

The Deadly, Sweet-tasting Poison known as *Lectio Divina*

by Jeremy James



Thomas Keating meeting the Dalai Lama

It is sad to relate that many professing Christians today – who ought to know better – are falling for the trap known as *lectio divina*. This is an old monastic technique for 'exploring' the Scriptures which has recently been revived. Its practitioners claim that it has enhanced their understanding of the Bible and given them an exciting new perspective on God's Word, especially as it applies to them personally. They say the practice of *lectio divina* has enabled them to feel closer to God and to have a greater sense of what it means to experience God.

In this paper we will examine this ancient practice and the real agenda behind its revival.

What is *lectio divina*?

Most of the well-meaning Christians who are promoting this practice do not seem to know its origin and do not always use the same terminology when describing it. They may know it simply as a quiet, reflective way of studying the Bible, usually in a group setting. In the main they are not aware that it originated in the Catholic Church and that its modern resurgence is linked directly to the worldwide ecumenical program controlled by Rome.

Thomas Keating, a Roman Catholic priest, is a world authority on contemplative prayer and a well-known spokesman on the subject of *lectio divina* – or *meditatio scripturarum* as it is sometimes called. For this reason we will use his paper from October, 2008, for reference purposes: *The Classical Monastic Practice of Lectio Divina*.

Keating: "...*lectio divina* is not the same as reading the Scriptures for the purpose of private edification, encouragement, or getting acquainted with the many-sided aspects of revelation..."

This should immediately give rise to concern. He explicitly states that his method or technique – which has been used by monks in the Roman Catholic Church since the 4th century AD – is not identical with a study of Scripture for the purpose of personal edification. If that is the case, then it must include an element that either complements or is a substitute for personal edification.

Keating: "...a particular structure, such as is required in all forms of common prayer, tends to limit spontaneity to the movement of the Holy Spirit, which is the heart of the practice..."

Here he identifies the distinguishing element at "the heart of the practice." This allegedly provides the "spontaneity" that takes it beyond "all forms of common prayer" and enables the practitioner to experience "the movement of the Holy Spirit."

So, according to one of its foremost exponents, *lectio divina* is a category of prayer beyond "all forms of common prayer," a kind of super-prayer as it were.

He then goes on to describe the technique itself:

Keating: "With some variations, it usually goes like this: A passage is read out loud three or four times followed by two or three minutes of silence. After each reading the participants apply themselves inwardly to the text in specified ways. After the first reading, they become aware of a word or phrase. After the second they reflect about the meaning or significance of the text. After the third reading, they respond in spontaneous prayer. After the fourth reading, they simply rest in God's presence and after a period of silence, those who wish are invited to do a brief faith sharing on the text. In some cases, there is a brief sharing after the third or fourth reading and period of silence..."



From his description we can see that *lectio divina* (Latin for 'divine reading') is an ancient form of prayer or prayerful meditation, where the object of meditation is a "word or phrase" taken from Scripture.

According to Keating the emphasis is on silence, looking within, spontaneous prayer, resting in God's presence, more silence, sharing, and yet more silence.

We would note, firstly, that silence is never equated with prayer anywhere in Scripture. Secondly, as countless Bible scholars have shown, no passage of Scripture can be divorced from its context. Keating confirms that the exploration of the "meaning or significance" of the text during *lectio divina* is conducted without any necessary regard to the context of the "word or phrase" selected. Therefore, by itself, it cannot possibly reveal the *objective* meaning of any selected passage.

There are a number of other problematic aspects to what Keating is describing. For example, what is actually being *shared*, knowledge or opinion? What role is played by one's *imagination* when applying oneself inwardly? Why does he imply that something which is 'spontaneous' is more spiritual than something which is not?

And what can he possibly mean by the injunction to "simply rest in God's presence"? He would seem to be implying that *lectio divina* is a technique that can bring the practitioner into the actual presence of God.

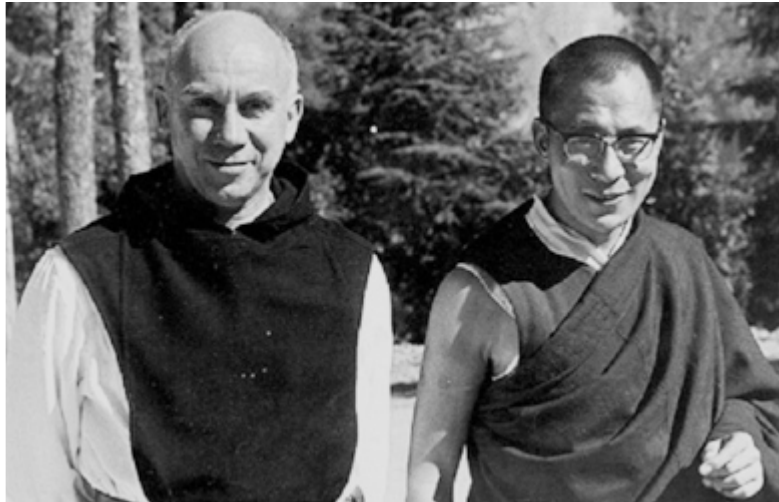
These questions give further reason for concern.

