-denominational which has come to mean: creeds and personal beliefs do not matter; all are welcome.

HERE AND NOW...

From 2009 to 2011, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches have all but healed their separation of more than 450 years. The Anglo Lutheran Catholic Church (ALCC) has announced their desire by letter to Cardinal Walter Kasper, on May 13, 2009, stating that it “*desires to undo the mistakes of Father Martin Luther, and return to the One, Holy, and True Catholic Church established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Blessed Saint Peter.*”

As another example of how Reformation churches have been disarmed by modern times: “The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is now offering classes in Iconography for the enhancement of the congregant’s devotional life. As of July 2011, it has voted for the possibility of ordination for candidates in “same gender relationships” (from their website).

This week, it was announced that the Holy See has set up a special group of cardinals to expedite the return of disaffected Anglicans and Episcopalians. About a third of the Anglican Priests have already submitted their paperwork and are looking at the possibility of becoming Catholic priests sometime in 2012.

Surprising but not shocking is this movement of mainline churches back towards Rome. It has been going on in a serious way for almost two decades. New generations of liberal Protestants feel that church has not met their felt needs. They further believe that science has proved the Bible false and yet technology has not lived up to its promise of solving the world’s problems. Conservative Protestants are embarrassed by their church’s trendiness and lack of direction. With no social mooring and no Biblical anchor, the mainline churches have been tossed about upon wave after wave of sociological fad and fashion searching for a safe haven of relevance. They have been largely unsuccessful because they are unsure of any position on important issues.

On the other hand, the Roman Church, self-assured and confident, takes the moral high ground on social activism and issues like abortion. They have liturgy and mystery, they have education and history, they are well organized and lest we forget, they have the Pope. By all appearances, they know what they want, where they are

going and how to get there. This is in sharp contrast to mainline Protestantism. A large number of well-respected Protestants have converted to Roman Catholicism. Among the most noteworthy are: Thomas Howard, brother of Christian writer Elizabeth Elliott); Robert Webber, Wheaton Professor; Richard John Neuhaus (one of the engineers behind the document *Catholics and Protestants Together*); and most recently – Francis Beckwith, professor from Baylor University (who resigned his presidency of the Evangelical Theological Society).

What has been both shocking and surprising is the much more recent drift of evangelical churches towards Rome. For many years, the evangelical churches (Southern Baptist, Church of Christ, Nazarene and others) have held the Biblical line on doctrine. On issues such as evolution vs. literal 7-day creation and mythology vs. the miraculous, the evangelicals have withstood Papal onslaughts and public ridicule in the media. What has happened to loosen their hold on the Bible? The answer is **Spiritual Formation**.

In the same way that the New Age movement made Transcendental Meditation and Cosmic Consciousness acceptable to the general public, Spiritual Formation has made Eastern-style meditation, the divine inside you (cosmic Christ) and some Catholic practices like solitude (monasticism) and confession to people (spiritual directors) palatable to Protestant Christians.

The New Age did it this way. They quit acting hippie-dippy and put on a business suit. No longer was meditation and channeling spiritualistic and scary, it was scientific and helpful. Yoga was not part of Hinduism; it was a way to manage stress. Most of the new titles were no longer in the occult section of bookstores; they were now in the psychology and self-help sections. Scientology was no longer science fiction; it was practical.

Using the same techniques, Spiritual Formation has slowly but surely replaced the sufficiency of Scripture with the self-help of contemplation and the scientifically proven benefit of meditative practice. Mix with that a little monastic rigor and some foggy medieval history, and Spiritual Formation has a distinctively Catholic flavor. What is going on?

SPIRITUAL FORMATION...what exactly is it?

Spiritual Formation is a universal experience. Dallas Willard writes, “It is a process that happens to everyone.... Terrorists as well as saints are the outcome of Spiritual Formation. Their spirits or hearts have been formed.” A study of various world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and others would enable one to understand specifically how each religion views Spiritual Formation or spiritual growth within its unique belief system. (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_formation)

To many, Spiritual Formation is regarded as a loosely defined term that can mean Christian maturity or anything spiritual. It is quite vast and consequently may be used as each spiritual tradition, or persons within that tradition care to define it.

