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Unspoken Prayer in Spiritual Formation: Tool or Trouble

Wayne Lewis

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UNSPOKEN PRAYER IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION: TOOL OR TROUBLE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
WAYNE LEWIS

NEWBERG, OREGON

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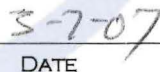
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TOOL OR TROUBLE?**

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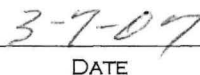
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Given Permission

*I love sitting in the silence
with you God.*

*I love being so still that
my very heartbeat slows,
my breathing unlabored.*

*If I tell my body to rest in You,
give permission, really,
perhaps my mind will join as well.*

Permission~

*the world so needs this...
permission to be in God,
permission to embrace the goodness
of rest, peace, and quiet.*

No wonder the world's gone mad.

How will we ever

find peace in the world,

bring peace to this world

if the water of our own soul never stills

in the steadiness of You? Peace. Be still. Breathe.

Let go. Amen.

Kathy Fuller Guisewite, Until the Knowing is Known

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Wayne Lewis

ABSTRACT

Title: Unspoken Prayer in Spiritual Formation: Tool or Trouble

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The questions addressed in this document are: Can unspoken prayer be used in Christian spiritual formation? If so, how? And are there dangers that come with its use?

For the purpose of simplicity and utility, the term “unspoken prayer” will refer to prayer that is not verbalized with voice or mind and is prayer offered to God as listening, focused waiting, or thought focused meditation. Unspoken prayer is utilized by Christians in forming a more intimate relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord. Many terms are used for this type of prayer including contemplative prayer, silent prayer, listening prayer, and centering prayer. These terms are used by many people in many contexts and are often used with different meanings.

While unspoken prayer has an ancient history, there is concern that it not only can lead the disciple away from a more intimate relationship with Jesus but that its’ modern origins have ties in the occult or Eastern religions. This document will examine what unspoken prayer is, how it has been practiced, and whether there is valid foundation for

concern that it may actually be harmful to the Christian pilgrim on an inward journey that seeks an enriched relationship with Jesus as Lord.

Chapter One will examine the problem with narrative and establish a modern context for spiritual formation and unspoken prayer. Also Chapter One will clarify terminology for spiritual formation and unspoken prayer as used in this document. Chapter Two will examine the biblical basis for unspoken prayer. Chapter Three will examine the historical and theological roots of unspoken prayer. Chapter Four will look at opposing points of view of the forms of unspoken prayer. Chapter Five will take a critical look at the most prominent issues concerning unspoken prayer. Chapter Six will weigh in summary the merits of the previous arguments and seek to discern the value of unspoken prayer to the Christian seeker and how it may be used.

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to Unspoken Prayer

A Story

Della Gotfried entered the doors of St. James Church with a tinge of excitement and a tinge of worry. She had an appointment with Pastor Dan Goodman. Pastor Goodman had a good reputation in the city's Christian community as a compassionate, hard working pastor. Della had struggled for some time feeling a deep desire to grow in her relationship with Jesus and yet feeling adrift at the same time. Della taught Sunday School at First Church on the East side of downtown, and Mabel, her friend and neighbor, taught at St. James. Mabel had recommended that Della come to Pastor Dan for spiritual direction. If she liked it, she could continue as his directee or he could recommend her to someone else. Della had never heard of spiritual direction, spiritual formation, or the Christian spiritual disciplines. She was there to see what it was all about. She trusted Mabel and would give Pastor Dan a try. "I love you, Jesus," she prayed as she entered the prayer room to which the secretary directed her.

Five months later Della was delighted. Pastor Dan had helped her a great deal and yet she was not sure what he had done. He told her he had done nothing. The Holy Spirit had done it all. She felt as though she had embarked on a great adventure. They met for an hour once a month; and for one session, they sat for nearly half an hour at a time without saying a word. As a matter of fact, Della enjoyed the silence. It was still

strange and a little hard to get used to but it was comfortable. On this day, their fifth session, Della mentioned this to Pastor Dan. After a moment of reflection he said, “Good, I’m glad you enjoy those moments.” Della answered, “Oh I do, Pastor. They are like jewels in our time together.” Pastor Dan did not answer.

They sat in silence for about ten minutes then Pastor Dan said, “Do you use unspoken prayers in your prayer life at home and church?”

“Oh sure,” Della answered. “I am one of the team that prays for the pastor during the sermon.”

Pastor Dan smiled, “But, Della, do you sit at home in a quiet room and pray without words for a few minutes or even a minute at all through the day?”

Della thought for a moment and said, “Well, I pray without speaking words. Is that the same? When we sit here I am asking God if I should be saying something.”

“Well it may be close,” Pastor Dan said, “but you may consider going just a bit further. Try sitting and just listening to the Lord for a time. You may be doing it in your prayer life now, but most people are talking to the Lord even in their silence. Could you try just sitting and listening to him? To keep your focus, you may just repeat the word “love” or “Lord” occasionally. You are not trying to be empty, that may be dangerous; you are simply trying to be open to the fullness of the love of the Lord. Try it for a few minutes several times this month and tell me next month what God said. If it works, we will then explore it further.”

The following week, Della was in the Tuesday morning ladies’ prayer meeting and mentioned her sessions with Pastor Dan and her discovery of unspoken prayer and listening prayer. Her pastor’s wife was present and was deeply alarmed that Della may

have been drawn into some mysterious cult. She became agitated and had to take leave of the group for a moment and fan herself. Clara loved Della and all the flock of the First Church and wanted to protect them from the hazardous “spirituality” that was going around. Meditation is what it is, she reasoned. Those hippies, swamis, and new-agers meditate. Clara loved Della and did not want to offend her; so in as calm a voice as she could muster, she looked at Della and said, “What do you do over there at St. James, mediate?”

Della said, “Why no. We talk and pray together. Sometimes we sit quietly and just wait for the Spirit to speak or lead.”

“Della, honey, the Spirit has work to do. If you just sit and wait, you will be left behind,” Clara said with as much poise as she could feign.

Della answered, “But I am getting so much from it. I am closer to Jesus than ever. I have a real personal relationship with him and feel good about my own spiritual life for the first time in a long, long time.”

Just before Della’s next visit with Pastor Dan, Della’s pastor, the Rev. Dr. Albert Angel, visited Pastor Dan to inform him that he did not appreciate his efforts to proselyte Della from his flock.