The Four Stages or 'moments'

Keating then gives a more detailed description of the steps used in the so-called 'scholastic' version of *lectio divina*, a structure which he says is somewhat less in evidence in the 'monastic' version. Apparently the 'scholastic' version was formulated in the twelfth century by a Catholic monk, the 'angelic Guigo', in his work, *The Ladder of Monks*, while the popularization (though not the invention) of the monastic version is ascribed to the mystic and ascetic, John Cassian, late in the 4th century. Cassian was a great favorite of the modern Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, who in turn was highly praised by Pope Francis when he addressed the Houses of Congress in Washington D.C. in September, 2015.

Keating: "The scholastic form divides the process into stages or steps in a hierarchical pattern. Following the reading of a passage of Scripture, the first step was to allow a phrase or word to arise out of the text and to focus on it. This was called *lectio*. The second was the reflective part, pondering upon the words of the sacred text, and was called *meditatio* ('meditation'). The spontaneous movement of the will in response to these reflections was called *oratio* ('affective prayer'). And as these reflections and acts of will simplified, one moved from time to time to a state of resting in the presence of God, and that was called *contemplatio* ('contemplation')..."

We can see from this that *lectio divina* is more than just a technique for understanding the Bible – a task for which it is hopelessly ill-equipped – but an entry point or trapdoor leading to the entire underworld of Catholic monastic practice and mystical silence.



Thomas Merton with the Dalai Lama

Lectio divina has been around for centuries because it has served Rome well. As one of the pillars of Catholic monasticism, it has played a vital role in promoting and crystallizing the mental attitudes that have shaped the Catholic Church and made her such a deadly enemy of Biblical truth. It has enabled her eminent theologians to find the "meaning or significance" in God's Word that serve the goals of Rome and to downplay, allegorize, or simply sidestep the innumerable passages that challenge or conflict with her doctrines.

While the technique gained popularity through the writings of John Cassian and later through its incorporation into the *Rule of St Benedict* – which made its practice a fundamental feature of the European monastic tradition – the technique itself was invented by an Egyptian named Origen, who taught a number of heretical doctrines, including the allegorical method of Biblical interpretation. This was founded on his conviction that the Word of God must contain additional layers of meaning beneath the literal text and that these layers – expressed figuratively in metaphors, symbols and mystical typology – could be accessed via the *allegorical method*. This enabled him – and his successors within the Roman Catholic Church – to stretch the meaning of Scripture beyond what God had plainly intended, and even to find scriptural justification for concepts and doctrines taken from Greek and Gnostic philosophy.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Origen should have invented *lectio divina* to further this end. While it did not contribute directly to the formulation of Catholic theology, it induced the monastic and ecclesiastic communities throughout the Catholic Church to accept that Scripture had layers of meaning beyond the plain or literal meaning and that these layers could be accessed through meditative prayer, contemplative silence, and the correct use of one's imagination.

It also had an unintended consequence, as far as Origen was concerned, in that it got its practitioners to believe that Scripture had both an objective and a *subjective* meaning, and that the latter could be used to guide and direct one's personal life.

Here is how Keating describes this mystical process:

Keating: "In the monastic way of doing *lectio divina* we listen to how God is addressing us in a particular text of Scripture. From this perspective there are no stages, ladders or steps in *lectio divina*, but rather there are four moments along the circumference of a circle. All the moments of the circle are joined to each other in a horizontal and interrelated pattern as well as to the centre, which is the Spirit of God speaking to us through the text and in our hearts..."

Sadly, this kind of foolishness has great appeal in an age where Christians have very little knowledge of God's Word. Instead of engaging in a prayerful daily reading and study of Scripture, they prefer to 'dip' into the text and see what the Holy Spirit is telling them. They are relieved of the need to study the Bible in a systematic way and become familiar with its immutable truth – with knowledge, discernment and understanding. Instead, using *lectio divina*, they have only to focus on a specific verse (or even a single word) as the 'spirit' directs them and, lo, all the godly wisdom and insight that they need comes pouring into their soul. As Keating says, when this happens "the Spirit of God [is] speaking to us through the text and in our hearts."

For reasons that are difficult to fathom, many professing Christians today have come to believe that if they go along "the circumference of a circle" in their imagination and join the "four moments" to the center in an "interrelated pattern," that they will hear the voice of God speaking in their hearts. It is difficult to accept that anyone who does this has found Christ and been born again – or that they have read the Bible even once from cover to cover.

***Lectio divina* supposedly 'expands' one's awareness**

Keating goes on to say:

Keating: "They would sit with that sentence or phrase without thinking of stages or following some predetermined schema, but just listening, repeating slowly the same short text over and over again. This receptive disposition enabled the Holy Spirit to expand their capacity to listen. As they listened, they might perceive a new depth to the text or an expanding meaning..."

Here we are brought into a domain that ought to alarm anyone who sincerely believes in the truth and sufficiency of God's Word. The practitioner is expected to repeat a word or phrase over and over again in his mind (or perhaps in a softly audible voice) until its meaning expands. He is not to analyze it or follow "some predetermined schema" but to enter into a receptive state and just listen.

Anyone who is familiar with yoga, eastern meditation, or the process of hypnotic suggestion will recognize what is happening here. The practitioner is being invited to empty his mind, to surrender or set aside his critical faculties, and to accept as spiritually legitimate whatever images or ideas impinge spontaneously on the screen of his mind.