Gerald G. May writes, in *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit* (Harper, 1982, page 6) "Spiritual formation is a rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening of faith and furtherance of spiritual growth. It includes educational endeavors as well as the more intimate and in-depth process of spiritual direction."

Well that sounds safe enough, but it is a bit vague. A dilemma lies in the fact that the terminology is engineered for all of us to think that we understand it. And so we are comfortable with it. The problem looms larger when we get away from the engineers early descriptions of Spiritual Formation. What does the data show? What has been the actual progress of what can only be defined as a tsunami of books, DVDs, Christian celebrity endorsements, classes and retreats for this cultural phenomenon?

It is possible to discuss or even argue the origins of Spiritual Formation (capital S, capital F). Many of the handbooks say that the modern proponents of Spiritual Formation are only “rediscovering” the rich spiritual heritage of the Desert Fathers and certain Christian mystics from the Dark Ages. Even so, most will agree that our current interest in the topic of Spiritual Formation started when a “pastor” of the Quaker “Society of Friends” wrote a book. The Quaker was Richard Foster. His book was: *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, (Harper, San Francisco, 1978). In the book, he lists the “lost” spiritual disciplines that are spiritually formational.

Most of the disciplines seem positive enough as Foster interprets them: praying more often through the day, slowing down from the rush of a materialistic lifestyle and acts of community service. Protestant Christians have historically considered these the fruits of a born-again Christian life. The problem with the Spiritual Formation method is that it makes these activities the *way* toward spirituality and not the *result*. The counter argument would be that practicing the disciplines is not about *earning* salvation, but *learning* how to be more spiritual.

Can this still be helpful? Of course it can. Have some of our members forgotten the importance of these things? Indeed, sadly so. It is not that worms are not real food for fish, the problem is *the hook*. It is not that these activities (more prayer, fasting, quietude, and feeding the poor) are not real food for Christian thought and action. The problem (*the hook*) is the emphasis and the devil is in the details. In spite of the Christian theme, it is an almost completely self-focused and works-based foundation. Further, what you learn and experience outweighs doctrine. Again, like the charismatic movement, there is no doctrinal divide. Unlike the charismatic movement, Spiritual Formation does appeal to the intellectual and sober-minded. Both share the concept that experience is the qualifier for doctrine, and that is exactly backwards.

More than this, Richard J. Foster is part of an aggressive worldwide ecumenical movement. Business gurus have discovered that being Christian is not necessary to receive benefit from these methods. New Age celebrities endorse the Christian resources and vice versa. It appears they have an agenda. Their agenda is similar to the current Papal agenda. That is, bringing groups of people together by means of a shared experience. The *contemplative* method, or Spiritual Formation, is the platform being used to do this. It does not seem to matter (or no one seems to notice) that these groups have doctrines and beliefs that are not just incompatible, but mutually exclusive.

These are the spiritual disciplines as originally practiced by Catholic mystics in the early centuries of the Christian church. More recently, these disciplines were refined and codified by the Catholic mystic and founder of the Jesuits, Ignatius Loyola. The more recent popular teachers of these methods are mostly Catholic: Richard Foster considers Henri Nouwen his mentor. Henri Nouwen, Fr. Basil Pennington and Fr. Thomas Keating say they owe everything to Thomas Merton. The majority of the teaching comes from Catholic priests and Quakers who love to study with Buddhist monks and Zen masters. If you go back farther, to the Dark Ages, and farther still, to the Desert Fathers, they are all Catholic. This may be a good place to note that recent Papal encyclicals endorse the *contemplative tradition* as a pillar of their plan for evangelization and unification. Another of the pillars is the mystery of the Eucharist.

And of course, another of the pillars, supported by sightings of apparitions around the globe, is the mediation and the ministry of Mary.

