

Rick Warren Speaks Out Against Those Warning the Church of Meditation by John Lanagan

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ~ 2 Corinthians 11:14

Perhaps stung by criticism about his Daniel Plan alliance with three well known New Age doctors, Rick Warren simultaneously addressed and sidestepped the *meditation* issue during a recent sermon.¹ Warren never acknowledged his own promotion of teachers of anti-biblical meditative practices such as contemplative prayer, never addressed the Daniel Plan controversy, but seemed to accuse instead the Christians who sounded the alarm about Eastern/New Age meditation advocates Dr. Mehmet Oz, Dr. Daniel Amen, and Dr. Mark Hyman.

In a seeming attempt to “spin” the continuing controversy, Rick Warren claimed Christians on the Internet have been warning *against* biblical meditation!

With a touch of sarcasm and making a scary, mocking, wooing sound, Rick Warren stated:

It’s called meditation. Meditation? What in the world is that? Some people think, wow, that’s scary. This has actually become a controversial word. Some very, very confused believers have been teaching—I’ve seen it on the Internet—that Christians should be afraid of meditation and run from meditation. That’s nonsense! The Bible talks about meditation and commands it.

Wait a minute. He’s “seen it on the Internet?” In reality, Rick Warren cannot identify one Bible-believing blogger or online discernment or research ministry that teaches that Christians should fear and “run from” biblical meditation.

Biblical meditation is simply reflecting upon or pondering the Word of God. We “chew” upon it, or as Warren himself described it, we “*ruminates*” on what we read in God’s Word. It is wonderful, powerful, and something we are commanded to do (*Joshua 1:8*).

In biblical meditation, a repetitive word or chant is never used, the mind never ceases being active, and there is never an altered state of consciousness. Thus, one does not enter what is known as *the silence*. But this is exactly what happens during Eastern/New Age meditation. In his sermon, Warren explained it very well: “*So when the Bible says meditate it’s not talking about zone-out in some psychic, New Age trance, or put your mind in neutral and contemplate your navel. Ommm.*”

“Ommm,” indeed. Rick Warren has played a significant role for many years in promoting contemplative prayer—the barely disguised, “*Christian-ized*” version of Eastern/New Age meditation. Popular and influential, he has helped publicize many contemplative teachers—Richard Foster and Dallas Willard (both exalted in *The Purpose Driven Church*, pp. 126-127),

Henri Nouwen (a favorite of his wife's, he says), Tricia Rhodes, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Gary Thomas (a "friend" of Warren's), and many others (see quotes at the end of this article.)

Contemplative teachers in the Christian camp will not advise believers to focus on a mantra like "Ommm" (for example), but rather on a word or phrase like "Jesus" or "Abba Father." In this way, the contemplative prayer appears "Christian" but nevertheless serves as entrance to the *silence*.

Many of those who enter the *silence* frequently end up believing all is in God, or God is in all—beliefs contradictory to biblical teaching and to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. *Sue Monk Kidd* is just such a person. She started off as a conservative Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, but when she was introduced to Thomas Merton, it changed her whole spiritual outlook, and eventually she became a worshiper of the goddess Sophia, saying that God is even in excrement. And should we not be concerned that her name sits on the back of Dallas Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, and yet Rick Warren *recommends that book* on his website and shows great admiration and recognition for Willard's role in the Spiritual Formation (contemplative prayer) movement in Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church*.

The *silence* is the realm of deceptive spirits. And more and more churches, ministries, organizations, and schools are going contemplative. For Rick Warren to stand up (just days after New Age meditation advocates Oz, Hyman, and Amen have addressed his congregation and even referring at times to their style of meditation) and belittle, mock, and scorn Christians who are warning against eastern style meditation coming into the church all the while he has been promoting the teachers of such meditation for years, is astounding, not to mention very wrong.

Rick Warren's explanation on biblical meditation is not the explanation Christians need to hear, not when Henri Nouwen, Gary Thomas, Richard Foster, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Brennan Manning, Thomas Merton, and others who have been extolled by Warren are teaching millions to go into the contemplative silence.

From Lighthouse Trails: Quotes by some of those whom Rick Warren has promoted over the last couple decades:

Gary Thomas: *"It is particularly difficult to describe this type of prayer in writing, as it is best taught in person. In general however, centering prayer works like this: Choose a word (Jesus or Father, for example) as a focus for contemplative prayer. Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing."*²

Of Gary Thomas, Rick Warren states: *"I think highly of his work ... he tells them [readers] how they can make the most of their spiritual journeys. He places an emphasis on practical spiritual exercises."*³

Tricia Rhodes: *“Take deep breaths, concentrating on relaxing your body. Establish a slow, rhythmic pattern. Breathe in God’s peace, and breathe out your stresses, distractions, and fears. Breathe in God’s love, forgiveness, and compassion, and breathe out your sins, failures, and frustrations. Make every effort to “stop the flow of talking going on within you—to slow it down until it comes to a halt.”*”⁴