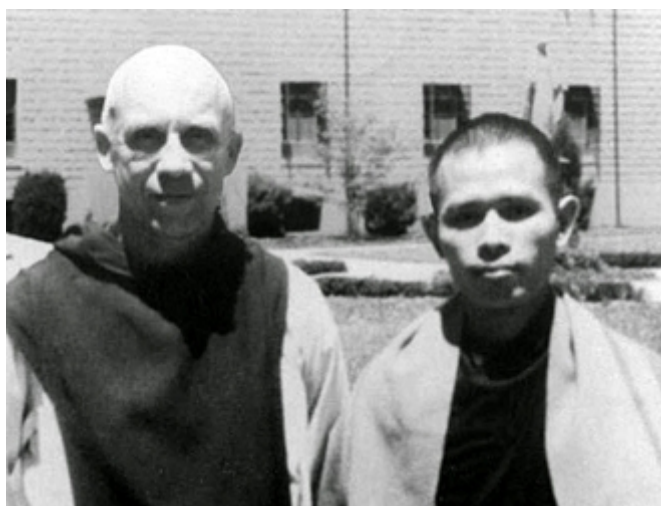
The more a person practices *lectio divina*, the more he is able to enter this "receptive" state and receive these unbidden impressions. Thus many practitioners of *lectio divina* become addicted to this mystical practice, believing they have found a new way of discovering and exploring Biblical truth. Some even believe it allows them to enter into and experience the presence of God.

Here is how Keating describes the latter:

Keating: "As this listening attitude stabilises, they might experience moments of contemplative prayer in the strict sense, in which they are just present to God, or quietly engulfed in the divine presence. In this situation, one's attentiveness to God expands into the sheer awareness of the divine presence. For the moment, we break through the veil of our own ways of thinking. The external word of God in Scripture awakens us to the interior Word of God in our inmost being..."

The pride implied by this passage is unsettling. To a born-again believer it reeks of heresy, and yet many who profess to be Christian are beguiled by the prospect that they might be "engulfed in the divine presence," whether through *lectio divina* or by some other means.

This is not a Christian goal and it has nothing whatever to do with the Word of God!



Thomas Merton with Thich Nhat Hanh, who has written extensively on Buddhist meditation.

How can I be sure? Because I have studied the Word of God and can recognize the difference between Biblical truth and mystical deception. The Word of God equips every believer with the ability to discern the difference. *Every* believer! So, if a professing Christian is unable to tell the difference, then he or she no longer regards the Bible as the sole, sufficient, and inerrant word of God.

This may seem like a harsh assessment but, sadly, this is where we are today. A great many professing Christians have but a vague and insubstantial grasp of God's Word. They think it is Biblical to want to be "engulfed in the divine presence." It does not even occur to them that they are craving a mystical experience and wandering blindly into a realm where Satan is at his most dangerous.

A true believer lives by the words of the Psalmist: "**I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.**" (Psalm 130:5) A false believer, on the other hand, wants a personal encounter with God, and he wants it *now*. He has heard that the contemplative mystics, a monastic movement, or some other elect group have found a short cut to God and are having "experiences" and "getting results" – and he craves what he foolishly believes they have.

Anyone who wants to live in "the sheer awareness of the divine presence" (as Keating puts it) is opening a door to self-deception. The Enemy will take that desire and build on it, utilizing every device he can muster – lucid dreams, prophetic visions, amazing coincidences, flashes of light, disarming insights, periods of elation – to convince the practitioner that God is now working in his life in a new and special way. And he can do this because the practitioner *has given him permission*.

Only from God?

Keating tries to define these changes as something that can originate only with God – but he is wrong!

Keating: "Our awareness expands without our having done anything but allow the Spirit to act. It is a heart-to-heart exchange with Christ..."

The moment a person turns off his mind and invites a supernatural force to work in his life, he has no way of knowing what kind of 'spirit' will respond to his invitation. Practitioners naively assume that, because they are Christian, the only 'spirit' that can enter their lives is the Holy Spirit. But they forget that there are two other possibilities.

The first is the spirit of their own being. Man is a tripartite being – body, soul, and spirit. We can easily be deceived by our own wishful thinking and vain expectations. Our fallen nature craves experiences and must be restrained. The moment we rely on our "heart" to guide us, we enter into a downward spiral of self-destruction. As God has warned, "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" (Jeremiah 17:9)

The second, and easily the most dangerous, is the spirit of the fallen angels. Satan has the power to impart a wide range of 'spiritual' experiences. Many have fallen for his enticements, those sweet emotional states and ecstatic moments – often fleeting – that cause the practitioner to return again and again, hoping for more. Before very long, his life has drifted far from God's Word, into a world where his spiritual foundation rests primarily on imagination, intuition, feelings, signs, and wonders – not to mention his expanding awareness!

The mysticism of *lectio divina* is revealed unashamedly by Keating in a number of flagrantly pagan statements toward the end of his paper:

Keating: "It is a movement from conversation to communion. It also enables us to express our deep spiritual experience of union with God in words or symbols that are appropriate... In contemplative prayer, we are in touch with the source of all creation; hence, we transcend ourselves and our limited worldviews. As a result, we feel at one with other people and enjoy a sense of belonging to the universe... The Divinity begins to dwell in us bodily in proportion to our capacity to receive it as we grow in union with the Eternal Word. This process needs to be nourished both by the interior silence of contemplative prayer and cultivated by *lectio divina* (in the sense of listening)."