“Well, Albert, if Della has prayed about it and has decided not to come for direction any longer I certainly respect that decision. I am surprised though. I thought things were going well. And, Albert, I have directees from many churches, and I assure you that I would never try to influence any of them from their home church.”

“Well, Rev. Goodman, Della and I prayed together, and we came to the correct decision. I believe the only good one,” the Reverend Doctor said.

“I see. Well I will continue to pray for her and her progress on her inward journey,” Pastor Dan said.

Rev. Dr. Angel stiffened a bit at the mention of Della’s inward journey. He hoped that his disapproval of such language was clearly communicated. “Della will not be returning; and frankly, I feel that it will be an ordeal to rescue her from the errors she has assumed.” Rev Dr. Angel continued, “This is new age teaching and I do not like it or approve of it for my congregation - Foster, Willard, and Keating and their kinds of prayer and disciplines. Error!”

Pastor Dan smiled and said, “Well I assure you that neither these authors nor my teaching are occultic or new age, and I would never allow it here at St. James.”

“Sir, I tell you I surveyed the offerings at a local new age bookstore, and there it was. Foster’s book right out on the shelf. I was making a list of books for my flock to avoid.”

“Well, Albert,” Pastor Dan said, “I have noticed the offerings at similar stores and found the Bible to be available but I am not warning my congregation off of that. Albert, I know that your concerns are sincere but they need more meat on their bones. Bless you in your journey. If Della returns, we will discuss your concerns.”

Della, Dan Goodman, The Rev. Dr. Angel, First Church, and St. James Church are fictitious but they represent the opinions, beliefs, and hearsay that encircle unspoken prayer and its’ subtypes. In this paper I intend to examine unspoken prayer as a valid tool for Christian spiritual formation. One of the elements of this examination is to look at the statements of those who are deeply opposed and of those who practice and promote unspoken prayer.

The subject of unspoken prayer is too broad to be examined thoroughly in this brief document, and the primary thesis that directs the content that follows is that unspoken prayer can be a useful tool for Christian spiritual formation.

Preliminary Thoughts Concerning Unspoken Prayer

I am including this short section at the beginning of this work with the hope that it will provide my readers with a clear understanding of what I mean by “unspoken prayer.” There is always a danger that the reader will miss the writer’s point, especially if the writer is attempting to explain something that is unfamiliar to the reader. Given the subject matter of this piece, I wish to take every possible precaution to avoid misunderstanding. Unspoken prayer is a broad term incorporating many disciplines that are most often categorized as Christian mysticism or contemplation. These disciplines will always contain an element of silence, silent prayer, meditation, or contemplation. Christian spirituality and Christian spiritual formation have many origins and influences; and because of the diversity of origins and faith traditions of the language of Christian spirituality, there is often a misunderstanding of what a speaker or author means with the language that is presented. I do not intend to change the readers’ minds or challenge the readers’ convictions concerning unspoken prayer within their faith tradition. My only purpose here is to clarify how I understand unspoken prayer and the criticisms most often tendered against it. The following description of unspoken prayer is not intended as the final word; it is merely one perspective among several that may be culled from a vast array of literature on the subject.

The research for this dissertation revealed that often authors who oppose unspoken prayer will quote an author who supports it and then make a statement like, “That is what he said and now let me tell you what he means.” There is no way to avoid this tendency in some readers and authors. This section of chapter one will work to clarify the author’s broadest intent concerning unspoken prayer.

First, this study of unspoken prayer concerns the use of unspoken prayer in the Christian tradition. It is acknowledged that many faith traditions outside the Christian church use unspoken prayer in many ways, but this document restricts its considerations to use within the Christian church. A **Christian**¹ is a person who, through a process of culture, learning, or evangelistic effort, comes to a place of obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit’s work, the new disciple comes to a realization that because of their broken and sinful condition, they are separated from God. In this process the disciple comes to the understanding that Jesus interceded for their brokenness on the cross and by grace received their punishment. This act of grace made a way for them to become reconciled to God. This process is considered in the light of many Christian worship traditions, and this definition is not intended to promote any one tradition. The process of salvation is between the disciple and Jesus as their Lord.

Salvation is the act of becoming a Christian disciple of Jesus Christ. The disciple must avoid a static affiliation with God and seek a progressively evolving relationship with Jesus. In order to grow or mature as a Christian and move from milk to meat, there must be a process of refinement in the Christian’s relationship with Jesus as Lord.² This

¹ Throughout this paper bold type is used to emphasize many words, phrases, and Scripture portions. The words and phrases in bold are the author’s emphasis unless otherwise noted.

² Henri Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts, A Mediation on the Burning Life*, (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 87.

process may involve many areas of development and study. Usually the process of maturity in the Christian will be a mixture of several of the following.

The first is **Discipleship**, which is to be a follower of Jesus. Often the new follower of Jesus, who has been transformed by a salvation experience, will have a mentoring relationship with a more mature Christian in order to progress into a more personal relationship with Jesus. This mentoring relationship is part of the process of discipleship. Studying the catechism is discipleship. Attending church membership class is discipleship. Participation in Sunday school is discipleship. Usually the process of growth in discipleship is weighted more on the side of a didactic experience. However most of the exercises of discipleship may be formational as well. Generally speaking, the mystery of the experience leans the experience toward discipleship or spiritual formation. The two processes are not exclusive one from the other and are necessarily interdependent. For example, one may use a section of scripture from discipleship class for a period of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio divina* is an ancient form of Bible reading that is carried out with the sequence of scripture reading-*lectio*, meditation-*meditatio*, prayer-*oratio*, and contemplation-*contemplatio*.

In order to develop a dynamic relationship with Jesus, there are many intentional exercises a disciple may use in order to be drawn by the Holy Spirit into a deeper, more mature Christ-like spirit of being. The Christian spiritual disciplines are not self-help tools that if done in a prescribed manner automatically result in an improved character nor can they be used as a bargaining chip that will allow the disciple to engage in questionable behavior (Galatians 5:19-21) if he/she simply keeps up the daily devotional *carte du jour*.