Research has given the conviction that the structure being built on this self-focused foundation of disciplines is even worse.

The discipline of slowing down from the hectic pace of modern life *evolves* into the monastic concept of *solitude*. Quoting St. John of the Cross they say, “God’s first language is silence”. Without experiencing this, you are not “experiencing God”. That sounds very spiritual but runs contrary to scripture. John 1 simply does not say, in the beginning was the silence. “Come now, and let us reason together...”, says the prophet Isaiah. A difficult request if our first language is silence. As Jesus also quoted Isaiah, His desire was for the Jews to see and perceive and having ears, to hear and understand.

Community service *evolves* into Social Activism, which may be fine in its place, but is not enjoined in scripture. oPolitics was not part of His mission. His kingdom was not of this world.

There is a special focus on prayer. Some really good suggestions from Foster here: praying for our leaders when we read the paper or watch the news, praying for friends when we meet them at the mall etc. But this emphasis on prayer *evolves* into special kinds of prayer. *Contemplative prayer* is one of the greatest causes for alarm. What is taught is the same style of self-hypnotic meditation that Buddhists, New Age gurus and occult animists use. Along with this dangerous form of meditation are other forms of “vain repetition”. Some examples are: the repetitive *Jesus Prayer*, the *Breath Prayer*, and *Lectio Divina* – words from scripture as mantras. Evangelical Protestants do not take lessons in prayer from Buddhists or Catholics, or do they?

This week’s item is from *Publisher’s Weekly*, August 28, 2006, with a headline: “PW Talks with Philip Yancey.” The following are excerpts:

Publisher’s Weekly: “Many of your books have been about how Christians feel the burden of spiritual practice. Which writers most influenced your thinking about prayer?”

Philip Yancey: “No Protestants come to mind, to be honest, so, much I have learned about prayer is from the Catholics. One book I discovered was by Mark Phibido, called, ‘Arm Chair Mystic.’ Of course, if you want to go deeper, there’s Thomas Merton.” (Underlining mine.)

No Protestants come to mind? How about Andrew Murray? How about E.M. Bounds, George Mueller, or Hudson Taylor? There are more but space prohibits. It is just not possible to cover all this material. There are internal disciplines and external disciplines. Some of the disciplines seem benign. Some definitely are not.

The discipline of confession and its fraternal twin *spiritual direction* has a vast potential for disaster within it. And here is a caution:

“--I have been shown that many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate. Seeds of evil are scattered in the minds and hearts of those who hear, and when they are under temptation, these seeds will spring up and bear fruit, and the same sad experience will be repeated. ...Thus the open confession in the church of these secret sins will prove a savor of death rather than of life.”--5T 645 (1889).

Some people love to confess. Teresa of Avila (Medieval Catholic nun and mystic) exaggerated her sins to her many confessors according to the Catholic Encyclopedia. And many people love to hear confessions. Each person should think twice before opening up his or her secret thoughts and sins to another human being. This area of Catholic theology is very contaminated and should best be put under strict quarantine.

Much could be said about the potential problems of *spiritual directors*. This is a quote from an Adventist pastor about how he got into *spiritual direction*. He says that he did not see the problems with it at first. Still, he experienced a “high level of resistance” (from within himself) when he started this “journey” in the fall of 1973. I will underline what it seems would have been a red flag to Seventh-day Adventists:

“For much of the Christian era the practice of spiritual direction was confined to Catholicism, particularly monasticism and the Society of Jesus. In recent years there has been a revival of interest in spiritual direction as a resource for personal spiritual formation among both Catholics and Protestants. A leading Protestant advocate of spiritual direction is Tilden Edward, director of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C. As I began my own prayerful search for a spiritual friend, I came across the significant work by Tilden Edwards, Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction. I strongly recommend this book as a valuable resource. There, for the first time, I caught a glimpse of the real value of spiritual direction as a means of nurturing spiritual life.”- (Spiritual Formation in Ministry, pp 6-7)

To close the thoughts on confession and spiritual direction, consider this long held principle of Protestant theology:

“Everyone needs a practical experience in trusting God for himself. Let no man become your confessor; open the heart to God; tell Him every secret of the soul. Bring to Him your difficulties, small and great, and He will show you a way out of them all. He alone can know how to give the very help you need.” --GW 418 (1915) (underlining mine).