Rick Warren about Rhodes: *“This book is a quiet-time companion for those who hunger for a greater intimacy with God. It offers fresh insight into little understood aspects of prayer and introduces a step-by-step journey of learning contemplative prayer.”*⁵

Henri Nouwen: *“Through the discipline of contemplative prayer, Christian leaders have to learn to listen to the voice of love ... For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required.”* (Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, pp. 6, 31-32)

Of Henri Nouwen, Rick Warren says: *“My wife, Kay, recommends this book [In the Name of Jesus]: “It’s a short book, but it hits at the heart of the minister. It mentions the struggles common to those of us in ministry: the temptation to be relevant, spectacular and powerful. I highlighted almost every word!”*”⁷ (Nouwen’s books also sit on [the Saddleback website](#) today.)

Dan Kimball: *“Meditative prayer like that we experienced in the labyrinth resonates with hearts of emerging generations. If we had the room, we would set up a permanent labyrinth to promote deeper prayer.”*⁸

Rick Warren about Kimball’s book, *The Emerging Church*: *“This book is a wonderful, detailed example of what a purpose-driven church can look like in a postmodern world... Dan’s book explains how to do it [reach an “emerging generation”] with the cultural- creatives who think and feel in postmodern terms. You need to pay attention to him [Kimball] because times are changing.”*⁹ (This book of Kimball’s also talks about the labyrinth as well as other forms of contemplative such as lectio divina.)

Brennan Manning: *“[T]he first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer ... simply return to listening to your sacred word. Gently return your mind to your sacred word.”* (*Ragamuffin Gospel*, p. 212, 218)

Rick Warren on Manning: *“Ragamuffin Gospel sits on Rick Warren’s website today, under “Must Read Books.” It is this very book that reveals Manning’s true affinity with contemplative spirituality. In the back of the book, Manning makes reference to Basil Pennington saying that Pennington’s methods will provide us with “a way of praying that leads to a deep living relationship with God.” However, Pennington’s methods of prayer draw from Eastern religions.*

In his book, *Finding Grace at the Center*, Pennington says: *“We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age-old wisdom of the East and “capture” it for Christ. Indeed, those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern*

techniques as possible. Many Christians who take their prayer life seriously have been greatly helped by Yoga, Zen, TM and similar practices.” (pp. 5-6) Saddleback readers will get Pennington when they are given *Ragamuffin Gospel*.

Leonard Sweet: *“Mysticism, once cast to the sidelines of the Christian tradition, is now situated in postmodernist culture near the center.... In the words of one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, Jesuit philosopher of religion/dogmatist Karl Rahner, “The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will be nothing.” [Mysticism] is metaphysics arrived at through mindbody experiences. Mysticism begins in experience; it ends in theology.”* (*Quantum Spirituality*, p. 76).

Rick Warren on Leonard Sweet: *For extensive documentation on Warren’s ongoing comradeship with Leonard Sweet, read A “Wonderful” Deception by Warren B. Smith. Leonard Sweet spoke at the Saddleback Small Groups Conference a couple years ago, for one example.*

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun: One of the authors that has been in the Saddleback Spiritual Growth Center for a long time is Adele Ahlberg Calhoun author of *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (the one Saddleback is recommending). The book is promoting mantra meditation, giving detailed instructions on several types of contemplative practices. In addition, the author quotes from many New Age sympathizers and New Age contemplatives. In *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Ahlberg Calhoun encourages the use of centering prayer, breath prayers, contemplative prayer, labyrinths, palms-up, palms-down exercises, and recommends for further reading a who’s who of mystics.

What is the “Fruit” of Contemplative Prayer?

Where does contemplative prayer lead? Listen to these two quotes by men who have been promoted by Rick Warren, and you will see the answer to that question. It is an answer that should greatly trouble Bible believing Christians, realizing the implications by *“America’s Pastor”*:

Henri Nouwen: *“Today 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.”*—From *Sabbatical Journey*, Nouwen’s last book, page 51, 1998 Hardcover Edition

Thomas Merton: *“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.”* Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, pp. 157-158.

****Most of these quotes above are taken from Ray Yungen’s book, *A Time of Departing*.**

Endnotes:

1. Part 4: The Prayer That Changes You <http://saddleback.com/mc/m/903D>
2. Gary Thomas, (from *Sacred Pathways*, 1st ed. p. 185)
3. Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox, "Book Look" section (Issue #40, 2/20/2002)
4. Tricia Rhodes, *The Soul at Rest* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), p. 28.
5. Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox (February 18, 2004).
6. Quote by Saddleback pastor Lance Witt, "Enjoying God's Presence in Solitude"
7. Rick Warren quoting Kay Warren on the Ministry Toolbox (Issue #54, 6/5/2002).
8. Dan Kimball, "A-Maze-ing Prayer"
9. Rick Warren in the foreword of Kimball's book, *The Emerging Church*

This has been a special exclusive report by John Lanagan of *My Word Like Fire Ministries*.