One of the most common and most controversial of the Christian spiritual disciplines is **Christian contemplation/meditation**. This is a form of deep concentration that creates a compelling ability to focus on the matter at hand. This deep concentration or thought is not absence of thinking but, indeed, primarily a thought process.³ Many who oppose meditation outright feel that it is a state of altered consciousness. This is not the case in Christian contemplation/meditation. However, Christian contemplation/meditation is a process of peeling away the outer, materially bound, layers of oneself in order to commune, spirit to Spirit with God. Wesley Tracey calls this the discipline of subtracting.⁴ In effect, the process of contemplation/meditation cleans up the pollution of the world on the outer layers of the self and creates a clean vessel for God to transact business with. Christian contemplation/meditation is a process of overcoming the attachments to the world that impede the disciple's truest and deepest communion with God. Christian contemplation/meditation is an intentional practice of Christian spiritual formation.

Christian Spiritual Formation is the intentional practice of Christian spiritual disciplines in order to move toward Christ-likeness. Spiritual formation is from God and is never the result of the disciple's efforts. Spiritual formation is not a self-help program. Spiritual formation is a gift of grace from God to the disciple as the disciple seeks a more intimate relationship with Him. The means of spiritual formation are complex and multi-dimensional. In a very real sense, everything we do contributes to or hinders our spiritual formation. Church attendance, Bible reading, formal or informal study, prayer, fasting,

³ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 54.

⁴ Wesley D. Tracey, E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, et. al., *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 98.

meditation, prayer, Sunday school participation, ministry to felt needs, and the practice of the classical disciplines all have formative value. Greed, judgment, hate, racism, pride, and a plethora of other self-centered acts may hinder our formation by placing barriers to our communication with God.

The primary ingredient of all these tools of Christian spiritual growth is prayer.

Prayer, in a broad sense, is communication with God. Prayer, most often offered as petition for needs, in this document is considered to be communication in any form with God. This creates concern in some Christian fundamentalist circles; but prayer, as the word stands alone, is broader than a Christian context. **Christian prayer** is communication with the Father in a relationship established by the ministry of Jesus on the cross. Communication with the Father in any form is prayer for the Christian disciple.

Prayer may be expressed in many forms. One of these is silent prayer. **Silent Prayer** can be confusing and is not the same as unspoken prayer. For the purposes of this document silent prayer is considered prayer that is verbalized silently in the mind but not orally expressed. Silent prayer is the prayer that is offered in a group as you pray along with the leader or current prayer. A silent prayer may be offered up for the pastor from the pew. This is a prayer that is considered in words but not spoken.

Another form of prayer, and the one specifically examined in this document, is unspoken prayer. As will be examined, unspoken prayer can be controversial in its many forms. **Unspoken Prayer** is prayer offered to God as listening, focused waiting, or thought focused meditation. It is a state of intentional openness to the unfathomable

presence of God. This is not an emptying of the mind or opening to random thoughts.⁵

Unspoken prayer does not free us from our mind or mental abilities but from the attachments that impede hearing the still small voice that sought out Elijah in 1 Kings. Unspoken Prayer is listening to God as He listens to you. Words may or may not come to the disciple from God. During the process of unspoken prayer, words will not be formed by the praying disciple. Unspoken prayer may be used in centering prayer, Lectio Divina, contemplative prayer, or meditation.

Unspoken prayer may be made up of many forms. One is solitude. **Solitude** is far more than aloneness. Solitude is a state of being with God or being in the presence of God with a heightened sense of His being and a diminished sense of material surroundings. Solitude does not require being away from others or being remote geographically. Usually solitude requires a quiet, calm environment but not isolation or seclusion.

A key part of the Christian's relationship with God is their spiritual life and their spirituality. **Spirituality** is, in a broad sense, a concern with matters of the spirit or unknown elements of being. The spiritual, concerning as it does eternal verities regarding man's ultimate nature, is often contrasted with the temporal or the worldly. The central defining characteristic of spirituality is a sense of connection to a much greater whole which includes an emotional experience of religious awe and reverence. As with some forms of religion, the emphasis of spirituality is often on personal experience. It may be an expression for life perceived as higher, more complex, or more integrated with one's worldview, as contrasted with the merely sensual.⁶ However, this is

⁵ Thomas Keating, "Clarifications Regarding Centering Prayer." Email to Wayne Lewis.

⁶ Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spirituality>.

a very broad definition and applies to any arena of spirituality or god seeking. For Christians a more specific definition is offered. **Christian Spirituality** deals not only with a person's efforts to connect with God, or the Christian's efforts to connect with God through the work of Christ, but man's existence within and without the kingdom of God. Christians should not restrict their study of spirituality to life within the kingdom. God sought each Christian before they were reconciled to Him by the work of Christ. Christian spirituality, therefore, encompasses life within and outside the kingdom of God.

Ultimately Christian spirituality is grounded in relationship with Christ Jesus that leads the disciple to 1) know Jesus as Savior, 2) grow in relationship with God through relationship with Jesus, or 3) experience a more incarnational life due to a more powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:6). Christian spirituality is both being and doing. Christian spirituality cannot be defined by denominational codex for those outside the denomination. The God/seeker relationship in Christ that designates a seeker as Christian constitutes Christian spirituality without regard to maturity of that relationship (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Christian spirituality is a broad subject of many elements. There is Eastern Christian or Orthodox spirituality which must be differentiated from Eastern non-Christian spirituality. Unfortunately this distinction is not always made by all authors. The difference will always be noted in this document.

Eastern versus western spirituality is characterized by the contrast between the apophatic and kataphatic nature of spirituality. Eastern Christian spirituality looks more to experience the mystery of God; whereas Western Christian spirituality looks more to experience the definable nature of God. It is a mistake to merge eastern spirituality and

Eastern Christian spirituality in one's work. The position of this document believes it is a grave error for any Christian or scholars to fail to separate Eastern Christian or Eastern Orthodox Christianity and confuse it with eastern spirituality or occultism.

The mystical unknown nature of God is an important element of Christian spirituality. **Mysticism** in this text deals with that part of the Godhead that we humans cannot understand this side of heaven (Isaiah 40:12-31). There are simply elements of the mind of God that we do not and cannot know or comprehend. God in His grace may choose to reveal glimpses of this mind by direct revelation, but there will still be more we do not know about God than we do know about Him. It is further considered that there is a human tendency to want to impart to God characteristics that we know and understand, therefore using anthropomorphism to make God a controlled being.