We have been told that Spiritual Formation is not taught this way at our universities. But this is what the originators of Spiritual Formation are teaching. We have heard it said that these non-Adventists have co-opted the name Spiritual Formation. That Spiritual Formation never meant to us what it means to them. What if we had been calling communion “the Eucharist” for the last 20 years (and we have heard the term *Eucharist* used at the Walla Walla University Church). What if someone directed our attention to the fact during this past year that transubstantiation is associated with the term *Eucharist*? Would we be able to say that it does not mean that to us when we say it?

Further, how is it that Protestants in general, but Seventh-day Adventists in particular, have been missing out on these great spiritual truths? The underlying idea is that these beneficial practices were lost in the Reformation. And now we are told that fortunately for all of us, the Catholic monastic system had them all along, particularly the Jesuits. This is not just an idea about how to enhance your devotional life. Neither is it a way for seminaries to teach spiritual maturity to young pastors. It is the engine on the ecumenical freight train and it is headed right for us. Indeed, it is halfway through town.

It gets worse. Some of the resource reading that the proponents of Spiritual Formation recommend is much worse. The books about God that are being promoted by Richard Foster (and Rick Warren, Chuck Swindoll, Philip Yancey, Max Lucado, Bill Hybels, Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Dallas Willard and their organizations) are much more Catholic/mystical/spiritualist than their own writings. This emphasis on method and/or experience diminishes the work of Christ on our behalf. His finishing work in the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary becomes unnecessary. Scripture becomes insufficient. Faith in Christ alone is compromised, no matter what Paul said to his spiritual son Timothy:

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Timothy 3:15-17 KJV

There are many examples of poor choices of reading material on the recommended lists of these teachers. But worth mentioning is the most blatant of Renovare’s offerings. Richard Foster states we all can be grateful to Ignatius Loyola. This is from one of Foster’s compilations, *Spiritual Classics, Companion to Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*. On page 291 of *Spiritual Classics* begins a chapter by Ignatius Loyola on “*Rules for Discernment of Spirits*,” taken out of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The introduction to this chapter reads:

“Ignatius Loyola is one of the most influential religious founders in Christian history. The religious order that he founded continues to have worldwide influence and is especially known for its work in education and **spiritual formation.**” (Emphasis mine.) –*Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings for Individual and Groups on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines*, ed. Richard J. Foster, and Emile Griffin, a Renovare Resource for Spiritual Renewal.

Near the end of this chapter by Ignatius Loyola in *Spiritual Classics* Richard Foster (the founder of Renovare, and chief editor of the Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible) writes glowingly of Loyola:

“Of all the literature on the discernment of spirits I think Ignatius of Loyola is the very best. He is so wise, so clear, and so direct... Whatever and whenever Ignatius’s experiences [sic] we can be deeply grateful for the help these ‘rules for the discernment of spirits’ can give us as we seek to distinguish the movement of God upon the soul from that of Satan and his minions.” –Richard Foster, commenting on Ignatius Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, *Spiritual Classics*, page 298.

There is no denying that Ignatius Loyola was very spiritual. A contemporary of Martin Luther, he could pray his mystical prayer for five hours in the morning, with tears, in what he called "the presence of God". And then go to work planning the murder of tens of thousands of Protestant Christians. To recommend this man as someone who could teach others how to discern between good and evil is a travesty. It is an insult to thousands of Protestant Christian martyrs. And we have to ask if Richard Foster has lost his power of discernment as well.

