



Eight

“AMERICA’S PASTOR”

In the fall of 2002, at the same time the first edition of *A Time of Departing* was released, another book came on the scene. This second book gained almost overnight fame, and before too long, *The Purpose Driven Life* had become a household name. Rick Warren captured the heart and soul of millions of Americans (the majority in evangelical Christianity) like no one else had ever done. His books are seen as blueprints of the Christian life not just for millions but tens of millions worldwide. In fact, *The Purpose Driven Life* has sold nearly thirty million copies, and that number continues to climb. This means that practically every Christian family in America has at least one copy in their home.

The question you may be asking right now is, “Why is Rick Warren included in a book that is covering New Age interspirituality and exposing the dangers of contemplative prayer? Are you saying that Rick Warren is heading in that direction too? Not America’s pastor! Surely not.” If that were the case, we’d hear about it from Christian leaders. Right?

On the contrary, some of the leaders I have trusted over the past many years have wholeheartedly endorsed Warren’s Purpose Driven teachings. The late Pastor Adrian Rogers was just such a leader. Rogers

wrote of *The Purpose Driven Church* (Warren’s first book) in the most vibrant terms. Of it he said, “This book is on the must-read list for every pastor.”¹

And Adrian Rogers isn’t the only one. In fact, it appears that most Christian leaders support Warren, with only a small number who do not. And this support has cut across nearly every denominational and religious partition. From Southern Baptist (Warren’s own denomination) to Pentecostal to Lutheran to Jewish to Catholic, countless leaders and pastors have given their unwavering support and endorsement to Warren and his Purpose Driven program.

In my book, I have tried to lay out a concise and well-documented explanation of contemplative prayer—its history, its make-up, and its technique. I have also illustrated with one example after another just how widespread and pervasive contemplative spirituality really is. If indeed Rick Warren is promoting contemplative prayer, as I believe he is, this guarantees that contemplative prayer will be promoted on an enormous scale. Through Rick Warren, Richard Foster’s vision could enter fully into mainstream evangelicalism both in North America and around the world; and with the unprecedented following and support Warren has gained, we could be heading towards a crisis in the church that might possibly lead to the falling away that the Apostle Paul warns about.

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER—“A HOT TOPIC”

Rick Warren believes that his “Purpose Driven paradigm” is an essential element and the heartbeat of the church. Of it, he says:

Personal computers have brand names. But inside every pc is an Intel chip and an operating system, Windows.... The Purpose Driven paradigm is the Intel chip for the 21st-century church and the Windows system of the 21st-century church.²

Warren also believes Purpose Driven has helped to put evangelical Christianity on a path that will lead to a second “reformation” and a great *spiritual awakening*:

I believe that we are possibly on the verge of a new reformation in Christianity and another Great Awakening in our nation . . . The signs are everywhere, including the popularity of this book.³

In an interview, Warren stated:

I'm looking for a second reformation. The first reformation of the church 500 years ago was about beliefs. This one is going to be about behavior. The first one was about creeds. This one is going to be about deeds. It is not going to be about what does the church believe, but about what is the church doing.⁴

Many who adhere to the Purpose Driven movement see great hope in its message. With Warren's proposed *global P.E.A.C.E. Plan*, that hope extends far beyond the borders of Christianity, and Warren is seen as someone who can solve the major dilemmas the world now faces! Yet the danger is that this agenda could serve as a platform for promoting a global spirituality that compromises the Gospel.

In February of 2003, my publisher sent a copy of *A Time of Departing* to Rick Warren with the hopes of alerting him to the dangers of contemplative spirituality. At the time, we knew nothing about how far Warren had already traveled down that road. We had actually hoped to warn him of what I saw sweeping the church. A couple of weeks after sending the book, he sent a card, which read:

Just a note to say thanks for the copy of *A Time of Departing* by Ray Yungen. It definitely will be a useful addition to my personal library and resource in my studies. I agree this is a hot topic. Sincerely, Rick Warren

While his response was vague, it seemed clear by his note he had recognized contemplative spirituality as an item of relevance in Christendom today. The question then was, on which side of the fence was he standing?

As I have carefully shown in this book, contemplative spirituality is a belief system that is a bridge to interspirituality and thus a denial of the message of the Cross. And we know by Scripture that we cannot serve both man and God. Rick Warren is either for or against contemplative prayer. Which one is it? It cannot be both.

We can begin to find the answer to this question by turning to Warren’s first book *The Purpose Driven Church*. In that book, Warren praises a number of parachurch movements he believes God has “raised up” to remedy a “neglected purpose” in Christianity. One of these he mentions is the *spiritual formation movement*, which promotes contemplative prayer through the “Spiritual Disciplines.” Warren names Richard Foster and Dallas Willard as leaders of this movement.⁵

I believe I can document that Warren does indeed embrace the spiritual formation movement, of which he writes that this movement has a “valid message for the church”⁶ and has “given the body of Christ a wake-up call.”⁷ What this means is that Warren, leader of this “New Reformation,” has landed on the side of the contemplative prayer (i.e., spiritual formation) movement. In order to prove this to be true, it is essential to examine Warren and his ministry. In so doing, you may also come to the conclusion, as I have, that the Purpose Driven paradigm could very well be providing an avenue not for a new reformation and spiritual awakening from God but rather for a descent into spiritual apostasy.