Mysticism and the mystical nature of God often lead Christians, with a deep sense of longing to experience the mystical nature of God, to seek Him in unorthodox or unconventional ways and practices. The validity of these tendencies and some specific practices will be examined more carefully in chapter four.

This is an overview of some of the most important elements of unspoken prayer, the characteristics of unspoken prayer that differentiate it as a distinct part of Prayer and particularly Christian prayer, and the specific meanings of some terms as they relate to this document. In the chapter that follows, unspoken prayer will be further dissected and supported through Scripture and by its very positive role in the formation of the Christian's relationship with the Father through the ministry of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Overview

There is considerable variance of opinion in Christian circles considering unspoken prayer. One camp of thought is very concerned about unspoken and silent prayer. These concerns are about the use, influence, and origins of silence in prayer and spiritually formative exercises. The expressed concern is that the use of silence is formed in occultic and eastern religions and that it will open the disciple to harmful practices, entrance of evil spirits, and remove the focus from the foundation of Christian experience, that is Jesus as the giver of life, and lead the disciple to dependence on self and mystical practices of meditation and blending self into God as a replacement for growth in grace. The core problem for Ray Yungen is the source of centering/silent/contemplative prayer. He sees this source as originating in India and traveling through Alexandria on to the desert fathers and ultimately to the modern spiritual formation movement.⁷ Yungen sees the renewed interest in the classical spiritual disciplines as a move toward a universal salvation, pantheism, and universalism without regard to the work of Jesus as Savior and toward a more person/works centered way to salvation.⁸ His more specific concern is that the Keating/Pennington/Merton system of centering prayer uses and pays tribute to Eastern meditation, Buddhist, and Hindu practices on meditation.⁹ As the use of silence in prayer crosses the borders of many world religions and Christian cults into the post-modern New Age movement, these associations concern not only Yungen, but many others as well.

⁷ Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing Company, 2002), 83-84.

⁸ Ibid. 82.

⁹ Ibid 65.

The other school of thought on unspoken prayer is idealized in the teachings and writings of Thomas Merton, Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating. These men were and are a part of an effort in the 1970's and 1980's to rekindle interest in Christian spirituality and spiritual formation. One of the most popular and copied techniques they established is known as *centering prayer*.¹⁰ Keating and company sought to establish a manner of Christian spirituality that would help a mass of churchgoers who were hungry for a more distinctly spiritual vein in their religious lives into or back into a passionate contact and involvement in the church. Keating believed that the church was losing young people because they were offered a mystical experience by eastern religion, popularized by the Beatles and the 1960's mysticism, and who were hungry for an experience that was not self centered, as both Catholic and Protestant experience had become, but was community and social justice oriented.¹¹ This line of thought was further popularized in 1978 when Richard Foster published *Celebration of Discipline*. This book brought these thoughts firmly into the Protestant tradition and has since become a classic popularizing the work of the classical disciplines for Christian spiritual formation for the Protestant church much as Keating/Pennington/Merton had done for the Catholic Church. Foster has gone on to become something of a Christian pop hero and now works through Renovaré, an organization he founded to promote Christian spiritual formation.

In *Intimacy with God*, Thomas Keating mentions the negative attitude toward contemplation prior to 1975 and the confusion over what a contemplative was and how a

¹⁰ M. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Prayer Form*, (New York: Image Books, 2001), 55.

¹¹ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 13.

contemplative prayed.¹² While this may have been cleared up somewhat by the writers on contemplation in the 1970s and following, there still appears to be a great deal of confusion and negative thought in the Protestant and Catholic churches.

Another area that must be examined is when the authors who are pro or con unspoken prayer speak of Eastern influences, are they talking about the same thing? An important question is: are the critics on course or do they tend to proof text the writings of the author they criticize?

Another concern that requires examination is whether the fact that New Age and other non-Christian spiritual or religious groups use centering, silent, or unspoken prayer as a basis for disregarding or demeaning its use altogether. These and other questions will be examined more thoroughly in chapter four. This chapter will also introduce the question of whether all mysticism and things mystical are always of evil origin and lead to destruction and disaster for the Christian disciple.

The concentration will be on unspoken prayer as it encompasses centering prayer, *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and mediation and how closely linked these all are in a common thread of the unspoken Spirit to spirit communication. The issue of safety for the Christian pilgrim to use these practices as devices for spiritual formation will be an important theme of chapter four as well. An attempt will be made to present a rational, balanced argument and safe reasonable conclusions will be made.

It is true that the emphasis of this document is unspoken prayer; but centering prayer, silent prayer, and *lectio divina* must be considered as well because various authors throughout the assorted writings, disciplines, and areas of thought all use these

¹² Ibid., 15.

terms, often with different slants on their meaning. An attempt has been made to clarify some of these potential misunderstandings in this overview

There is a Biblical foundation for unspoken, silent, or contemplative prayer. Chapter two will examine the Old and New Testaments for that evidence. This chapter will look at episodes in the Old Testament that were, or may be, interpreted as the characters using silent prayer and how this use may have effected their actions and decisions. The New Testament will be examined for occurrences of unspoken or listening prayer and how it was used and how it can be interjected into the spiritual journey of the modern twenty-first century disciple.

A search will be made for Jesus' use of unspoken prayer or His references to it. This is vital for the Christian on a formative journey because our attitude toward and use of unspoken prayer must be grounded in an objective hermeneutic. Since the goal of the Christian use of prayer for this journey is to be more Christ like, the basis for the use of any form of prayer must fit into the example of Christ. The question of whether a Biblical reference must be direct and unequivocal will be considered as well. Many of the references cited concerning unspoken prayer may be indirect but nevertheless clear; chapter three will examine some of these and consider their value and validity for this study. The opponents of unspoken prayer feel that there is little or no Biblical basis for unspoken prayer, silent prayer, or silence as an adjunct to worship.

Chapter three will look at the historical and theological characteristics of unspoken prayer. This is a vital chapter because many critics categorize all unspoken prayer as unacceptable and "mystical" in nature. How the historical roots of unspoken

prayer and the use of unspoken prayer as a discipline for Christian spiritual formation support its use is a key question.

In addition to the other items mentioned, chapter four will examine the modern approach to unspoken prayer and the literature that explains and promotes it as a discipline for the twenty-first century disciple seeking a more Christ-like character. This chapter will look at the arguments against unspoken prayer and examine their validity and merit for the twenty-first century Christian seeking a more deeply profound spiritual experience. It will also examine the place of apophatic spirituality for the modern western Christian and what the modern denominational protestant Christian may gain or lose in a pursuit of a mystical worship or formative experience.