A 2003 *Christianity Today* article, *Got Your Spiritual Director Yet?* confirms two things; one is that spiritual direction is *contemplative*, and two that it is becoming a part

of evangelical Christendom. The article explains that popular Christian author Larry Crabb is changing his views. Once a believer in psychology he is switching to spiritual direction. The article credits *contemplatives* (mystics) such as John Cassian and Ignatius of Loyola for getting *spiritual direction* into the church and suggests that we can learn more about it from Richard Foster, Eugene Peterson, and Dallas Willard.

Major names in divinity schools, theological seminaries and popular ministries are following this methodology in droves. While this is happening, the Emerging Church is reinventing Christianity for the postmodern generation. But what does this new invention look like? It looks like the use of candles, crosses, incense and experience-based name-calling of all that went before, with the exception of Catholic liturgy. What are they reading? Books on mysticism and liturgy rank high on the lists. What are they doing? Well, one thing they are doing is celebrating Lent.

Jerry Falwell's Liberty University celebrates Lent for the first time. Cheers go up in the Billy Graham Pavilion at Wheaton. They are having an *Ancient Future* conference for Emerging Church leaders and supporters. Closer to home, innovative Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Canton, Ohio, and Hollywood, California celebrate Lent.

CONTEMPLATION DESTINATION...

The part that Foster did not mention in 1978, or at least not after the first printing, was his deep interest in New Age philosophy. This fit in well with his Quaker background because of their belief that each human being has an *inner light* that is part of God. Many have wondered why the Puritans thought Quakers were heretics; it is because of this belief. The period of silence in their worship service always was broken when someone, anyone, felt the *inner light* was giving them something to say. These revelations out of the silence were considered equal to scripture.

In the late 80s, a Dominican monk named Matthew Fox wrote a book entitled: *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: the healing of mother earth and the birth of a global renaissance*. This book is also a popular link in the chain of Spiritual Formation theology. Fox was one of the first authors to admit that when they talk about Jesus they have something else in mind. It is not that they disbelieve that Jesus was a historical character. Where the paths part is here: they do not believe that Jesus was the One, the only Son of God, Saviour, atoning Sacrifice and Lord of the human race. They believe that Jesus Christ was able to get in touch with the divine inside and that He was able to *evolve* into the God/Man. Fox says we can do that also, and *contemplative prayer* is the way to get there. This concept changes everything. It certainly changes how we look at the Bible verses about Christ's character being formed in the Christian and the literal second coming. These verses would have to be re-interpreted. Now, they say, he will come inside everyone and we will all live in peace and harmony. This is the same message that the apparitions of Mary bring to her appearances in Egypt, India, China, and Africa as well as the better-known sites in Europe and the Americas.

With a slight alteration, this view of future peace and prosperity was what the Christian church believed in 1844. Because of the rapid advances of science and technology, they thought the world was getting better and better. No need for an interruption of such wonderful progress by the literal coming of the Son of Man. Now no one thinks utopia is around the corner, at least not because of science and technology. Crime and depravity, poverty and war surround us. Where does this hope for a peaceful "dominion" or "kingdom" come from? It comes from Spiritual Formation: a spiritual *evolution*. As we all learn to find the god inside of ourselves we become one with each other and one with all things. Everything will be okay.

The so-called Christian mystics taught this in the Dark Ages. Julian of Norwich described it in the writings of her visions. Others did similarly but all used Christian terminology. It is all about connecting the divine inside you with the divine outside you. This works for Buddhists, it works for New Age philosophers, it works for the Sufis (Muslim mystics), it even works for Quakers and Catholics, but it never really worked for Protestant or evangelical Christians (let alone Seventh-day Adventists) until now. Here is what “Baptist” preacher and social activist Tony Campolo has to say.

“Beyond these models of reconciliation, a theology of mysticism provides some hope for common ground between Christianity and Islam. Both religions have within their histories examples of ecstatic union with God ... I do not know what to make of the Muslim mystics, especially those who have come to be known as the Sufis. What do they experience in their mystical experiences? Could they have encountered the same God we do in our Christian mysticism?” –Tony Campolo in *Speaking My Mind*, pages 149-150.