PURPOSE DRIVEN: MYSTICS, MONKS, AND BREATH PRAYERS

The vast majority of people who read Warren’s books feel his approach to Christianity is articulate and refreshing. Furthermore, they see some of his statements, such as the one below, as proof beyond measure that he is a staunch defender of the faith:

Every human being was created by God, but not everyone is a child of God. The only way to get into God’s family is by being born again into it. But there is one condition: faith in Jesus. The Bible says, “You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”⁸

However, a growing number of believers see Warren in a very different light, as someone who has sold out Christianity by using high-tech marketing methods and a watered-down gospel—one that de-emphasizes sin and repentance and promotes sensual approaches to worship and secular psychology-based counseling programs. While these issues may be worth discussing and debating, this is not the focus of my critique in this book.

Most likely, many of Warren's admirers might feel that what I *am* saying about *America's Pastor* is a sort of misguided heroism and that I am implying that I, and others like me, are more informed and discerning than multitudes of pastors who embrace Warren. Such admirers might see me as one who is giving a black eye to the very Christianity I claim to defend. What do I have to say to these charges? Simply put, my objective is not to attack individuals such as Rick Warren but rather to reveal what certain practices (and the belief system that enfolds them) entail and why Christians should not engage in them. Is this controversial? Yes! However, this is one controversial debate that is vital to the spiritual well-being of millions of people.

I draw your attention now to a section in *The Purpose Driven Life* under Day 11, "Becoming Best Friends with God." In this section, Warren begins by telling readers that more than anything else, God wants to be our friend, that "we were made to live in God's continual presence,"⁹ and that "we can now approach God anytime,"¹⁰ but he adds there are "secrets"¹¹ to having a friendship with God. One of those secrets he refers to is a form of contemplative spirituality called "breath prayers."¹² He says that a relationship with God will never happen by just attending church and having a daily quiet time. He then offers an example of someone who learned this *secret* and had an intimate relationship with God. This person was a Carmelite monk named Brother Lawrence.

The fact that Brother Lawrence was in the Carmelite order means his spiritual practices were derived from or heavily influenced by Teresa of Avila who reformed that order in the previous century. In a book titled *Christian Mystics*, Professor Ursula King makes the startling revelation that:

[G]iven her [Teresa of Avila] partly Jewish background, her thinking was also affected by Jewish Kabbalistic mysticism, elements of which can be detected in her writings.¹³

Brother Lawrence is often quoted by contemplative authors for his habit of what he called “practicing the presence of God.”¹⁴ But what was the actual nature of this presence? Was it something that would reflect the true character of God? I find the following account from a devout advocate of Brother Lawrence both questionable and disturbing:

It is said of Brother Lawrence that when something had taken his mind away from love’s presence he would receive “a reminder from God” that so moved his soul that he “cried out, singing and dancing violently like a mad man.” You will note that the reminders came from God and were not his own doing.¹⁵

Brother Lawrence says that secret conversations with God must be “repeat[ed] often in the day,”¹⁶ and “for the right practice of it, the heart must be empty of all other things.”¹⁷ He speaks of the trouble of wandering thoughts and says that the habit of practicing the presence of God is the “one remedy”¹⁸ and the “best and easiest method”¹⁹ he knows to dissolve distractions.

Rick Warren has not only favorably introduced this monk to his readers and called his ideas “helpful”²⁰ but has sandwiched between his comments on Brother Lawrence an unusual rendering of Ephesians 4:6 from the *New Century Version* concerning God that reads, “*He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything.*”²¹ However, Warren neglects to rectify this misleading translation and alert the reader to the fact that Paul is speaking here of the Church body as uniquely united in Christ by one single faith under one single God as is clear by what immediately precedes the verse in question:

There is one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all. (Ephesians 4:4-6a)

And lest anyone should think Paul is speaking in terms of an all-inclusive God-is-in-everybody religion, he only says this after making one of the most concise presentations of the Gospel recorded in Scripture:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast . . . But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2: 8,9,13)

Without Warren giving any explanation to the verse he quotes, the implication is that God is in all creation, including all persons. Many reading *The Purpose Driven Life* may very well take this to mean that God is in all. Former New Age follower, Warren Smith, in his book *Deceived on Purpose: The New Age Implications of the Purpose Driven Church*, expounds:

Rick Warren's implication . . . that God is "in" every person is at the very heart of all New Age teaching. The Bible does not teach this. The *New Century Version* that Rick Warren quotes is dangerously mistaken in its translation of Ephesians 4:6. . . . New Age teachers with their New Spirituality are trying to co-opt this scripture to make it apply to the whole human race.²²

Shalem Institute, founded by Tilden Edwards and located in Washington, DC, sees Brother Lawrence as someone whose contemplation includes the belief that God is in everything:

Christian contemplation means finding God in all things and all things in God. Brother Lawrence, the 17th century Carmelite friar, called it "the loving gaze that finds God everywhere."²³

Rick Warren has taken Brother Lawrence's advice of repeating "little internal adorations" throughout the day a step further and tells his readers that "practicing the presence of God" can be accomplished through *breath prayers*. Warren states:

The Bible tells us to “pray all the time.” How is it possible to do this? One way is to use “breath prayers” throughout the day, as many Christians have done for centuries. You choose a brief sentence or a *simple phrase* that can be repeated to Jesus in one breath. (emphasis mine)²⁴

Warren then advises readers to use visual reminders throughout the day and gives an example of others who practice breath prayers—Benedictine monks, known for their contemplative spirituality and interspirituality. According to Warren, this breath prayer that the monks practiced (*and now we should practice*) involves taking a “simple phrase” such as “I belong to you” or “You are my God” and “Pray it *as often as possible*.” (emphasis mine)²⁵

British metaphysical author Carolyn Reynolds, in her book *Spiritual Fitness*, defines meditation simply as “repeated sounds or phrases.”²⁶ That is exactly what Warren is promoting. He assures readers, “Practicing the presence of God is a skill, a habit you can develop.”²⁷ The key word here is “skill,” which reflects Richard Foster’s influence that Christians need to be *trained* in order to interact with God in any profound way. But it is the nature of this method that betrays the danger of the contemplative approach.