These words could just as easily have been written by a Hindu yogi! Gnostic and New Age tracts are littered with expressions like "our deep spiritual experience of union with God," "in touch with the source of all creation," "we transcend ourselves and our limited worldviews," "we feel at one with other people and enjoy a sense of belonging to the universe," "Divinity begins to dwell in us bodily," and "nourished...by the interior silence."



A Hindu priest places a religious shawl on Pope Francis during a conference in Sri Lanka, January, 2015.

This is not just an alternative, or false, form of Christianity but a deeply subversive attack on true Christianity. It is a cunning perversion of God's Holy Word. It is eastern mysticism masquerading as Biblical truth. And it is the Roman Catholic Church at her most devious and deceitful.

Be warned – there is no 'safe' form of *lectio divina*. It cannot be divorced from its mystical roots or its experiential context. *Lectio divina* undermines and distorts God's Word; it opens practitioners to the false promise of subjective truth; it exploits the carnal human craving for 'experiences'; it portrays imagination as a possible source of divine inspiration; it reinforces the false human belief that God can be contacted through the use of techniques; and it encourages practitioners to enter an altered state of consciousness, where discernment and sobriety are suspended and spontaneous mental impressions are accepted as messages from the Holy Spirit.

It would be difficult to devise a method or technique of equal simplicity that could deliver the same kind of venom: "**Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!**" (James 3:5)

The Official Papal Endorsement of *Lectio Divina*

Some might see *lectio divina* as a purely monastic activity with little relevance, even to Catholics, but, significantly, this is not the case. The Second Vatican Council (1965) lifted this ancient technique from relative obscurity and placed it at the very heart of contemporary Catholic practice. Rome has continued to raise its profile, not only among Catholics, but also among the so-called "separated brethren" (another Vatican term for 'Protestants').

The architects of the coming one world religion recognized that doctrinal differences would continue to place substantial barriers between various religious denominations and groups. They realized, furthermore, that it would be easier to reduce the perceived importance of doctrine than it would be to coerce everyone into accepting the same body of doctrine. To do this they had to convince the masses that the same truth was common to all mankind, that it lay *beyond* doctrine, and that it had to be *experienced*. This is why mysticism plays such an important role in their overall strategy. They know that if they can get a significant proportion of professing Christians to replace prayer with meditation – principally by confusing the two – they will come to accept that Biblical truth is to some degree personal and subjective. This will greatly diminish the importance of doctrine and stimulate a yearning for inner experiences and direct, personal communication with God. The mystics will be portrayed as exemplary saints whom the rest of the world should emulate.

Lectio divina is central to this strategy.

Here is how Pope Benedict XVI described its importance to an international Catholic congress of cardinals and bishops in 2005:

"If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, *Lectio divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times." – Pope Benedict XVI, On the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 16 September 2005.

Note in particular their intention to find new ways of spreading *lectio divina*! These ways will be "carefully thought through and in step with the times."

The Catholic clergy will also play an important role in spreading the practice of *lectio divina*:

"Those aspiring to the ministerial priesthood are called to a profound personal relationship with God's word, particularly in *lectio divina*, so that this relationship will in turn nurture their vocation" – Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010.

The Pope also conceded the fundamentally idolatrous nature of *lectio divina* when he linked it with "the Mother of God":

"We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity. We find the supreme synthesis and fulfilment of this process in the Mother of God." – Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 30 September 2010.

The Two Awesome Weapons of a Born-Again Christian

As I have said many times in these papers, born-again Christians have only two weapons, but they are awesome. These are repentant prayer and diligent Bible study. Satan fears them both and is doing all he can to reduce their use. He may not be able to stop Christians from praying, but he can get them to pray in the wrong way. Equally, he may not be able to stop Christians from reading the Bible, but he can get them to read it in the wrong way. And *lectio divina* enables him to do both!

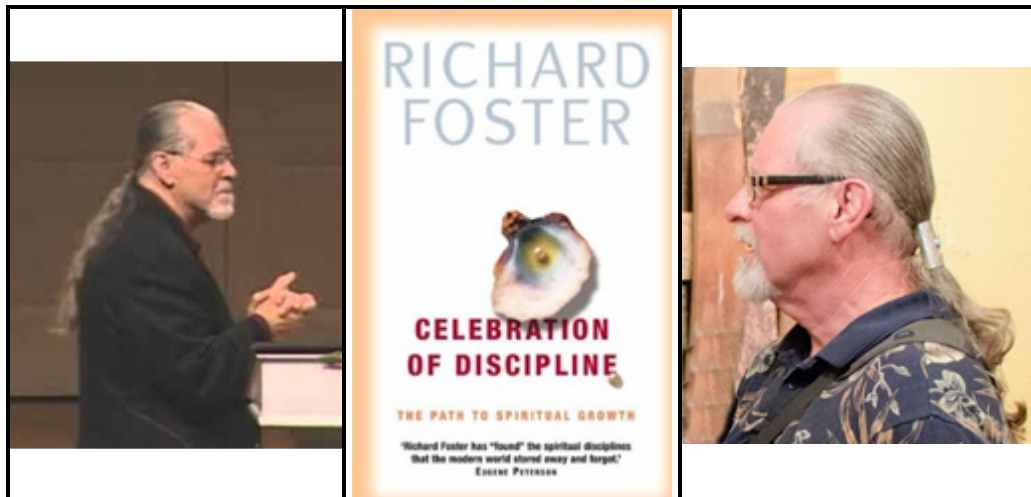
The Roman Catholic Church is in the vanguard of his plan to disarm true Christians. She is working quietly but with great determination to spread *lectio divina* and get as many professing Christians as possible to practice daily meditation, to empty their minds, to listen to their hearts, and to repeat a 'scriptural' word or phrase over and over again in the insane belief that they are studying the Word of God.