Chapters four and five will examine the specific pro and con evidence concerning unspoken prayer. These chapters will look at the origins of the evidence, the logic behind it, and the various conclusions of the authors and scholars involved.

Chapter six will express the conclusions of this study and make recommendations aimed especially to the seeker who is interested but a novice in the spiritual disciplines and may be concerned about any detrimental effects of silence, unspoken prayer, contemplation, or centering prayer. This chapter will also include a primer for the disciple seeking a way to embark on the discipline of unspoken or centering prayer.

This study is not intended to be a definitive work on unspoken, centering, or contemplative prayer. The purpose and intent of this study is to look at unspoken prayer as defined in this document and examine whether it stands as an asset to the disciple of Jesus or introduces dangers that will draw the disciple away from rather than to Jesus.

Defining the Topic

The initial thesis for this document was: Centering Prayer is a valid foundation for Christian spiritual formation. The form of centering prayer being looked at was the modern form widely promoted by Basil Pennington, Thomas Merton, and Thomas Keating and Keating's Contemplative Outreach organization. The three Catholic monks felt a deep concern for a loss of spirituality and mysticism in the American church with their concern being focused on the Catholic Church. These three were largely responsible for the modern Centering Prayer movement based on the same form of prayer as articulated in the anonymous work *The Cloud of Unknowing*.¹³ Interest in this work was rekindled by these three and Father William Meninger in the early 1970's. Although these men are Catholics, their concern was for all the church, both Protestant and Catholic, particularly for the young people of the church who were flocking from churches in droves in pursuit of mystical spirituality, especially one that fostered community. As Thomas Keating encountered young people visiting the Trappist Monastery of his residence, he noticed that they were coming to a contemplative state of prayer that even many cloistered monks in strict religious orders, primarily the Trappists, were not achieving or even aware of. At the same time, Thomas Merton was writing extensively about his encounters with inter- religious communities and the ease with which Buddhists, Hindu, and other religions were coming to this state of spiritual rest that was not evident in many Christians and that he himself had not easily encountered

¹³ Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2003).

through the cloistered life.¹⁴ Keating's concern was that these young people had to go to India, or at least to look outside their faith traditions, to find a spirituality that was mystical and satisfying to their needs. Keating was disturbed, as were Merton and Pennington; and using the *Cloud of Unknowing* as a guide, they began further conversations in order to find a practice of mystical prayer that would lead to a heart felt contemplative experience.

As the literature was explored for this original thesis, the first question that arose was: is centering prayer a good beginning for a Christian in their initial investigation of a deeper contemplative experience? The almost immediate answer was that it may be but with cautions. The foundation for this answer was far-reaching. Centering prayer as taught by Keating, et al., is a simple yet advanced practice that is unadorned and straightforward to begin and to do but takes a certain level of refinement to do well and safely. Keating, et al., seemed to promote it as a good starting point; but the more I read, the less I agreed with centering prayer being a good launching pad for the new pilgrim on the inward journey. Centering prayer appeared to be something that anybody could do easily but may not be something that the novice pilgrim should take on because there may be inherent risks. The primary risk is that in unspoken prayer the disciple must open his mind and his soul and his spirit to the Spirit. In an immature Christian on milk, the ability to be protected from harmful spirits or destructive forces seeking to enter in with destructive intent may be lacking. Secondly, centering prayer takes time and a pilgrim in the beginning may well get discouraged from something that could be a great benefit if done with proper knowledge, patience, and wisdom. The third and most serious concern came from Keating's writings. This concern was that when the new pilgrim initially

¹⁴ Keating, 13.

approaches centering prayer, he is opening himself or herself to the spiritual world, perhaps for the first time, and that a certain maturity and wisdom is needed to be exercised in order for the disciple to be certain that the Spirit was encountered and not dangerous spirits from the enemy. A fourth and unexpected concern arose from correspondence between the author and the initial advisor. This concern was that centering prayer was not a valid tool for the Christian disciple seeking more fulfilling heartfelt spirituality and that centering prayer may actually be harmful. This came about as the advisor introduced the author to literature that questioned and, in some cases, criticized and even condemned unspoken prayer, silence, and the validity of intentional use of the classical spiritual disciplines by the seeker. As this concern was approached and examined, literature surfaced that did far more than voice concerns but actually fielded absolute opinions that both the ancient and modern authors of centering prayer, spiritual formation, silence, and spirituality were promoting views that are universalistic, pantheistic, and decidedly not Christian. These arguments were a far cry from the original intent of this document but needed and deserved to be addressed.

This led to the current thread of this study. This document will not attempt to be a definitive answer to either side of a problem that cannot be answered. The intent of this document is to look at unspoken prayer and its components of centering prayer, *lectio divina*, prayerful meditation, and contemplative prayer as defined earlier and make reasonable conclusions as to the effectiveness and safety of unspoken prayer in its many forms and how to be aware of any dangers and avoid them. If the information contained in this document helps any reader come to a rational, reasonable, scriptural, and personal

conclusion about using unspoken prayer in any form with comfort and trust that God was in the process, the goal will be reached.

CHAPTER TWO

Biblical Foundations for Unspoken Prayer

To consider any form of Christian prayer as valid, there must be a Biblical foundation. This applies not only to prayer, but any activity that the Christian chooses to pursue, especially decision making matters of formation in Christ. Luke Timothy Johnson admits to a bias that, “When the church makes decisions, the Bible ought somehow to be involved.” Johnson goes on to say that this may well raise more problems than it solves.¹ This chapter will examine the possible Biblical foundations of unspoken prayer, silent prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. Each of these forms of prayer is included in the chapter title and description because they are so deeply interrelated and together comprise unspoken prayer. Meditation is certainly a part of unspoken prayer as well as contemplation and contemplative prayer. Unspoken prayer can become a part of any Christian’s daily life with the Lord but must be on a firm Biblical foundation.

This chapter will examine the presence, validity, and vigor of several Old Testament and New Testament Biblical references to prayer and how they may apply to unspoken prayer. Argument for and against the validity of unspoken prayer will be

¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 10.

reserved for chapters four and five unless they apply directly to the Biblical characterization of unspoken prayer and the thrust of this chapter.