In Foster’s book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, Foster encourages readers to “bind the mind” with “breath prayers,”²⁸ quoting Theophane *the Recluse* and making reference to Brother Lawrence, calling him a practitioner of this type of prayer. Very likely, this is where Warren picked this up.

I believe this is a question that needs to be asked, “Is breath prayer a valid practice?” In Sonia Choquette’s book on psychic development, *Your Heart’s Desire*, she says, “All of us need to take the time to expand our mental awareness in order to hear inner guidance.”²⁹ The way she suggests doing this is through the same principle as breath prayer. One repeats, “I am calm” over and over again.

When a word or phrase is repeated over and over, after just a few repetitions, those words lose their meaning and become just sounds.

Have you ever tried repeating a word over and over again? After three or four times, the word may begin to lose its meaning, and if this repeating of words were continued, normal thought processes could be blocked, making it possible to enter an altered state of consciousness because of a hypnotic effect that begins to take place. It really makes no difference whether the repeated words are “You are my God” or “I am calm,” the results are the same. So, if you use Warren’s method or the occult method, the use of a mantra will take you to the same place.

What Warren is teaching is a derivative of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an ancient primer on contemplative prayer, written by an anonymous monk. Contemplative priest, Ken Kaisch, teaches his students this method of prayer found in Brother Lawrence’s writings and describes what the term “presence” means:

You will be gradually able to tune into God’s presence
 ... you will have a sense of slow, vibrant, deep energy
 surrounding you ... Let yourself flow with this energy, it
 is the Presence of our Lord ... As you continue to dwell
 in the Presence, the intensity will grow. It is extremely
 pleasurable to experience.³⁰

Warren not only promotes breath prayers on Day 11 in *The Purpose Driven Life* but also on Day 38, where he tells readers how to become “world-class Christian[s]” through the “practice [of]... breath prayers.”³¹ In addition to these two references, there are four references to using breath prayers on Warren’s pastors.com website, which reaches thousands of pastors throughout the world. And on the main Purpose Driven website, Warren again promotes this practice in an article titled “Purpose Driven Life: Worship That Pleases God.”³²

EVIDENCE THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED

Skeptics, at this point, may say, “So Rick Warren promotes breath prayers. That hardly qualifies him as a contemplative advocate.” Well, let’s say for a moment that this is true—that promoting breath prayers is not enough solid evidence. Is there any other indication that Warren aligns with contemplative spirituality? In truth, there

is ample evidence to prove this vital point.

Through Rick Warren’s pastors.com website, he is able to communicate to over 150,000 pastors and church leaders around the world. In taking a close look at this website, as well as the weekly e-newsletter that goes out via email to these pastors, it doesn’t take much effort to find that Warren is promoting Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, Henri Nouwen, and Thomas Merton. These and other contemplatives are favorably endorsed and promoted repeatedly.

While most of the examples I give are directly from Rick Warren himself, my first example is an article written by Saddleback’s pastor of spiritual maturity, Lance Witt. In his article (found on Warren’s website), titled “Enjoying God’s Presence in Solitude,” Witt says, “We were created with a need for solitude,” and adds:

Your life is full of pressures, distractions and fast-paced living. According to Thomas Merton, it is reflection and wonder (solitude) that scoops these invaders out of your life. Through solitude, there is finally room in your soul to meet God and for him to do the work in you that He longs to do.³³

Witt says that “Solitude creates capacity for God,” and “The goal of solitude is not so much to unplug from my crazy world, as it is to change frequencies.” Witt then quotes Richard Foster as someone who knows how to *change frequencies*:

Solitude doesn’t give us the power to win the rat race, but to ignore it altogether.³⁴

On the same website, Rick Warren refers favorably to a book titled *Sacred Pathways* by his “friend” Gary Thomas. Of the book, Warren says:

Gary has spoken at Saddleback, and 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.³⁵

What are these “practical spiritual exercises” Warren is speaking of from Thomas’ book? In *Sacred Pathways*, Thomas lists different ways people can draw near to God incorporating contemplative prayer. In a section titled “Centering Prayer,” he explains:

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.³⁶

Does this sound familiar? There’s no difference between it and Eastern-style meditation or the experience Thomas Merton taught. In essence, *Sacred Pathways* is a manual for mantra meditation, yet Warren believes we can find ways to “draw near to God” through this book.³⁷ How many thousands of pastors who read Warren’s newsletters might see his avid promotion of *Sacred Pathways* and buy a copy of it? If they do, they will find that Thomas has an affinity for the writings of Annie Dillard, who also promotes contemplative spirituality.

