



The Plumbline

Assessing Current Teachings, Issues and Events with Scripture

Scazzero Scares Me

The Bridge across the Tiber back To Home Sweet Rome is now open for traffic

The title and subtitle are metaphoric symbolism. Crossing the Tiber river near Rome is often used for Protestants returning to Roman Catholicism. Scazzero is an Italian name for Peter Scazzero who is senior pastor of New Life church in Queens, New York City. Rev. Scazzero has not claimed Rome for his official residence, but makes many trips across the Tiber. Scazzero's stated mission is to introduce Catholic contemplative prayer and practice to evangelicals. Scazzero avoids the term Catholic for obvious reasons but uses "Contemplative Prayer" freely, assuming probably correctly, that evangelicals will not know the meaning of the term. Scazzero's book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* recounts how after his seminary experience at Gordon-Conwell, he launched into growing an evangelical church in Queens. However, as the years went by, his marriage nearly collapsed and his time consuming ministry was brought to a standstill. I am not sure why he and his wife Geri took a 6 month sabbatical and visited monasteries overseas including Taizé in France. They came home, however, converted to Contemplative Spirituality (henceforth CS). They assumed that their church would refuse this but the elders were open to try it. The rest is history. They implemented a Benedictine Daily Office devotional routine, a Sabbath experience and a Rule for Life. All of this is presented as the solution to Scazzero's insufficient experience in traditional evangelical spirituality. Going further, Scazzero is convinced that living a life of contemplative rhythms and discipline is the primary way to bring evangelical emotional and spiritual lives into health.

Scazzero has found that he is in demand among evangelical pastors nationwide. He has been invited to speak to AOG pastors conferences, CMA pastors meetings and even to Focus on the family retreats. He quotes primarily from famous Catholic monastic mystics both living and dead, and he proudly announces that he attends a Trappist monastery in MS on a regular basis participating in the rigors of monastic life. It appears that his audiences have no problems with the source of his material. Trappist monks, and other emergent universalists get generous quotes in his writings and are ALWAYS quoted favorably. One can only assume he sees their teaching found in their writings as beneficial and that his evangelical audiences either don't care or know to whom he refers in his writings.

The wider context of this is that there have been years of efforts to bring about a practical union between Rome and evangelicals. The prominent person in this endeavor has been and continues to be Chuck Coulson. He has spearheaded this effort of some years now called ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together). One could say that Coulson built the bridge over the Tiber and now Scazzero and others have widened the bridge and taken down any warning signs still remaining so that evangelicals can easily go back and forth. Now evangelicals can shoot across the Tiber and land in some of the historic monasteries. All of this now without even a winking or a stirring among evangelicals who owe their existence to the Protestant Reformation. Only a few "hard hats" so-called make a few grunting noises. Given the quiet intrusion of postmodern deconstruction of almost all truth claims in the church and the prevailing winds of tolerance, the deal can now be sealed sooner rather than later. Luther, Calvin and Zwingli are quietly relegated to the scrap heap of ancient church history. The Reformation can be buried as an unfortunate mistake, and an inconvenient episode in church history. Many evangelicals are convinced CS is just a way to slow down and have quiet devotions in a busy life style. But for people who know, - it is not remotely like a quiet bible study. It would only take a few minutes on a computer to establish that CS is not really an option. Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen, the big two of monastic mystics leave no doubt that "entering the silence" is essentially an eastern way of eliminating all conscious thought so that we can uncover God's presence already buried deep in all humans and in all living things (Panentheism). Scazzero's