“...During times of reflection I sensed that believing in Jesus and living out His teachings just wasn't enough. There was a yearning for something more, and I found that I was increasingly spiritually gratified as I adopted older ways of praying--ways that have largely been ignored by those of us in the Protestant tradition. Counter-Reformation saints like Ignatius of Loyola have become important sources of help as I have begun to learn from them modes of contemplative prayer. I practice what is known as ‘centering prayer,’ in which a sacred word is repeated as a way to be in God's presence.” --Tony Campolo, *Mystical Encounters for Christians*.

“What I am trying to say is that Jesus who incarnated God [sic] 2,000 years ago is mystically present and waiting to be discovered in EVERY person you and I encounter.” –Tony Campolo, *A Reasonable Faith*, 1983 page 171 (please note the date, 1983).

“...Isn't God's message to sinful humanity that He sees in each of us a divine nature of such worth that He sacrificed His own Son so that our divine potentialities might be realized? ... The hymn writer who taught us to sing “Amazing Grace” was all too ready to call himself a “wretch”... Forgetting our divinity and over-identifying with our [Freudian] anal humanity...Erich Fromm, one of the most popular psychoanalysts of our time, recognized the diabolical social consequences that can come about when a person loses sight of his/her own divinity...” –Tony Campolo, *Partly Right*, 1995.

Dozens, if not hundreds of well-known evangelicals are lining up with emergent ideas about Dominion Theology, Universalism and Spiritual Exercises. So it is true that they are echoing, or rediscovering, a type of devotional life that some monks and nuns practiced almost one thousand years ago. And perhaps they have also rediscovered what the Desert Fathers had been doing centuries before that. So it does appear to be a place where Mormon theology (what God is, we shall become), Quaker *inner light* theology, and Catholic monks and mystics intersect. Now disillusioned mainline Protestants and evangelicals are joining them.

So the Pope and the Dalai Lama met with hundreds of leaders of the world's diverse religions and announced that they all pray to the same god. So the Vatican

announces that *contemplative practice* is the perfect evangelistic tool for getting all people everywhere to appreciate the “mystery of the Eucharist”. What does it all mean?

“It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, now I realize what we all are.... If only they [people] could all see themselves as they really are ... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth.... This little point...is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody.” Thomas Merton

The Catholic Church and the ecumenical movement used Pentecostalism and/or the charismatic experience to drive a false concept of the power of the Holy Spirit into acceptability. More importantly, as the so-called Christian world longs for unity, they were led to believe that this might be the way. The working of the Holy Spirit (falsely named) would surmount the problem of divisive doctrinal differences. And so the experience superseded doctrine and became *Inter-denominational*.

So now, the *Ancient-Future*, the Emergent Church, evangelicals (mega-church and traditional), Protestants and Roman Catholics have “rediscovered” the way to *evolve* spiritually and connect with – not just Mormons and Quakers, but Buddhists, Muslims, Messianic Jews, Shinto, Zoroastrians, Voudon (voodoo), Taoists, Universalists and New Age Futurists. The working of a false communication with the divine would surmount not just doctrinal differences but cultural as well. And so the experience supersedes the Bible and becomes *Inter-Faith*.

WHO ARE WE?

Spiritual Formation entered the Seventh-day Adventist Church by fairly legitimate channels. Many authors claimed that these practices could be tailored to any “faith tradition”. The more objectionable aspects of the *disciplines* were not emphasized. It was taught in our colleges and universities by those who thought that these principles would fill in the gap they believed existed between didactic teaching and practical devotional life. The connection that some of the authors had to Catholic teachings mixed with Eastern religious practice was not considered important and was mentioned infrequently if at all. Few people really noticed. And since the first layer of source material was “Christian”, the few that noticed were not worried. It seemed practical.