Warren’s promotion and endorsement of contemplatives doesn’t end with Brother Lawrence, Thomas Merton, Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, and Gary Thomas. In the September 3, 2003 issue of Warren’s weekly e-newsletter to pastors, under his “Book Look” section, he listed Tricia Rhodes’ book *The Soul at Rest: A Journey into Contemplative Prayer* and said:

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. (emphasis mine)³⁸

A few months after this endorsement appeared on his website,

another mention of Rhodes was made on his weekly communication to pastors around the world, referring to Rhodes as “one of our favorite authors on contemplative prayer.”³⁹

This “favorite author” of Rick Warren describes a deep-breathing exercise in which the practitioner is to breathe out the bad and breathe in the good, another example of the mantric methods used by mystics in many world religions. Listen to Rhodes give instruction on how to prepare for prayer time:

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.”⁴⁰

I don’t remember ever reading in Scripture that I could partake of God’s love by physically breathing it in or could rid myself of sin by breathing it out. Interestingly, Rhodes also quotes Morton Kelsey in this passage. You will recall Morton Kelsey, whom I discussed in chapter three, said:

You can find most of the New Age practices in the depth of Christianity ... I believe that the Holy One lives in every soul.⁴¹

Rhodes shows her affinity to contemplative prayer when she states:

Contemplative Prayer penetrates our heart of hearts, probing the deepest rooms of our interior soul. It leaves no stone unturned, no darkness unlit.... It is wonderful and painful and through it He changes us into His likeness.⁴²

Rhodes encourages readers to use the *Jesus Prayer* in which the name of Jesus is focused on and repeated.* She also says what so many other contemplatives have said in their discontent with simple faith and their disillusionment with the power of the Word of God: “Reading, studying or memorizing God’s Word will only take us so far in our quest for spiritual growth.”⁴³ This is my point—contemplatives teach that faith in Christ and dependence on His Word is just not enough—we need a trance-like mystical experience as well.

The pastors.com website is saturated with favorable comments, endorsements, and promotions of many contemplatives. On two separate occasions on the website, Warren makes reference to a book his wife, Kay, recommends:

My wife, Kay, recommends this book: “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!*” (emphasis mine)⁴⁴

The book Kay Warren recommends is *In the Name of Jesus* by Henri Nouwen. Nouwen devotes an entire chapter of that book to contemplative prayer saying:

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.⁴⁵

Anyone who knows something about the Warrens’ background should not be surprised by their promotion of Nouwen. Rick Warren is a graduate of the Robert H. Schuller Institute for Successful Church Leadership. Schuller himself emphasized the impact that Nouwen had on his school:

*Technically, the Jesus Prayer is: *Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, but it is often shortened to just the word *Jesus*.

All of our students have to watch and listen to Henri Nouwen. I keep interrupting and stopping the video machine, telling them to notice how he uses his hands, to look at the twinkle in his eye, to see how he connects his eye with the eye of the listener, to be aware of the words he uses—all positives, no negatives.⁴⁶

The Warrens took Schuller’s word for it with regard to Henri Nouwen. It’s no wonder: The Warren’s were greatly impacted by Schuller, according to a *Christianity Today* article, which quotes Kay Warren as saying, “He [Schuller] had a profound influence on Rick.”⁴⁷

Rick WARREN AND THE EMERGING CHURCH

The emerging church movement, which I will discuss further in the next chapter, has gained the support of many Christian leaders. Rick Warren is one of those leaders who has actually helped to launch the movement. In Dan Kimball’s popular book, *The Emerging Church*, Rick Warren wrote the foreword and said:

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.⁴⁸

Kimball’s book describes different methods to reach this generation, including the use of “practicing silence, and lectio divina [a form of contemplative prayer].”⁴⁹ Kimball reinforces his promotion of the silence on his “Vintage Faith” website in an article he wrote titled “A-Maze-ing Prayer,” which promotes the use of the labyrinth as a way of “Meeting God in the middle.”⁵⁰

The labyrinth (discussed more in the next chapter), used in ancient days, is a maze-like structure, which was originally designed to connect with God mystically. As participants walk through the labyrinth (sometimes called a prayer walk or prayer path), chanting words or

phrases (centering down), the idea is that by the time they have *centered* their souls, they will reach the center of the labyrinth.

Dan Kimball expresses his admiration for the labyrinth, saying:

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.⁵¹

In the back of *The Emerging Church*, under the recommended resources section, Kimball lists several books written by contemplatives. Some of these include *Sacred Pathways* by Gary Thomas, *Renovation of the Heart* by Dallas Willard, *Messy Spirituality* by Mike Yaconelli, *In the Name of Jesus* by Henri Nouwen, *Book of Uncommon Prayer* by Steve Case, and *Four Views of the Church in Postmodern Culture* by Leonard Sweet. All of these authors share one thing in common—the belief that we need the *silence* to draw close to God, and *that* silence is reached through contemplative prayer.

Not only did Rick Warren write the foreword to Kimball's book, but, in random spots throughout the book, he has written side-bar commentaries—seventeen of them to be exact. Of his commentaries, only one was negative and that was over a minor point. Nowhere in the book is there any indication that Warren was not in full support of Kimball's views. Warren made comments such as:

- “This book is a wonderful detailed example...”⁵²
- “Thank you so much for sharing your background, Dan ... Go for it.”⁵³
- “This is so important!”⁵⁴
- “An outstanding chapter, Dan!”⁵⁵

The question must be asked, *is* Rick Warren promoting and endorsing the emerging church movement? This is a valid question considering the fact that the emerging church movement is immersed in contemplative spirituality and other metaphysical practices. Certainly, by writing the foreword to the emerging church signature book,

it would be safe to assume the answer is yes!