The Vatican strategy is clearly seen in the work of Renovaré, one of many groups and movements that promote contemplative prayer. All are ecumenical in nature, each working in its own way to bring all branches of 'Christianity' together under the umbrella of the Catholic Church. Renovaré, which means "to renew spiritually," was founded in 1988 by the Quaker theologian, Richard Foster. It is intensely ecumenical and deeply committed to what it calls 'spiritual formation.' While it professes to be non-denominational, it is little more than a mouthpiece for the Roman Catholic Church. For example, the Renovaré version of the Bible includes the Apocrypha, treats the early chapters of Genesis as mythology, denies the prophetic content of the book of Daniel, and endorses Replacement Theology (which rejects any future role for Israel in God's plan for mankind).

The impetus to found Renovaré came from the success of Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, which was published in 1978 and has sold over two million copies. Since his book has been highly praised by many senior figures in the Roman Catholic Church, it can be taken as a proxy for what the Vatican itself wants all professing Christians to incorporate into their lives. For this reason we need to take a close look at its contents.

***Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster**

The first thing we need to understand about Foster's book is that it fits perfectly into the Vatican agenda. The fact that its author is a Quaker is irrelevant. What matters is what he says, and he says virtually everything that a Jesuit would say. The book itself is replete with adulatory references to the Roman Catholic mystics and with material found exclusively or primarily in Roman Catholic sources. He refers approvingly to the following, often in glowing terms ("masters"), and in many cases with direct quotations from their writings:



Author	Position in the Roman Catholic (RC) Church	Biblical Christian?
Bernard of Clairvaux	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Augustine of Hippo	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Alphonsus of Liguori	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Teresa of Avila	Doctor of the RC Church	No
John of the Cross	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Catherine of Genoa	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Thomas Aquinas	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Francis de Sales	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Albertus Magnus	Doctor of the RC Church	No
Hildegard of Bingen	Doctor of the RC Church	No

Peter of Celles	RC monk	No
Wilfrid Stinissen	RC monk	No
Thomas Merton	RC monk	No
Brother Lawrence	RC monk	No
Benedict of Nursia	RC monk	No
Francis of Assisi	RC monk	No
Ignatius of Loyola	Jesuit priest	No
Jean-Pierre de Caussade	Jesuit priest	No
George Maloney	Jesuit priest	No
P. Teilhard de Chardin	Jesuit priest	No
Thomas à Kempis	RC monk	No
Meister Eckhart	RC monk	No
Dominic de Guzman	RC monk	No
Augustine Baker	RC monk	No
Juliana of Norwich	RC nun	No
Catherine of Siena	RC nun	No
Evelyn Underhill	Anglo-Catholic	No
Kenneth Leech	Anglo-Catholic priest	No
Peter Toon	Anglo-Catholic priest	No
John S Dunne	RC priest	No
François Fénelon	RC priest	No
John Henry Newman	RC priest	No
Henri Nouwen	RC priest	No
Brennan Manning	RC priest	No
Richard Rolle	RC mystic	No
Jeanne Guyon	RC mystic	No
Catherine Doherty	RC missionary	No

Given that there are 36 'Doctors' of the Roman Catholic Church, Richard Foster has managed to include references or material relating to no fewer than ten of them! To this can be added a whole host of Roman Catholic mystics and 'saints', including the founders of the Jesuit Order, the Franciscan Order, and the Dominican Order, respectively. The Trappist monk, Thomas Merton – whom the Pope praised so highly before the US Congress – is quoted no fewer than 14 times.

In addition Foster cites a number of individuals, including the following, whose teachings are blatantly gnostic, mystical or New Age:

Agnes Sanford	New Thought	No
Emmet Fox	New Thought	No
Morton Kelsey	Notre Dame professor	No
Carl Jung	Gnostic	No
George Fox	Quaker	No
Isaac Pennington	Quaker	No
Thomas Kelly	Quaker	No
John Woolman	Quaker	No
Elton Trueblood	Quaker	No

The second thing we need to bear in mind when examining *Celebration of Discipline* is that it assumes throughout that Roman Catholics are Christian. Foster doesn't even attempt to justify this false assumption, and yet his entire thesis is grounded in the belief that the traditions and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are Biblical. By pretending to have rediscovered a lost spiritual art – namely, the art of conversing with God on a personal level through the effectual practice of what Rome calls 'contemplative prayer' – Foster suggests that there is no essential difference between Christians of the first century AD and Catholics today who practice 'contemplative prayer'. Alas, many Evangelical readers of his book appear to have been taken in by this grossly misleading claim.