quotes are from nearly all the luminaries of CS. But he does not go on to describe in detail their practices and teachings, however. This is unfortunate for very quickly that would nail down a few undeniable features of CS. First by meditative techniques and disciplines there is a desire to reach an alternate state of spiritual consciousness in which unknowing rather than knowing is the goal. In past centuries that monastic goal often took years to attain. But in recent times Father Thomas Keating, quoted freely by Scazzero [Thomas Keating, *Intimacy With God: An Introduction To Centering Prayer*] p. 44 *Daily Office*] along with Father M. Basil Bennington [famous quote "The soul of the human family is the Holy Spirit], found a way to attain mental silence and unknowing in about 20 minutes. Father Keating attended the 6th annual Christian-Buddhist Meditation Conference recently. Here he presented this centering prayer short cut to "Nirvana" to Asian Buddhist monks. Father Keating was praised as a good bridge between Christianity and Buddhism. An attendee stated that his centering prayer seemed to tie in with Transcendental Meditation, yoga mantra meditation, the Jesus prayer and Hindu readings on meditation. Tilden Edwards, founder of Shalem Inst. also quoted in Scazzero's book, p. 170 states in his book that "This mystical stream (CS) is the western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality." (*Spiritual Friend*, NY, NY, Paulist Press, 1980, p. 18). Scazzero on page 160 of his book recommends centering prayer. He states: "I often spend 5 minutes centering down... I follow James Findley's guidelines..." (James Findley is a former Trappist Monk and promoter of interspiritual contemplative monk Thomas Merton.) Relying on James Findley, Scazzero's book *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* states: 'Sit still, Sit straight, Breathe slowly and deeply... When you find your mind wandering, let your breathing bring your mind back...' (*Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, p. 160,61). Finally, contemplatives ALWAYS end up in universal salvation. Thomas Merton, Scazzero's apparent favorite and most quoted contemplative, simply says "At the center of our being (every human) is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin.. [Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, p. 157]. Why am I writing now about ~~it~~ Well! it so happens Scazzero and his books and Daily Office are the basis of an 8 week attempt to recapture emotional and spiritual health in our very evangelical/Pentecostal church.

Contemplative Prayer Movement and Its Origin

Compiled by S.E Ray

There is a prayer practice that is becoming popular within the evangelical church. It is primarily known as contemplative prayer. It is also known as centering prayer, listening prayer, breath prayer and prayer of the heart. The practice is now widely embraced and taught in secular and professed Christian seminaries, colleges, universities, organizations, ministries and

seminars throughout the United States. Academic promoters have introduced these practices in the fields of medicine; business and law, while countless secular and Christian books, magazines, seminars, and retreats are teaching 'y people how to incorporate these techniques into their daily lives. Promoters promise physical, mental and spiritual benefits... The essential function of contemplative prayer is to enter an altered state of consciousness in order to find one's true self, thus striving to find God. Proponents of contemplative prayer teach that all human beings have a divine center and that all, not just born-again believers, should practice contemplative prayer. To achieve the state of emptiness, they employ a "mantra," a word repeated over and over to focus the mind while striving to go deep within oneself. The effects are a hypnotic like state: concentration upon one thing, disengagement from other stimuli, a high degree of openness to suggestion, a psychological and physiological state that externally resembles sleep, but in which consciousness is interiorized and the mind subject to suggestion.

In the early Middle Ages during the 4th through the 6th centuries, 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 to God without distraction. The contemplative

movement is traced to these monks. They were the first to promote the mantra as a prayer tool. [These desert fathers reasoned that 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] (Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*). Some of the most influential writers who have popularized contemplative prayer in the evangelical church are Richard Foster and Brennan Manning. Both these men have written popular Christian books about contemplative prayer. And both quote the Catholic mystics such as Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating. Through the late 1960s and early 1970s, Father Keating and Father Bennington met together with an effort to understand the mass defection of young Catholics at the time these people were drawn in part to the East's meditation practices. Their research led Keating then an abbot at a Massachusetts monastery, to begin unearthing a similar meditative method based on a Christian tradition [the Desert Fathers]. The East was mixed with Catholicism to yield new appeal to the defecting younger generation of the time.

Contemplative prayer differs from Christian prayer in that the intent of the technique is to bring the practitioner to the center of his own being. There he is, supposedly, to experience the presence of God who [already] dwells in him. Christian prayer, on the contrary, centers on God in a relational way, as an independent power apart from oneself but realized intimately through the Holy Spirit. The confusion of this technique with Christian prayer arises from a misunderstanding of the indwelling of God. The fact that God indwells us does not mean that we can capture His presence by mental techniques. Nor does it mean that we are identical with Him in our deepest self...