There are literally thousands of books on prayer. Many of these texts are excellent resources for the definition and practice of prayer. The ultimate authority, however, must rest in the Biblical presentation of unspoken prayer as a valid component of Christian formation and practices of discipleship. If unspoken prayer in any form is valid, must it be used? If it is valid, can it be ignored as a tool for spiritual formation? How does the seeker decide? These questions will influence the subject matter in chapter two and expanded in chapters four, five, and six.

This chapter is the critical element of the entire document. Many of the opponents of unspoken prayer in any form create an either/or scenario for all Christians seeking a deeper and richer relationship with Jesus through intentional formational disciplines. For example, Ray Yungen, in his book *A Time of Departing*, raises the question, “How can credible evangelical organizations justify meditative practices that clearly resemble those of Eastern meditation?”² This begs the question: must Christians avoid any method of growth that is not clearly and exclusively developed from their own ranks? How many of our ideas of church planning, finances, growth, and missions are borrowed from secular sources? How many of the techniques taught in our leadership seminars are based on Jim Collin’s excellent books such as *Good to Great*? How many of the early Christian rituals were based on Jewish and even pagan rites and practices? Just how much of Christianity is exclusively Christian?

² Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing: How a Universal Spirituality is Changing the Face of Christianity*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing Company, 2002), 135.

The answer must be found in the scriptures and a foundation laid that supports not just our views and our practices but makes our views and practices His views and practices. We live in a postmodern era in which there are few absolutes in secular society, and it is routine for a person to declare a specific view or trait and yet fail to live it out. This is not new to society or the church. Many white supremacy groups proclaim the love of Christ and the hate of all who are not like them; yet their message is so deeply opposed to scripture that the organization proposing such a position cannot be measured as valid. So is unspoken prayer opposed to scripture? Is there a scriptural base for the use of unspoken prayer? Unspoken prayer practiced in any form must be based in Scripture in its foundation but must also produce the fruit of the Spirit in its practice.

Is unspoken prayer a valid Biblical concept? Speaking of Richard Foster, Yungen states, “When he made an appeal from scripture to support the credence of contemplative prayer practice, all he could find was Psalm 62:1, a verse that refers to being still and attentive to God. But this passage is certainly not suggesting that one go *beyond thought* by a sacred word or focusing on the breath” (Emphasis Yungen’s).³ The reference Foster makes in the passage referred to by Yungen is not made in the context of presenting a Biblical case for contemplative or any other type of unspoken prayer. Foster states that, “Contemplative prayer is one discipline that can free us from our addiction to words.”⁴ He goes on to quote Psalm 62:1 as evidence that silence is one position that the Christian can take before God. Then more significantly on the following two pages Foster goes on to describe the many subtle dangers of contemplative prayer to the novice disciple. Foster in no way states that this verse is being used as a case for the complete

³Ibid. 77.

⁴ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 155.

Biblical foundation for contemplative prayer and, indeed, acknowledges the necessity of avoiding error or being seduced by unkind spirits while in silence before the Lord.

This brings up the danger of proof-texting and the intent of this document to avoid it. Proof-texting is the practice of removing a passage of scripture from its context and using it to prove a point that it may not support when used in the proper intended context. Using this approach is especially tempting when using Biblical passages because the authors are not available to explain the many verses and passages of scripture that can convey many meanings when exposed to the light of the Holy Spirit. Many of the books and articles used in chapters four and five to examine the dangers of unspoken prayer use proof-texting to pick and choose quotes from their sources to challenge, criticize, or condemn unspoken prayer as not only dangerous but unbiblical and absolutely harmful to the Christian seeking a more mature and richer relationship with Jesus. The above example is typical. Quotes are often used by these authors or a criticism arranged around a quote with no consideration of the context or the full thought of a paragraph. This is frequently a danger in Biblical scholarship and very often used to make a case against unspoken prayer. This chapter is not a comprehensive work on the Biblical basis of unspoken prayer or its subsidiary types but will make every attempt to be as thorough as possible in the examination of the passages used and build a solid foundation for the claims of this document.

The next item applies to this and every other chapter. The fact of Biblical scholarship, whether in Sunday school or the seminary classroom is that there are many, many chapters, verses, and passages of scripture that will be interpreted differently as they are studied by scholars with varying goals, backgrounds, and presuppositions. This

applies to interpretation of scripture and doctrine. What is the best way for the Christian pilgrim to find his place in scripture and doctrine? Can we arrive at different conclusions and indeed be simply different rather than wrong? The answer is certainly we can. Most often Jesus told those He healed or invited into the kingdom of God to repent and sin no more. He never insisted that they become Jewish. He even forbade some to join His band and follow Him sending them back to their home place and into their own community. Jesus readily pointed out the deception and lies of the Pharisees and other opponents, but He never tried to build a case of judgment against them.

Unspoken prayer can lead the pilgrim onto unsafe territory if the foundation of scripture, faith, grace, obedience, and knowledge is not solid. The goal of this document is to define the avenues of unspoken prayer, acknowledge the risk that it can be misused, and define how well meaning critics confuse Christian and non-Christian unspoken prayer. The goal of this chapter is to lay down a Biblical foundation for unspoken prayer of many types and to examine how the scriptures used may apply to unspoken prayer.

Old Testament

Psalms 62:1

The first verse that must be examined is Psalms 62:1, “My soul *waits* in **silence** for God only; from Him is my salvation.” Verse five repeats, “My soul waits in **silence** for God only, for my hope is from Him.” Verse one seems to explain itself but it is reinforced in verse five, each verse with a statement of intent and then explanation. In verse five the word *for* is a fulcrum for the interpretation of this verse and its meaning. “My souls waits” in silence *for*, (there is a reason and now I will tell you what it is) my

hope is in Him. Bibleworks 5 gives the Hebrew word for wait as *damam*-a silent or quiet waiting, repose. In verse one, it is *dumiyyah*-to grow dumb, silent or still.⁵ Verse one gives the sense of coming into silence or finding silence. This is in line with the teaching that silence is a discipline that can be refined much as learning to express one's feelings in an art form. "My soul waits" is attuned to the idea in unspoken prayer that the goal of communication in the prayer time is on a spirit to Spirit plane. "My soul waits in silence" is repeated in both verses. In silence the Psalmist anticipated hope and salvation.