Some Seventh-day Adventist pastors took training at Spiritual Formation retreats. Here is an interesting observation from Tilden Edwards:

“This mystical stream [Contemplative Prayer] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality...it is no accident that the most active frontier between Christian and Eastern religions today is between contemplative Christian monks and their Eastern equivalents.” --Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend*, pages 18 and 19.

As mentioned previously church pastors and leaders have attended the training at the Shalem Institute. Pastors in Southern California had monthly training brought to them. It was held at the Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Official sanction began when the results of a church-wide survey pointed out some real needs:

“For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a “wake-up call” was sounded after a 2002 survey showed that though doctrinal understanding was high, there were several

"areas of concern," including low involvement in daily prayer and Bible study, active Christian witness to the community, and participation in community service" (see Adventist News Network, October 9, 2002).

A little over one year later, Spiritual Formation was announced to the church at large. Remember that these concepts had been taught to pastors and in our universities and seminary for some time already.

Feature: Church, Congregations Increase Focus on "Spiritual Formation" *"Spiritual formation is a topic being raised by many pastors and church leaders in a growing number of Christian denominations. It's no longer enough to just know doctrine and facts--in today's hectic society people are searching for something deeper and more meaningful, something that makes sense in their whirlwind lives" (see Adventist News Network, February 3, 2004).*

In this article, several authoritative Seventh-day Adventist educators, pastors and administrators advised readers that although the trend documented in the survey was alarming, they believed they had a solution. The solution was Spiritual Formation. Even though we were now almost twenty-five years down this path, and some alarms had been sounded, nothing of the potential problem areas of Spiritual Formation was mentioned. Nothing was mentioned about Spiritual Direction and confession; nothing was mentioned about the solitude or *silence* required for successful *contemplative prayer*. And, nothing was mentioned about the origins of this style of devotional discipline and practice. It was stated that Spiritual Formation just meant "spiritual maturity" and that we had undervalued the importance of "experience", particularly to young people. It was even claimed that we had "stunted" the growth of our youth by our focus on doctrine.

The description of Spiritual Formation in the article matches the defence of Spiritual Formation now; it's not what you think; it is just spiritual growth and maturity.

A committee had already been established to help accomplish this goal:

"The Adventist world church created the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) in September 2001, designed to provide overall guidance and standards to the professional training of pastors, evangelists, theologians, teachers, chaplains and other denominational employees involved in ministerial and religious formation, or spiritual formation, in each of the church's 13 regions around the world." Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, Wendi Rogers/ANN.

The Trans-European Division has followed up on the mandate and launched a Spiritual Formation program throughout their field. This came to our attention early this year, as the Southeast Asia Union Mission announced that they are using Spiritual Formation, and other resources to launch a *small group* ministry initiative. They are also setting up a mentoring program that will be mission-wide. When questioned about the program, our administrators and leaders rightly called our attention to the fact that this was already being taught in most of our institutions of higher learning and that the world church was behind it. This paper is the result of backtracking those claims and discovering that the claims were true.

Although a bit late in the day, the question still needs to be asked: how can you make Spiritual Formation into a Seventh-day Adventist methodology? Nowhere in the New Testament do you see a recommendation to "experience God" or the listed spiritual disciplines as part of a Christian's maturation process. We do have the Beatitudes, the

Lord's Prayer, the "fruits of the Spirit", the "whole armour of God", and the "ladder" from II Peter. We know from study, that the ladder is Christ. As a more detailed example of what our devotional life should look like, Seventh-day Adventists have been given special insight into the Sanctuary Message. It was a symbolic example to the Israelites of how God and His only "begotten" Son were going to solve the problem of sin in the universe. More than that, it was a daily and yearly prophecy of what the ministry of Christ would look like when God would "...provide Himself a lamb..." But even more still, it is an example of what Jesus desires to do with our individual devotional life. It is completely balanced. The steps are in order. It is the only devotional life that can affect the final outcome.