The 'masters of meditation'

In the second chapter of the first edition of his book (1978), Foster made a statement which was removed from subsequent editions:

"In their writings, all of the masters of meditation strive to awaken us to the fact that the universe is much larger than we know, that there are vast unexplored inner regions that are just as real as the physical world we know so well. They tell us of exciting possibilities for new life and freedom. They call us to the adventure, to be pioneers in this frontier of the Spirit." [p.13]

He brazenly states that the whole purpose of meditation, as taught by the "masters of meditation," is to explore the inner worlds and become "pioneers" in this new frontier, the "vast unexplored inner regions." This is patently unbiblical. Chapter 18 of the book of Deuteronomy states categorically that any attempt by man to explore the supernatural is utterly forbidden. It is divination pure and simple, a sin so serious and so offensive to God that it merits the most severe punishment.

Foster is not only dabbling in the supernatural, but he is teaching a technique that mystics throughout the ages have used to open the door to the 'inner world'. This is Gnosticism, not Christianity.

The "masters of meditation" whom he quotes were dangerously deluded individuals. He presents people like Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola as towering figures of great integrity whom all Christians should strive to emulate, when in reality they had abandoned the Bible and vainly devised their own system of religion. They were rebels who thought they were smart enough to get around the restrictions that the LORD imposed in Deuteronomy and elsewhere in His holy Word.

As the Apostle Paul put it:

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." (Romans 10:3)

Does this mean that they did not have spiritual experiences? Not at all. They likely had many ecstatic or mystical experiences, but none of them came from God. Through their strong personalities and their cleverly crafted writings they managed to convince a great many of their followers that they had found another way, a "more excellent way" as Foster puts it [p.14].

Throughout his book Foster hammers home the idea that a real Christian is one who boldly steps into the realm of the supernatural and experiences God for himself. Faith has no role in any of this. His path or "way" is all about *experience*:

"How then do we come to believe in a world of the spirit? Is it by blind faith? Not at all. The inner reality of the spiritual world is available to all who are willing to search for it." [p.18]

He is teaching salvation by works, without faith and without Christ. One of the most startling aspects of his book is the extent to which he ignores Christ! And on the few occasions when Christ *is* mentioned he is portrayed, not as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, but as an inner master or spiritual guide, rather like the astral form of a Hindu guru. In one of his exercises he even urges the reader to relax into a meditative state and visualize the scene where Christ fed the five thousand:

"Then in your imagination watch the crowd leave and Jesus [going] up into the hills. You are left alone. You sit on a rock overlooking the water, re-experiencing the events of the day. You become quiet, and after a little while Jesus returns and sits on a nearby rock. For a time you are both silent, looking out over the water perhaps, and enjoying one another's presence. After a bit, the Lord turns to you and asks this question, 'What may I do for you?' Then you tell Him what is in your heart – your needs, your fears, your hopes. If weeping or other emotions come, do not hinder them." [p.38]

Is he serious? Yes! As difficult as it may be for a Bible-believing Christian to understand, this man is asking his readers to contact Christ through the power of their imagination. If you doubt this then consider another passage from the original edition (1978) but omitted from later editions:



**'Ecstasy of St Teresa'
by Carlo Cignani, 1688**

Based on a mystical experience recorded by Teresa of Avila in her autobiography. In it a supernatural being thrust her through with "a long spear of gold", causing her "excessive pain" which was at the same time so sweet "that I could not wish to be rid of it."

Teresa is one of the "masters" of contemplative prayer whom the Catholic Church esteem so highly. She is one of only four women to receive the official title, *Doctor of the Church*.

"Hence, you can *actually* encounter the living Christ in the event, be addressed by His voice and be touched by His healing power. It can be more than an exercise of the imagination; it can be a genuine confrontation. Jesus Christ will actually come to you." [p.26] [emphasis in original]

This is deeply, deeply disturbing.

And how is this 'contact' achieved? According to Foster this is achieved by leaving the physical body and travelling in one's "spiritual body." Again the relevant passage may be found only in the 1978 edition:

"In your imagination allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. Look back so that you can see yourself lying in the grass and reassure your body that you will return momentarily. Imagine your spiritual self, alive and vibrant, rising up through the clouds and into the stratosphere...Go deeper and deeper into outer space until there is nothing but the warm presence of the eternal Creator....Listen quietly...Note carefully any instruction given." [p.27]

Readers who are acquainted with the phenomenon called 'out-of-body-experience', also known as *astral projection* or *soul travel*, will recognize immediately what Foster is talking about.

The same phenomenon is revered in both Hinduism and Buddhism, and is cited frequently in occult literature. Their advocates induce this state by a variety of means, many of them akin to the methods used by the Western mystics: Enter submissively into a totally relaxed state, become detached from all sensory activity, empty the mind completely, repeat a 'spiritually charged' word over and over again, allow the imaginative faculty to take over, and become unconditionally receptive to the 'spirit'.

With regular practice the practitioner is supposed to achieve total dissociation from the physical body and conscious entry into another world.

Foster follows the methods used by the Roman Catholic mystics, which differ little from the ones used by Hindu sadhus and Buddhist monks. The basic principles are the same: "Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it." [p.15] (1978 edition).