In verse five, the Psalmist is speaking to or commanding his soul. "**My soul waits**" in silence for salvation and salvation results in hope. This is the command and the goal stated in one clear and succinct verse. Silence is allowed.

The NIV translates Psalm 62:1, "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him." Is the meaning here different than in the NASB translation? The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, "The psalmist is encouraging himself by **reflecting** on who the Lord is."⁶ This certainly conveys the meaning of contemplative and both ancient and modern centering prayer. Resting in God is the goal and theme of unspoken prayer. Basil Pennington reflects that centering prayer is a matter of spiritual refreshment⁷ and certainly this refreshment would come from quietly resting in God (NIV) or waiting in Him and His salvation and His hope (NASB).

PSALM 28:14

Wait for the LORD;

⁵ BibleWorks 5, Psalm 62:1, 5, notes.

⁶ William A. VanGemeren, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Expositor's Bible Commentary: vol. 5, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 421.

⁷ Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer*, (New York: Image Books, 2001), 204

Be strong and let your heart take courage;

Yes, wait for the LORD.

This is a message of hope. Wait and the Lord will rescue His people.⁸

Expositor's Bible Commentary goes on then to say that the psalmist believes that waiting will lead to tasting the goodness of the Lord in fellowship, protection, guidance, and victory. The key is in the waiting. And waiting takes strength. In *Teach Us to Pray*, Everett Leadingham acknowledges that at one time or the other everyone finds it difficult to wait. We may be willing to acknowledge this only in a whisper but it is true. During these times of difficulty, we must be strong and wait on the Lord.⁹ This waiting may be a constant verbal outpouring; or it may be a silent listening for the voice of God to come to us, or in some cases, to return to us.

Waiting on the Lord is part of the redemptive history of the people of God.

Waiting may be active or passive. Waiting may be sitting in the quiet of the prayer closet or rushing about in a constant flurry of activity as we await the answer or results. Brother Lawrence waited on the Lord as he washed dishes and scrubbed floors.¹⁰ But does one form of waiting exclude the other? Of course it doesn't. Waiting on the return of Jesus and the fulfillment of the kingdom is not a time of rest or immobility. In I Thessalonians 4:11, Paul exhorts his readers to work with their hands. In 5:12 he exhorts them to respect those among them who work hard. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Paul censures those who refuse to work. The Thessalonians are admonished to wait for the day of the Lord and to be busy in the work of the kingdom while they wait.

⁸ VanGemenen, 248.

⁹ Everett Leadingham, *Teach Us to Pray*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2002), 17.

¹⁰ Brother Lawrence, *Practicing the Presence of God*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 61.

This busy waiting does not eliminate the possibility of waiting quietly before the Lord as well.

“Wait for the LORD;

Be strong and let your heart take courage;

Yes, wait for the LORD.”

The sense of waiting here, however, is that the Psalmist is waiting in the fellowship, protection, guidance, and victory that God gives.¹¹ All of these things can be found in a conversation with God and conversation to be complete must include an element of listening in silence.

PSALM 5:3

“In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly watch*.” Essentially this verse is saying, “Lord I will pray in the morning and then listen for your voice.” The NIV translates this verse

“In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and **wait in expectation**.” To wait in expectation is a description of centering prayer, contemplative prayer, meditation, and elements of *lectio divina*. Bibleworks 5 gives the Hebrew word *tsaphah* to be translated as wait or keep watch.¹² Expositor’s Bible Commentary states that the word translated *eagerly watch* or wait in expectation can be translated “I will stretch out for you.”¹³ This phrase adds to the vision of expectant waiting in a submissive attitude of prayer for the answering, consoling, or guiding voice of God. Can the seeker hear this voice as well if he is speaking rather than

¹¹ VanGemeran, 249.

¹² Bibleworks 5, Psalm 28:14, note.

¹³ VanGemeran, 88.

listening?" The Psalmist prays and listens (waits) in his morning prayers. Neither eliminates the other, but they each complement the other.

GENESIS 1:1-3

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light."

In this passage the earth is formless, void, and dark. There is quiet. God speaks into the quiet chaos to initiate creation. No person is present to hear the voice of God. God is speaking to no one. But it is vitally important to see here that God uses the quietness. God does not avoid the quiet but in speaking creates quiet, the opposite of sound. The unproductive quietness of nothingness was used by God to initiate creation. His power was made manifest in the nothingness. For the disciple seeking to practice the disciplines of spiritual formation silencing the noise of inner busyness opens a place for God to speak. A quiet place is an asset, but a quiet mind is an essential. In Genesis 1:1, God spoke and created silence and concomitantly established Himself as the God that is to be acknowledged and sought after.¹⁴

EXODUS 14:14

"The LORD will fight for you while you keep **silent**." In this passage the word silence is from *charash*, to be silent, dumb, speechless, or deaf. With the Egyptians in

¹⁴ John H. SailHamer, *Genesis*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank A. Gæbelein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 20.

hot pursuit Moses is about to lead the children of Israel from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Moses tells them not only to keep silent, but says to them, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep **silent**.” Then the Lord tells the Hebrews to take a step and go forward. In their silence God spoke to them and sent them on their mission.

In the moment they see the Egyptians bearing down on them, they are about to panic. Moses does not instruct them to run or to fight. He tells them to be still and wait. Let God win the battle. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says that the Lord Himself is telling the Hebrews to, “Stop all action and become inactive, for I the Lord will act by myself on your behalf.”¹⁵ This passage again adds to the case that stillness, silence, and waiting is a way to hear the voice of God and to urge Him on to activity on your behalf. A cacophony of conversation or verbal urging is not necessary.

LAMENTATIONS 3:26

“*It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD.*” Lamentations 3:26

The full context of this verse reads:

The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the person who seeks Him. *It is good that he waits silently for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust, Perhaps there is hope.*

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *Exodus*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank A. Gæbelein, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 397.