We can confirm this answer by taking another look at Warren's weekly e-newsletter that goes out to thousands of pastors around the world. In the July 6th, 2005 issue, he devoted the issue to the emerging church movement, including his own feature article titled "Sharing Eternal Truth With an Ever-Emerging Culture." One of the recommended links in that issue was to an organization called, *The Ooze*, where lies a hub of articles, books, and links for emerging and contemplative spirituality. Spencer Burke, the organization's director, features his own book *Making Sense of the Church on The Ooze* website. In that book, Burke states:

I was struck by the incredible wisdom that could be found apart from the "approved" evangelical reading list. A Trappist monk, [Thomas] Merton gave me a new appreciation for the meaning of community. His *New Man and New Seeds of Contemplation* touched my heart in ways other religious books had not. Not long afterward my thinking was stretched again, this time by Thich Nhat Hanh—a Buddhist monk . . . Hanh's *Living Buddha, Living Christ* gave me insight into Jesus from *an Eastern perspective*. (emphasis mine)⁵⁶

This is just one quote that is indicative of the mindset that permeates *The Ooze* website. Why would Warren list that as a recommended site if he were not behind this philosophy? He knows that nearly 150,000 pastors receive his newsletter and that many will share the information with their congregations. It is potentially possible then that millions of people around the world are being influenced by Warren's newsletters each week. In that same issue of his weekly e-newsletter, Warren posted a statement from several of the leading emerging church leaders, including Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, Tony Jones, Spencer Burke, and Doug Pagitt. Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is an advocate of *Christian* yoga. In his book, *Church Re-Imagined*, Pagitt devotes most of one chapter to the subject, speaking of it in a most favorable manner, giving specific

instruction and encouraging the practice.

In essence, Rick Warren has become a conduit for spreading the contemplative message worldwide. He said as much when he avidly endorsed the spiritual formation movement in the *Purpose Driven Church*.

Perhaps the most revealing endorsement that illustrates Warren's sympathies toward contemplative spirituality is his promotion and connection to author and futurist Leonard Sweet. Sweet is said to be "one of the church's most important and provocative thinkers."⁵⁷ He is a popular lecturer and many of his books are published by Zondervan (Warren's publisher also).

The connections between the two men include a 1994 audio set titled *The Tides of Change*. In the set, Warren and Sweet talk about "new frontiers," "changing times" and a "new spirituality" on the horizon.

Later, in Sweet's 2001 book, *Soul Tsunami*, Warren gives an endorsement that sits on the back as well as on the front cover of the book. Of the book, Warren says:

Leonard Sweet . . . suggests practical ways to communicate God's unchanging truth to our changing world.⁵⁸

Some of these "practical ways" include using a labyrinth and visiting a meditation center.⁵⁹ Sweet also says, "It's time for a Post Modern Reformation,"⁶⁰ adding that "The wind of spiritual awakening is blowing across the waters."⁶¹ He says that times are changing and you'd better "Reinvent yourself for the 21st century or die."⁶²

To better understand Leonard Sweet's spirituality, I would like to draw your attention to a book he wrote a few years prior to the *Tides of Change* audio set—*Quantum Spirituality*. I highly recommend you take a look at this book yourself—Sweet has now placed the book on his website at www.leonardsweet.com in a format easy to download, which, of course, shows that he still promotes its message.

The acknowledgments section of *Quantum Spirituality* shows very clearly Sweet's spiritual sympathies. In it, Sweet thanks interspiritualists/universalists such as Matthew Fox (author of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*), Episcopalian priest/mystic Morton Kelsey, Willis

Harman (author of *Global Mind Change*) and Ken Wilber (one of the major intellectuals in the New Age movement) for helping him to find what he calls "New Light."⁶³ Sweet adds that he trusts "the Spirit that led the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*."⁶⁴

In the preface of the same book, Sweet disseminates line after line of suggestions that the "old teachings" of Christianity must be replaced with new teachings of "the New Light." And yet these new teachings, he believes, will draw from "ancient teachings" (the Desert Fathers). This "New Light movement," Sweet says, is a "radical faith commitment that is willing to dance to a *new rhythm*."⁶⁵

Throughout the book, Sweet favorably uses terms like *Christ consciousness* and *higher self* and in no uncertain terms promotes New Age ideology:

[Quantum spirituality is] a structure of human becoming, a channeling of Christ energies through mindbody experience.⁶⁶

The Bible does not describe Jesus Christ as an energy channeling its way in and through us. Without a doubt, this is New Age lingo. The wonderful thing about the Gospel that is presented in Scripture is that Jesus Christ is presented as a personal God who loves us and will have a relationship with anyone who, by faith, comes to the Father through Him. This is where the contemplatives have it wrong. They believe that through this meditative prayer they can reach God.

Sweet also tells his readers that humanity and creation are united as one and we must realize it. Once humanity comes to this realization, Sweet says:

Then, and only then, will a New Light movement of "world-making" faith have helped to create the world that is to, and may yet, be. Then, and only then, will earthlings have uncovered the meaning ... of the last words [Thomas Merton] uttered: "We are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity."⁶⁷

Leonard Sweet is what could be called an *Alice Bailey Christian* because his views on the role of mysticism in the church are evident. He states:

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.⁶⁸

It is this same mysticism (i.e., contemplative prayer) that I believe Rick Warren is also promoting. Warren extends his promotion and endorsement of Sweet to his *pastors.com* website. Nearly a dozen times Sweet is referred to positively, including an article *featuring* Sweet and another article written *by* him.