We know from the Bible that the Ten Commandments are the transcription of the character of God. We know from the Old Testament that when Moses wanted to experience God, God showed him His character. Further, we know that when Philip wanted to see the Father, Jesus told him that he had already seen the Father in the character of Jesus. The Bible never promises any sort of ecstatic communication with human beings. The Bible does not mention special breathing techniques, self-hypnosis or spiritual disciplines. Worship and adoration are fine in their place; but as passage after passage indicates it is no substitute for obedience.

And though the advocates of Spiritual Formation within our church promise that "it is not like that when we do it", the major proponents of this system are out of the closet as to what is involved. We are told that it is:

"...Out of the religious traditions of Quakerism that Foster has come with the message that today's Church is missing out on some wonderful spiritual experiences that can only be found by studying and practicing the meditative and contemplative lifestyle."

CONCLUSION...

Does not the fact that it started in Egypt remind us of an ancient story? Mendicant priests and Monasticism travelled from East to West during that time. So did candles, statues, beads, icons and Sunday.

Does not the fact that the whole Christian world supports, endorses and loves this system give us pause? It is part of the ecumenical program from Notre Dame to the National Cathedral, from Baptist-Baylor to the espresso-driven sacred-spaces of the Emergent Church.

Is it not worrisome that the Pope wants all people to be *contemplative* as the adoration of Mary and the Eucharist captivates the Protestant world?

Does it make us wonder where this path is tending? Do we want to know where it came from? Are we concerned enough to enquire where it is going?

Is it not somewhat disturbing to know that Buddhists, Hindus, Zen Masters and New Age gurus support with happy satisfaction the evidence that Christians have finally "rediscovered" their own mystical roots of meditation?

Can we reconsider?

The idea that we should accept as our teachers the Roman system that rejected the Reformation, and the Protestants who have rejected the Ten Commandments and the Seventh-day Sabbath at their core, is not sustainable. The idea that the Protestant world has lost sight of the true path leading to devotional life with God –but that the Catholics and their most zealous defenders the Jesuits, have kept it safe for us all these centuries, so we could "rediscover" it at the close of earth's history is untenable.

Finally, as we borrow these teachings, as we put labyrinth prayer walks in our colleges and hospitals, as we bring candles, beads and icons back into our churches and try to make them “Adventist”, we discover something else. The direction and flow of information is also exactly backwards.

“There is to be no change in the features of our work. It is to stand clear and distinct as prophecy has made it. We are to enter into no confederacy with the world, supposing that by so doing we could accomplish more.

“The eighteenth chapter of Revelation reveals the truth in no uncertain terms, but with boldness and power. There must be no toning down of the truth, no muffling of the message for this time. Satan has devised a state of things whereby the proclamation of the third angel’s message shall be bound about. We must beware of his plans and methods. The third angel’s message is to be strengthened and confirmed...” -9 MR pp 290.

“Satan will so mingle his deceptions with truth that side issues will be created to turn the attention of the people from the great issue, the test to be brought upon the people of God in these last days.” -Letter 28, pp 2-4 (to W.W. Prescott and wife, Feb. 17, 1900).

Seventh-day Adventists are debtors to all men because we know things that they do not know. We know Jesus is coming soon. Because of our understanding of the sanctuary service we know where Jesus is right this minute and we know what He is doing. We know what Babylon is and that their wine (teaching) is seen as fornication by God. We, by God’s grace, are to love these people as Jesus loves them (and us) and call them out to a Biblical understanding of Righteousness by Faith.

The proclamation of the three angel’s messages is our work as God’s denominated people. The messages of Revelation 14 are our responsibility to share. No one else will do it. The message of the first angel: worshipping and giving glory to God who created and redeemed us, was first declared in 1843. The message of the second angel: Babylon is fallen, was given in 1844 as the nominal churches rejected the light on the Law of God. The second angel’s message is repeated to the churches in Revelation 18. It is repeated because the principles of the churches have become corrupted. We are living in the time of the third angel. We are to give the world this information. May God give us the strength to live up to our high calling.