The individual must boldly "launch out into the deep" [p.3] and undertake this great adventure for himself:

"... is it not logical to conclude that we must wait for God to come and transform us? Strangely enough, the answer is no." [p.7]

The goal is to transcend one's mind and open one's heart to the divine presence. To this end the mystics use their imagination:

"We can descend with the mind into the heart most easily through the imagination." [p.29]

At this stage he anticipates a difficulty which he knows every true Christian will raise. What about the wickedness of the human heart? ("**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?**" – **Jeremiah 17:9**). Ah, but the Catholic mystics have an answer to that, an answer which Foster is satisfied will demolish all opposition to his mystical theology:

"But just as we can believe that God can take our reason (fallen as it is) and sanctify it and use it for his good purposes, so we believe he can sanctify the imagination and use *it* for his good purposes." [p.30] [emphasis in the original]

So that's how it's done! God cancels out the truth of Jeremiah 17:9 – a truth trembling with admonition – and sanctifies the practitioner's heart for His good purposes.

It is this kind of hypocrisy and double-think that makes me wonder how a Bible-believing Christian can trust anything in this book. With the wave of a magic wand – for that is exactly what it is – Foster conveniently eliminates the wretchedness, the sinfulness, and the filth of our fallen human condition. The practitioner now has a sanctified imagination and can visualize to this heart's delight. He is now licensed to practice divination, circumvent the constraints of the Bible, and enter the 'inner world'.

And now, the crucial point: The "normal foundation for the interior life" may be found in *lectio divina* or, as Foster calls it, *meditatio Scripturarum*:

"The *meditatio Scripturarum* is considered by all the masters as the normal foundation for the interior life. Whereas the study of Scripture centers on exegesis, the meditation of Scripture centers on internalizing and personalizing the passage. The written Word becomes a living word addressed to you." [p.26] (see also p.33 of 2008 edition)

Please consider carefully what he has just said. According to the "masters" – Thomas Merton, Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, etc – *lectio divina* provides the necessary foundation for contemplative prayer. If you want to be a *real* Christian, you must practice *lectio divina*. This echoes perfectly what Pope Benedict said: "If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church – I am convinced of it – a new spiritual springtime."

Other bizarre elements in Foster's book

It would take many more pages than we can spare to cover all of the other strange, occult ideas scattered throughout this book. The author claims, for example, that prayer can be "a dangerous business,"¹ that Christians should understand the importance of "thinking and experiencing in images,"² that dreams can be "a key to unlocking the door to the inner world,"³ that "centering" can be achieved "by concentrating on breathing,"⁴ that Christians should practice healing by imagining "the light of Christ flowing through [their] hands,"⁵ that "the purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person,"⁶ that in meditation "we create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart,"⁷ that imagination "is a powerful tool in the work of prayer" and "often opens the door to faith,"⁸ and that if we "surround ourselves with the strong light of Christ" it will "protect us from any influence not of God."⁹

These are all Gnostic in origin and are taught extensively in mainstream New Age literature.

He even lets his mask slip for a moment in the current edition when he says:

"A second advantage of the Confessional is that the word of forgiveness is expected and given in the absolution...There is a third advantage to the institutionalised Confessional, namely, penance." [p.184-185]

Confessional, penance, absolution? What is going on here? Clearly, in addition to being a compendium of practices found mainly in the western monastic tradition, his book is a thinly disguised apology for the Roman Catholic religion.

¹ p.16-1978; ² p.22-1978; ³ p.23-1978; ⁴ p.25-1978; ⁵ p.38-39-1978; ⁶ p.78; ⁷ p.24; ⁸ p.50; ⁹ p.37.

The Bible condemns *lectio divina* and all forms of divination

The Catholic practice known as *lectio divina* is (i) a corrupt form of prayer and (ii) a corrupt form of Bible study, both combined into a single exercise. To the extent that it uses visualization to bring the practitioner into the presence of God, it is straight-forward divination. Remember, divination is ANY human activity that presumes to be able to influence the supernatural in any way. This may seem like an excessively broad definition, but it is the **Biblical** definition.

The so-called inner world, as Foster calls it, is out of bounds to man! It is not an unexplored frontier, as he claims, waiting for man to enter, but a realm from which we are completely barred.

Man objects to this, but man is wrong! In our fallen human state we are attracted to the supernatural, to the hidden power and secret knowledge of the so-called inner world.

The LORD has made it perfectly clear that we CANNOT go there, or contact it in any way. The first three Commandments in Exodus chapter 20 set this out very clearly:

FIRST: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

SECOND: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God..."

THIRD: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

The Church of Rome has such great difficulty with these Commandments that she has erased the Second completely and interpreted the First to include the pagan god, Allah. She has also reduced the Third to a mere injunction against profanity.

Her corruption of these Commandments is deliberately designed to leave room for idolatry and divination. Christians need to remind themselves that Rome advocates prayers to and for the dead, kneeling before icons, venerating human bones and other religious relics, worshipping a sun-disk of bread which they imagine to be the flesh of Jesus, praying to a dead woman who is supposed to have great supernatural influence...the list goes on.