YOU CANNOT SERVE BOTH MAN AND GOD

While the fact remains that Warren is promoting contemplative prayer through his endorsements and recommendations of numerous contemplative authors and teachers, he takes his sympathies towards this a step further by enlisting contemplatives to teach people who have come under his Purpose Driven wing.

For the past several years, Youth Specialties, a youth-oriented organization, has hosted an annual event called the National Pastor’s Convention. Each year the event brings in many contemplative speakers such as Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, Ruth Haley Barton, and others. Available to the convention attendees are an on-site labyrinth, late-night contemplative prayer sessions, and workshops on contemplative prayer, emerging church, and yoga. In 2004, Warren was a featured speaker at this event and in fact spoke right after a yoga workshop.⁶⁹

Some may say that this is hardly enough proof to link someone, that maybe Warren didn’t know these activities (yoga, labyrinths, etc.) would be taking place at the conference. Fair enough. However, the following year (2005), Warren invited leaders *from* Youth Specialties to teach at his new Purpose Driven Youth Ministry conference.⁷⁰ Surely if he did not agree with Youth Specialties’ spiritual persuasions, he would not incorporate its leaders into his own events. Rick Warren’s involvement with Youth Specialties is evident. Even Saddleback’s youth pastor, Doug Fields, has participated as a speaker at several Youth Specialties events; and in Warren’s February 1st, 2006 e-newsletter, Warren promoted Youth Specialties again, linking to it as a place to find resources for youth ministries. “Resources” on the Youth Specialties website that week included books like *The Sacred Way* by emerging church author Tony Jones, *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry*, also by Jones, and several Bible studies by Youth Specialties president Mark Oestreicher. Recent comments made by Oestreicher on his Internet blog site are disturbing and no doubt confusing to many young people:

“Christianity IS an Eastern religion.”⁷¹

“[Y]oga is really just about stretching and slowing down.”⁷²

“If a Buddhist is using a breathing exercise to bring some peace to her life, well, bless her. But that should have no bearing on whether or not I choose to focus on my God-created breath.”⁷³

Youth Specialties also features a book titled *Enjoy the Silence* by Maggie and Duffy Robbins. Maggie Robbins was trained in a five-year course at Kairos School of Spiritual Formation. Kairos trains people in contemplative spirituality and has a course reading list that includes Thomas Keating, Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton. Duffy Robbins is an associate staff member of Youth Specialties and a speaker at the Purpose Driven Youth Ministry Conference.

Rick Warren says that contemplative prayer is a “hot topic”—in saying that, surely he is aware of the issue. With so many connections to contemplative prayer, it appears that he is not only aware of it, but he is an advocate of it. Because of his level of influence, he will be able to spread contemplative prayer more than Richard Foster or Thomas Merton ever could have hoped for.

In the spring of 2005, someone handed me a book called *A Life with Purpose* by George Mair. The book is written as a positive account of Rick Warren’s life. In fact, the subtitle on the front cover reads: *America’s Most Inspiring Pastor*. It is clear that the author had a great admiration for Warren. While Mair wrote the book, he spent many Sunday mornings at Saddleback church services, listening to Rick Warren and donating financially. However, after Rick Warren found out about the book, he publicly criticized it. In addition, Saddleback church sent out emails to an undisclosed number of people, discrediting Mair’s book.⁷⁴

I personally believe Warren’s effort to debunk the book was an attempt to conceal some of its observations. What George Mair didn’t realize was that in his candid account of Warren, and in his efforts to offer this testament of praise, some things were revealed about the pastor that might have gone undetected by the average person. For instance, Mair explains how New Age prophet Norman Vincent Peale was at the foundation of the church-growth movement and furthermore “many of Peale’s uplifting affirmations originated with an ‘obscure teacher of occult science’ named Florence Scovel Shinn.”⁷⁵ Referring to many of the methods that Peale taught and his “unification of psychology and religion,”⁷⁶ Mair says, “Saddleback distinctly bears the stamp of Reverend Norman Vincent Peale.”⁷⁷

It was in Mair’s book that I discovered Warren’s connections with New Age sympathizer Ken Blanchard. In November of 2003, Rick Warren announced to his Saddleback congregation his global P.E.A.C.E. Plan. In the same sermon, Warren introduced the congregation to Ken Blanchard, playing a video clip of Blanchard’s visit to Saddleback a few days earlier. Warren informed his large congregation that Blanchard had:

... signed on to help with the P.E.A.C.E. Plan, and he’s going to be helping train us in leadership and in how to train others to be leaders all around the world.⁷⁸

So who is Ken Blanchard? Surely, if Rick Warren has enough confidence in Blanchard to have him help train people to become leaders around the world and help with his P.E.A.C.E. Plan, then Warren must trust Blanchard’s spirituality.

