

Dear friends,

I was saddened by a recent mailing that was sent to our Nazarene pastors in Tennessee and Georgia . It has the address of Albany , GA , and appears to have been mailed by Don and Sue Butler. I do not know them, and to my knowledge have never had a conversation with them. They have copied materials from a website for "concerned Nazarenes". If you did not receive their mailing, feel free to disregard my email. However, I cannot leave their accusations unchallenged.

In the packet they accuse me of thriving on mysticism, which they identify as contemplative prayer or centering prayer. They also attack the practice of Lectio Divinia and the Emergent Church . I quote, "The biggest heresy in our opinion is the praying method being called Contemplative/Centering Prayer (known as mysticism). Where is the scripture for such new age stuff? Dr. Daniel Boone thrives on it, he says in an Alumni Spotlight. If he does...does Trevecca?" End quote. There is also vicious anti-Catholic tone throughout the material. You are invited to "join the fight to throw the bums out before the Lord pours His wrath upon our denomination". I, somehow, become their poster child for the Emergent Church movement. Trevecca is accused on the website of having yoga classes to introduce people to Hinduism. Spiritual giants like Thomas Merton, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and others are de-Christianized. They take pieces of a letter that I wrote completely out of context, a letter which the receiver never replied to. They have rejected means of communicating or answering these accusations on their website.

I do not wish to create an issue where there is none, but want to provide you with enough information to make your own judgment. I am providing the following attachments:

1. The Alumni Spotlight article, noted above in their quote, from The Tower, the magazine of Nazarene Theological Seminary. They take a few words from the last paragraph (noted in red) to accuse me of unchristian mysticism. This article is copied at the bottom of this email in its entirety.

2. I've attached above a reliable definition of Lectio Divinia from Richard Foster's book Prayer. It is simply a way of praying the scriptures

and living into them. I am accused of practicing this "new age stuff". Oh that I might be even more guilty of praying this way!

3. I've attached a definition of Centering Prayer/Contemplative Prayer, also from Foster's book. My most recent recollection of centering prayer was at the Prayer Summit sponsored by the denomination and hosted on the Trevecca campus. Many of you were here.

In addition, we don't have yoga classes. I think someone saw an announcement on our bulletin board for a class being offered somewhere in the area. While I have no need to defend yoga, and have never practiced it, I think most people consider it an option for increasing their flexibility. Maybe I need to be guilty of that.

The attack on Catholics is deeply un-Wesleyan. John Wesley spoke of having a catholic spirit toward our fellow Christians. While Nazarenes are different from Catholics in very significant ways, we believe that we will share eternity with them in the presence of the Christ who prayed that we might be one. I find this attitude arrogant, un-Christlike, and unholy. God has not raised us up to pass judgment on Catholics and I do not believe that God can bless a divisive, judgmental people.

As for the Emergent Church, I've spent about 4 hours over the past 4 years thinking about it. It hardly ever comes up in my conversations. I am not well enough informed to express the essence of the movement. I actually don't even have a dog in this hunt! As with most movements, there is probably some good and some bad in it. Regarding the Emergent Church, I tend to take the position of Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39 - "If this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them - in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" If the Emergent Church movement causes us to read the Bible more, repeat the historic creeds of our faith, pray as the ancient saints did, lead the next generation to authentic Christian faith...I wouldn't want to be opposing it.

When people assume the role of judge/jury/God, create their list of buzzwords that cannot be uttered without castigation, spread slander without even first conversing with the person they have attacked, and close themselves to rational dialogue - this, my friends, is wrong. I refuse to allow this behavior to stand without protest. As always, I am called to stand ready to forgive the sins of repentant persons.

My deepest regret is to divert time from the essential things that are occupying us these days:

- Campus revival this week*
- Guiding our university to become even stronger in the mission of God during an economic downturn*
- Establishing the Center for Social Justice to provide Wesleyan leaders for the care of the most needy in our world*
- Establishing the Center for Worship Arts to provide the world with people who can reclaim the arts to the glory of God.*

These are worthy endeavors. Pray with me for God's guidance. As for the mailing, pray that God will bring light and a spirit of repentance to those seeking to do harm.

Blessings,

Dan Boone

Living the Experience of Scripture
From the book *Prayer* by Richard J. Foster
Pages 161-162

Learning Recollection

There are three basic steps into Contemplative Prayer, and I find that often people are helped immensely by a simple description of them.

The first has been traditionally called *recollection*. It means a simple recollecting of ourselves until we are unified or whole. Basil Pennington uses the phrase *centering prayer*. Sue Monk Kidd calls it the *prayer of presence*. The old Quakers used the term *centering down*. They all refer to the same experience. The idea is to let go of all competing distractions until we are truly present where we are.