Silence, appropriate body posture and above all, emptying the mind through repetition 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 near to God... Silence is the language that God speaks.. says Thomas Keating who taught "centering prayer" to more than 31,000 last year. Keating suggests that those who pray repeat some 'sacred word' like God or Jesus." (Newsweek, January 6, 1992, article called, "Talking to God" p.44.)

The God Who is [Already] There

Francis Schaeffer once wrote a book entitled *The God Who IS There*. Now, conversely, the Contemplative mystics teach that God is already there, namely He indwells every human in his inner and "higher self." But furthermore they teach that God not only indwells every human but He indwells all his creation. This is not exactly pantheism, but a variant called panentheism. Pantheism teaches that God is all things. But Pantheism has now been combined with Theism (God is a personality) and this produces panentheism, which attempts to retain God's personality but adds that He also indwells every created thing. Contemplatives fully schooled in the Contemplative paradigm embrace panentheism. Fr. Ken Kaisch, a prominent teacher of the contemplative, has written in his book, *Finding God*: "The first and important result [of this prayer] is an increasing sense of God's presence in all things." William Johnson also states in his book *The Mystical Way*, that: God is the core of my being and the core of all things." (compiled from Ray Yungen). But this teaching undermines the biblical teaching of the sinfulness of all men and makes the atonement at the cross unnecessary. Furthermore if God is in every human and all things then he is in all religions. Tony Compolo and others see that this is a necessary corollary and Compolo has stated: 'Mysticism provides hope for common ground between Christianity and Islam.' (*Speaking My Mind*).

The lure of mysticism of all varieties belies a huge hollowed out vacuum in current evangelical spirituality, coui~esy of the Seeker - Sensitive. What else can account for the seeming insatiable hunger for all things mystical and particularly physical techniques leading to some kind of mystical and altered state of ecstasy. Across the evangelical spectrum people are signing on to various expressions of the contemplative. Below are a series of examples that defy understanding:

- Brennen Manning in his book "The Signature of Jesus" which explicitly gives training for centering techniques has his book endorsed by Max Lucado and Amy Grant.
- Youth Specialties has gone aggressively for contemplative spirituality being supported by Zondervan. The president of Youth Specialties, M. Oestreicher, is quoted as saying that 'Christianity is an eastern religion.' He dismisses criticism in the following quotes: 'If a Buddhist is using a breathing exercise to bring some peace to her life - Bless her. But that shouldn't have any bearing on whether I chose to focus on my god-given breath.' But, Mike Perschon an Edmonton associate pastor of a Mennonite church describes in a magazine "YouthWorker" his contemplative experience: "I built myself a room - a tiny sanctuary in a basement closet filled with books on spiritual disciplines, contemplative prayer and Christian mysticism. In that space, I lit candles, burned incense, hung rosaries and listened to tapes of Benedictine monks. I meditated for hours on word, images, and sounds. I reached the point of being able to achieve alpha brain patterns."

This appears much more than focusing on my god-given breath. Though some may pursue contemplative as a way to be silent etc, the origin of all this is ancient Catholic mysticism borrowed from Eastern mysticism in the 4th century and mixed with a Catholic tradition of monasticism.

The Contemplative Paradigm

- God lives deeply inside every human.
- Man's Problem: All mans problems are from not being in contact with God inside.
- By ancient prayer techniques man can restore union with God within.
- Sin is neglecting to establish union with God within.

The Gospel Paradigm

- God requires righteousness
- Man's Problem: Since Adam all have sinned and stand condemned before a holy God.
- Christ died to pay the debt of man's sin.
- Christ's righteousness is credited to the believing sinner's record.
- God regenerates sinners who believe the Gospel and gives them the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- Man is thus accepted in God's sight.
- Believers now focus on God and what He has done for them.