Blanchard is the author of the bestselling book, *The One Minute Manager*, a highly popular book, known in both the Christian and the secular world. He is also the founder of an organization called *Lead Like Jesus*. Blanchard became a Christian in the mid-eighties, yet he has had an interesting track record of books he has endorsed or written forewords to, comments he has made, and organizations he has been connected with. In a 2001 book titled *What Would Buddha Do at Work?*, Blanchard tells readers in the foreword:

Buddha points to the path and invites us to begin our journey to enlightenment. I ... invite you to begin (or continue) your journey to enlightened work.⁷⁹

We also find Blanchard writing the foreword to another book, *Mind Like Water* by Jim Ballard. In the book, Ballard describes methods for practicing Eastern/New Age meditation. Ballard states:

I signed up for the yoga meditation lessons ... founded by Paramahansa Yogananda [a Hindu guru]... I had evidently reached a level of consciousness beyond the usual ... I continue to consider meditation far and away the most important thing I do.⁸⁰

And yet, of the book, Blanchard writes glowing remarks:

Jim Ballard’s wonderful book *Mind Like Water* ... I hope that you and countless other readers will find in *Mind Like Water* some ways to calm your mind and uplift your

consciousness.⁸¹

Incidentally, Ballard is one of the trainers for the Ken Blanchard Companies. That shouldn't be much of a surprise though—practically all of the endorsements and forewords written by Ken Blanchard are for books written by clairvoyants, mystics, Buddhists, and others with affinities similar to Jim Ballard. It is important to note that Blanchard's endorsements are wholehearted. He never says things like, "While I disagree with the New Age meditation techniques this book promotes, I believe the author has some helpful points on business management (Blanchard's forte)." On the contrary, his endorsements never have any such disclaimers and in fact often recommend meditation techniques and practices.

Some may say that Blanchard wrote these comments when he was a young Christian, but when you look at the history of these endorsements, you see that the longer Blanchard has been a professing Christian, the more blatant the endorsements have become. For example, in the summer of 2005 a book titled *In the Sphere of Silence* was released. The book is a metaphysical manual on meditation (i.e., altered states of consciousness). Author Vijay Eswaran teaches in his book:

The Sphere of Silence, if it is practiced properly, is a very powerful tool. It is not just oriented to any one religion, it is universally accepted and practiced by almost all faiths on the planet. It is through silence that you find your inner being.⁸²

On the author's website, Blanchard gives this glowing endorsement of *In the Sphere of Silence*:

Effective leadership is more than what we do; it starts on the inside. Great Leaders are able to tap inner wisdom and strength by cultivating the habit of solitude. This book is a wonderful guide on how to enter the realm of silence and draw closer to God.⁸³

Just before I finished this new edition, in early 2006, a book hit the market called, *The 10-Minute Energy Solution* by Jon Gordon. The book is filled with suggestions on how to improve energy levels through meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, and other such techniques. Throughout the book, Gordon quotes favorably from the Dalai Lama, meditator Daniel Goleman, Thich Nhat Hanh, New Agers Marilyn Ferguson and Wayne Dyer, and from *A Course in Miracles*.^{*} Gordon promotes panentheism (God in all) by saying things such as: "You came from this source [speaking of God] and you are this source."⁸⁴

On the back cover of Gordon's book, Blanchard says:

Jon Gordon is a master at teaching people the power of positive energy. If you want to increase your joy and effectiveness, as well as your energy level, read this book.⁸⁵

But perhaps Blanchard's most telling involvement with the New Age is his role with an organization called The Hoffman Institute, home of the Hoffman Quadrinity Process. Not only has he given a strong endorsement for the program, saying (after he partook of it) that it "made my spirituality come alive"⁸⁶ but is also a current board member of the Hoffman Institute, along with several New Agers. This is an organization that was founded by a psychic and is based on panentheism (i.e., God is in all) and meditation! In the book, *The Hoffman Process*, the institute's mystical perspective is laid out clearly:

I am you and you are me. We are all parts of the whole...
 You can use a short meditation to remind yourself of this connection to all others in this world of ours...
 As you breathe, feel that breath coming from your core essence ... When you are open to life, you start noticing the *divine in everything*. (emphasis mine)⁸⁷

*A channeled work.

Like Leonard Sweet, Ken Blanchard is another Alice Bailey Christian or what some may refer to as a New Age sympathizer. He professes to know Christ, but his connections and affinity to the New Age are unmistakable.

In view of Blanchard's New Age sympathies and connections, how can he *lead people to be like Jesus*? Not only has Rick Warren allowed Blanchard to “sign on to help” with his global P.E.A.C.E. Plan, but Warren is also a board member of Blanchard's *Lead Like Jesus* organization, along with meditation promoters Laurie Beth Jones and Mark Victor Hansen (*Chicken Soup for the Soul* co-author—see page 93). On the *Lead Like Jesus* website, in an introductory paragraph preceding the list of board members, the following is stated:

... guided by a board of men and women who have discovered the power and potential of leading like Jesus. These board members come from all over the country and from all arenas of life, but they all share a common goal: to see that the Lead Like Jesus Movement be extended across the US and to the farthest reaches of the earth.⁸⁸

There are two questions to be asked here. First, if Rick Warren has been part of a board that is *guiding* Ken Blanchard, how is it possible that Blanchard came to endorse and participate in all those New Age books and activities? With over twenty members on that board, many of them professing Christians, including David McQuiston (representing Focus on the Family)* it would only make sense that someone would have told Blanchard that a book called *What Would Buddha Do At Work?* was not a book that should be endorsed by a Christian. The second question is what “common goal” does Rick Warren have with Ken Blanchard, Mark Victor Hansen, and Laurie Beth Jones? Jones, author of *Jesus CEO*, makes the following comments that clearly expose her beliefs:

* According to a Focus on the Family phone representative, McQuiston is no longer with Focus on the Family. They were informed that their name was still on the board member page of *Lead Like Jesus*, and as of the printing of this book, their name is still there.