Here is one approach to recollection. Begin by seating yourself comfortably and then slowly and deliberately let all tension and anxiety drop away. Become aware of God's presence in the room. Perhaps you will want to picture Jesus sitting in the chair across from you, for he is indeed truly present. If frustrations or distractions arise, simply lift them up into the arms of the Father and let him care for them. This is not suppressing our inner turmoil but letting go of it. Suppression implies a pressing down, a keeping in check, whereas in recollection we are giving away, releasing. It is even more than a neutral psychological relaxing. It is an active surrendering, a "self-abandonment to divine providence," to use the language of Jean-Pierre de Caussade.

Precisely because the Lord is present with us, we can relax and let go of everything, for in his presence nothing really matters, nothing is of importance except attending to him. We allow inner distractions and frustrations to melt away before him as snow before the sun. We allow him to calm the storms that rage within by saying, "Peace, be still." We allow his great silence to still our noisy hearts.

I must warn you that this centeredness does not come easily or quickly in the beginning. Most of us live such fractured and fragmented lives that collectedness is foreign to us. The moment we try to be genuinely centered, we become painfully aware of how distracted we really are. Romano Guardini notes, "When we try to compose ourselves, unrest redoubles in intensity, not unlike the manner in which at night, when we try to sleep, cares or desires assail us with a force that they do not possess during the day."

We must not be discouraged at this. We must be prepared to devote the entire time of contemplation to this recollection without any thought for result or reward. We willingly "waste our time" in this manner as a lavish love offering to the Father. God will then take what looks like a foolish waste and use it to bring us further into his loving presence. Perceptively Guardini comments, "If at first we achieve no more than the understanding of how much we lack in inner unity, something will have been gained, for in some way we will have made contact with that center which knows no distraction."

Living the Experience of Scripture
From the book *Prayer* by Richard J. Foster
Pages 148-150

Lectio Divina

In Christian meditation we seek to live the experience of Scripture. Alexander White says, “You open your New Testament And, by your imagination, that moment you are one of Christ’s disciples on the spot, and are at His feet . . . with your imagination anointed with holy oil . . . at one time, you are the publican: at another time, you are the prodigal . . . at another time, you are Mary Magdalene: at another time, Peter in the porch.”

As a practical aid in living the experience of Scripture, Ignatius of Loyola encourages us to apply all our senses to our task. We smell the sea. We hear the lap of water along the shore. We see the crowd. We feel the sun on our heads and the hunger pangs in our stomachs. We taste the salt in the air. We touch the hem of his garment.

Suppose we want to meditate on Jesus’ staggering statement “my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). Our task is not so much to study the passage as to be initiated into the reality of which the passage speaks. We brood on the truth that he is now filling us with his peace. The heart, the mind, and the spirit are awakened to his in-flowing peace. We sense all motions of fear stilled and overcome by “a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7). Rather than dissecting peace, we are entering into it. We are enveloped, absorbed, gathered into his peace.

The wonderful thing about such experiences is that the self is quite forgotten. We are no longer worried about how we can make ourselves more at peace, for we are attending to the impartation of peace within our hearts. No longer do we laboriously think up ways to act peacefully, for acts of peace spring spontaneously from within.

So many passages of Scripture provide a touchstone for Meditative Prayer: “Be still and know that I am God”; “Abide in my love”; “I am the good shepherd”; “Rejoice in the Lord always.” In each case we are seeking to discover God near us and are longing to encounter his presence.

Remember, in Meditative Prayer God is always addressing our will. Christ confronts us and asks us to choose. Having heard his voice, we are to obey his word. It is this ethical call to repentance, to change, to obedience that most clearly distinguishes Christian meditation from its Eastern and secular counterparts. In Meditative Prayer there is no loss of identity, no merging with the cosmic consciousness, no fanciful astral travel. Rather, we are called to life-transforming obedience because we have encountered the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Christ is truly present among us to heal us, to forgive us, to change us, to empower us.

There is a technical word for what I have been describing, and it might be helpful for you to know it – *lectio divina* (divine reading). This is a kind of reading in which the mind descends into the heart, and both are drawn into the love and goodness of God. Henri Nouwen once pointed to a lovely picture hanging in his apartment and said to me, “This is *lectio divina*.” It depicted a woman with an open Bible in her lap, but her eyes were lifted upward. Go you get the idea? We are doing more than reading words; we are seeking “the Word exposed in the words,” to use the phrase of Karl Barth. We are listening with the heart to the Holy within. This prayerful reading, as we might call it, edifies us and strengthens us.