- the First Commandment

Let's take the First Commandment. It comprises two critically important parts. The first identifies God with the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who brought Israel out of bondage. The second part utterly rejects ALL other sources of supernatural power ("other gods"). The Commandment therefore forbids contact of any kind, in any way, with the supernatural realm. This includes any attempt on our part to enter that realm in order to "approach" God.

Please think carefully about this because it is central to Christianity. This Commandment **alone** forbids everything that *Celebration of Discipline* has the audacity to teach. Richard Foster and his "masters," the Roman Catholic mystics, are in brazen violation of this Commandment.

- the Second Commandment

Now let's examine the Second Commandment. The popular – and erroneous – interpretation of this Commandment confines it to physical or visible images only, but this falls far short of what the Bible itself teaches. The LORD destroyed the entire human race in the Flood (save eight souls) because He saw "**that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**" (Genesis 6:5). These images were internal, conceived and nurtured within the heart and mind of the individual. As such, they had no physical reality, and yet they were so intensely repugnant to the LORD that He almost destroyed the whole of mankind in judgment.

When men use mental imagery and the power of their imagination to commune in any way with the supernatural, they are practising idolatry and violating the Second Commandment.

- the Third Commandment

The Third Commandment has long been greatly misunderstood. It refers to more than just the utterance of God's holy name, but extends to all that is holy, to all that the sanctity of His holy name is attached. This includes in particular His holy Word, the Bible. The Psalmist was pointing to this truth when he wrote, "**for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**" (Psalm 138:2)

So when the practitioners of *lectio divina* repeat a verse from the Bible ad nauseum, over and over again, without any rational regard to its meaning or its purpose, they are breaking the Third Commandment. They are belittling His word and His holy name. This is more than just tomfoolery, but a rejection of the sufficiency, effectiveness and objectivity of His word. These deluded individuals have embarked on an "interior" journey to find their own personal truth and, in the process, have opened themselves – in a most naive and credulous way – to the tricks and wiles of the Enemy.

Why not simply do what Jesus asked us to do?

Jesus said that when we pray we should speak humbly to our Father. He even gave a foundational prayer to illustrate what he meant. And when he spoke about Scripture, he intended that we simply read the text and understand what it says – **"Let him that readeth understand!" (Mark 13:14)** He condemned vain repetition and mental sophistry – **"But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." (Matthew 5:37)** And he condemned reliance of any kind on the thoughts of one's heart, **"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts..." (Matthew 15:19).**

If a Christian feels he lacks wisdom, let him ask God! –

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." (James 1:5-8)

Lectio divina is manifest proof that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Anyone who tries to empty his mind in order to fill it is double-minded indeed!



A person who uses this technique has effectively decided that God's Word is incomplete or ineffectual until they "do" something to bring it to life. They have decided that a passage of Scripture is simply a compilation of words on a page until their "inner light" shines upon it and reveals its meaning, in particular its here-and-now, subjective meaning, applicable on a personal level to each individual. When they do this they are treating the Bible as a book of divination, where the 'real' truth is revealed only to the initiated few who are bold enough to explore their interior world.

As the great figures of the Reformation tirelessly proclaimed, the truth of the Bible is accessible to all who study it prayerfully and patiently. It is God's Word, living and powerful, holding within its pages *all* that is necessary for the sanctification and perfecting of man:

"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 3:16-17)

I would urge readers to give prayerful thought to Psalm 119. When David speaks about "meditating" on God's Word, he means just that, prayerful thought and reflection on what the Bible *actually* says. This Psalm gives a truly wonderful account of the role of Scripture in David's life, of his profound love for God's Word, and of the extent to which he studied it, thought about it, and relied upon it in all situations:

**"Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way"
(Psalm 119:104)**

This is how understanding comes, through careful study of the Bible, through informed, rational consideration of what it *actually* says. Any other way is a false way. Every Bible-believing Christian should follow David's example and hate every false way, including *lectio divina* and the bogus spirituality of Catholic monasticism.

A Closing Word on Papal Hypocrisy

Rome is pushing *lectio divina* as one of the most effective ways of deepening one's spirituality. The cross, on the other hand, is being portrayed as a failure.

During his sermon at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York on 24th September, 2015, Pope Francis made the following astonishing declaration: "We need to remember that we are followers of Jesus Christ and his life, humanly speaking, ended in failure, the failure of the cross."

He didn't try to qualify or mitigate this statement in any way, but moved on to another subject. According to the Pope, the cross was a failure and Christ's earthly mission, "humanly speaking," ended in failure.

This is a stark example of the scepticism, apostasy and paganism that lies at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope mocks the cross, belittles Christ, worships Allah, prays with Hindus, and refuses to judge homosexuality. Sadly, Catholics who look to this man as 'the vicar of Christ' do not know Christ and never have. They may not think of themselves as disobedient or rebellious, but that is exactly what they are in the eyes of an awesomely holy God.

Our High Priest does not need a vicar. He earned the right – at the cross! – to intercede with the Father on our behalf. We need no other intercessor! The cross was a victory without equal in history. And when Jesus rose from the grave, he did so "humanly speaking," in the same human body that died on Calvary. So to describe this as a "failure" in any sense is simply obscene.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1)

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

**"Wait on the LORD: be of good courage,
and he shall strengthen thine heart:
wait, I say, on the LORD."
(Psalm 27:14)**

**Jeremy James
Ireland
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For further information visit www.zephaniah.eu

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