My personal mission and vision is to Recognize, Promote and Inspire Divine Connection in Myself and Others.⁸⁹
 Jesus regularly visualized the success of his efforts.⁹⁰

Jesus was full of self-knowledge and self-love. His “I am” statements were what he became.⁹¹

More recently, in another book of Jones, she says that Jesus “wanted everyone to see their connection to each other, and to God,”⁹² and admits she has been “challenged by the concept of meditation” leading to her decision to “experience the sheer silence of meditation—undirected prayer.”⁹³ In her book, *The Path*, Jones favorably quotes both a Zen Buddhist teacher (Thich Nhat Hanh) and a Sufi poet. Quoting the poet, Jones says:

“The universe surrenders to a mind that is still.” And in order to truly find The Path, each of us must loosen our minds, and begin from a point of wonder and openness—of being willing to *not* know. We must receive, before we can begin to give.⁹⁴

Rick Warren and Ken Blanchard have also shared speaking platforms together at *Lead Like Jesus* events, at Willow Creek’s Leadership Summits, and at other conferences. And in 2004, a seminar took place at Saddleback called the *Preaching and Purpose Driven Life Training Workshop for Chaplains*, a seminar for training Army chaplains. Warren was one of the speakers, and resources used for the seminar included those from Ken Blanchard.

Just prior to the release of this second edition of *A Time of Departing* Blanchard has come out with a book titled *Lead Like Jesus*. The book, which is endorsed by Rick Warren, presents “habits” Blanchard says leaders need to cultivate. One of those is the habit he calls solitude, which is to be practiced, he says, for a forty-five minute time period. Taking into account the endorsements and forewords Blanchard has authored, it is easy to see what he means when he says:

Before we send people off for their period of solitude, we have them recite with us Psalm 46:10 in this way: Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know. Be still. Be. When people return from their time of solitude, they have big smiles on their faces. While many of them found it difficult to quiet their mind, they say it was a powerful experience. The reality is most of us spend little if any time in solitude. Yet if we don't, how can God have a chance to talk with us?⁹⁵

During Blanchard's instruction on going into solitude, he tells participants to practice a *palms-down, palms up* exercise, which is another ritual or practice often used by contemplatives. By Rick Warren endorsing Blanchard's book, *Lead Like Jesus*, he, in effect, promotes his spirituality also.

A SLIPPERY SLOPE

I realize there are serious ramifications regarding the issues discussed here. What I am saying is that Rick Warren is part of the effort to bring contemplative prayer into mainstream Christianity. Remember, Warren makes favorable reference to Dallas Willard and Richard Foster in *The Purpose Driven Church*. He sees Willard as being on the same level as Foster in the spiritual formation movement (i.e., contemplative prayer movement). In Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, the title of which sounds very close to Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Willard quotes Merton and Nouwen and extols the practice of the silence:

In silence we close off our souls from "sounds," whether those sounds be noise, music, or words.... Many people have *never* experienced silence and do not even know that they do *not* know what it is.⁹⁶

Like Foster, Willard sees this *spiritual discipline* as the most powerful way to commune with God. He maintains:

It is a powerful and essential discipline. *Only silence* will allow us life-transforming concentration upon God.

(emphasis mine)⁹⁷

Dallas Willard, like Rick Warren, is a Southern Baptist. This shows the extent to which the mystical paradigm shift is unfolding within the largest protestant denomination in the nation. The alignment of the Purpose Driven movement and the spiritual formation movement has truly monumental ramifications, ones that will, should the Lord tarry, affect generations to come, if successful.

If this sounds somewhat dramatic or alarmist, I feel I have justification for it. If you are trying to make up your mind on whether or not Foster, Willard, Warren, et al., are on the right track regarding the *discipline of silence*, please consider this—on the back cover of *The Spirit of the Disciplines* there is a glowing endorsement of the book, which states:

A profound call to discipleship based on spiritual disciplines [that] awakens us to a forgotten truth, that the transformation to Christ-likeness is realized through taking on the “easy yoke” of the disciplines.⁹⁸

At that time, the person who wrote this endorsement was writing her own books on the value of contemplative spirituality. She was delving into the *Christian* mystical tradition with all of her heart and soul. The person is Sue Monk Kidd!

As you decide for yourself whether Rick Warren’s embrace of the contemplative has any consequential significance at all, remember the words of Sue Monk Kidd where she echoes the very essence of Thomas Merton in the conclusions she arrived at:

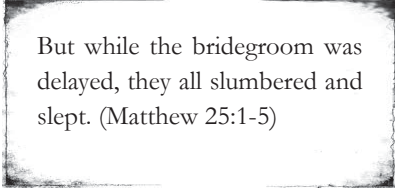
I am speaking of recognizing the hidden truth that we are one with *all people*. We are part of them and they are part of us ... When we encounter another person, ... we should walk as if we were upon *holy ground*. We should respond as if *God* dwells there. (emphasis mine)⁹⁹

These words are alarming when we consider that she started as

a Sunday School teacher!

When Rick Warren accepted Ken Blanchard's "sign-on" back in November 2003, Blanchard was sitting on the board of an occult organization. Please reflect on this. He was not just a member of the Hoffman Institute, but on its board! This is the man who would supposedly train Warren's leaders. Over two years later Blanchard is *still* on that board.

Contemplative spirituality, as I have demonstrated time and again, is a slippery slope that leads to interspirituality and the delusion that divinity is within every human being, thereby rendering the message of the Cross unnecessary and the truth of the Gospel void. That is the ultimate tragedy where the hope of the world has been stolen from the hearts of men as they slumbered.



But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. (Matthew 25:1-5)

8 AMERICA'S PASTOR

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