Bibleworks 5 lists the Hebrew word translated as silently in this passage as *dumam* meaning silent, silently, or a silence.¹⁶ It must be acknowledged that waiting silently or in silence can mean many things. This verse in the context of the passage reads:

The LORD is good to those who **wait** for Him,
To the person who **seeks** Him.
It is good that he **waits silently**
For the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for a man that he should bear
The yoke in his youth.
Let him **sit alone** and be **silent**
Since He has laid *it* on him.
Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is hope.
Let him give his cheek to the smiter,
Let him be filled with reproach.
Lamentations 3:25-30

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out that this section of scripture begins with the word good (*tohu*) and that the significance may escape the modern reader but it is important because the significance is, "God's will and purpose." It means that the reader is to accept God's timing and His will as an expression of faith and hope.¹⁷

Expositor's Bible Commentary goes on to state that verse 28, "Let him sit alone and be silent since He has laid *it* on him" indicates that the reader will be separated from ordinary human life by the yoke of God's service and that this will lead him to be an outcast. The commentary also says that the silence mentioned here implies an acceptance of God's service and a refusal to complain to his neighbor.

This section of scripture and the commentary's explanation is a picture of the contemplative life and of the disciplines associated with unspoken prayer. A common

¹⁶ Bibleworks 5, Lamentations 3:26, note.

¹⁷ Geoffrey W Grogan, *Lamentation*, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank A. Gæbelein, ed, vol 6, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 720.

thread in every mystic's writing, ancient or modern, is the identification of themselves as the foremost of sinners (vss. 28-30).

The bold words in this passage - wait, sit alone, sit, waits, silent, silently - are descriptive of the contemplative life, ancient or modern.

JOSHUA 1:6-8

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

“Meditate on it day and night,” is a command. This command may be open to interpretation. It is not an absolute command to the contemplative life but a command to meditate on the word of God and, when taken in context, to obey that word. The command to meditate may mean many things. According to *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, the Hebrew word translated meditate can mean to mutter. This would charge the reader to constantly mutter the word of God. In the broadest sense, this passage means to live God's word in your life and to be immersed in it. In a narrower sense, it leaves many options for meditation open to the reader and this meditation is to be day and night. In the present day, this command cannot be limited to a few minutes or even a few hours of quiet time, centering prayer, or the like. However, it in no way rules out moments of intense meditation or waiting in silence for the voice of the Lord to give direction in private interpretation. It also opens the door to the use of a word from

Scripture to be used in centering prayer and to breath prayers as taught by Richard Foster.¹⁸

New Testament

The Old Testament teaches that we are to wait on the Lord, sit silently before Him, and meditate on His law day and night. Now that Jesus is revealed, are we to abandon these practices? After all, we have the hope of the Old Testament meditation with us. Jesus has appeared, ministered, died for our sin, been resurrected by the love of His Father, and now sits in glory interceding for us. Does His presence nullify or overrule the teachings of the Old Testament? No. Thomas Merton says, “Nevertheless, as the New Testament does not do away with the Old, neither do we cease to meditate on the Law of the Lord. But our meditation is nourished by the *memoria Christi*—the consciousness, the awareness, the experience of Jesus hidden in the Old Testament which He has now fulfilled.”¹⁹ Merton goes on to say that to fulfill St. Paul’s vision of meditation we will find ourselves in Christ, penetrate the scriptures led by the very love of God, discover the joy of divine adoption, and the praise of His glory.

According to Merton we must continue to seek the “knowledge of God’s promises and the hope of their fulfillment.” He sees Ephesians 1:17-19 as evidence of this.²⁰

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ***I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power***

¹⁸ Foster, 122-124.

¹⁹ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 64.

²⁰ Ibid., 64.

toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might...”

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.” Thomas Merton sees this “enlightening of the heart” as an indication that we are to continue in our practice of meditation and the contemplative life, both of which fall into the category of unspoken prayer.²¹ The purpose and goal of Christian unspoken prayer is the enlightenment of our minds and heart to the further grasping of the mystery of God. Jesus, in Mark 4:11, says, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables.” The mystery has been given to us but not the fullness of the mystery? Has all been revealed? The answer may be yes and no. The mystery to the kingdom of God and becoming reconciled to Him from our sinful state is through the work of Christ on the cross and this has been revealed. But have all of the mystery of the kingdom and the full extent of the knowledge of Christ been revealed or is it being revealed through the church even today? In Ephesians 3:8-10;

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Here Paul announces that the mystery of Christ can be revealed through the church to the Gentiles, the lost. He then goes on to say that the mystery has been hidden and is now revealed through the Church. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says that the word

²¹ Ibid, 64.

unfathomable (*anexichniastos*) is “that which cannot be traced out;” and therefore the process of revealing the mystery goes on without end at least until after the judgment.²²

If indeed the mystery continues to be revealed, then we must use all Christian means at hand to discover its essence. Jesus said, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...” and the many forms of unspoken prayer are simply forms of this very seeking that Jesus Himself commands us to do. In Luke 6:12 Jesus, “...went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.” Was all of the night spent in verbal spoken prayer? The truth is we cannot know. Certainly it is conceivable that some of this time was spent in listening to the Father, His Abba.

Jesus Himself urged His followers to listen. Surely He would not teach and command a pattern that He Himself would shun. In Mark 4:3, Jesus exclaims to His followers, “Listen to this!” In Luke 8:16-18, Jesus said:

Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, so that those who come in may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and to whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him.

This passage tells us that there are hidden treasures and that we have access to them and the key is in the listening. Unspoken prayer is a mode of listening to the voice of God. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says that the most likely meaning of hidden in verse seventeen refers to God's truth. This commentary also sees the meaning of verse 18 as relating to a personal response to the proclamations of the kingdom of heaven.²³ Take care how you listen. Unveiling the lamp on its stand certainly includes the meaning that

²² A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11, Frank A. Gæbelein, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 47.

²³ Walter A. Liefeld, *Luke*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 11, Frank A. Gæbelein, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 909.

Christians are to allow the hope and joy that Jesus has given them to be revealed to the lost. Additionally, it tells us that we stand naked and uncovered before the Lord and allow Him to replenish our light as the Sun causes the moon to shine.

Listening is a necessary element in unspoken prayer. Andrew Murray wrote,

Prayer should principally be the holy silence and adoration of faith in which I **wait** upon God until He reveals himself to me, until He gives me through His Spirit the loving assurance that He looks upon me as a Father, that I am well pleasing to Him. He who has not time in quietness of soul, and in full consciousness of its meaning, to say Abba Father has missed the best part of prayer.²⁴

What Murray describes here is the listening element of unspoken prayer.

When Jesus took Peter and John up the mountain with Him, the cloud appeared and from the cloud the Father assured them that, “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.” (Mark 9:7). In 2 Peter 1:16-18, Peter tells of this encounter again and assures his readers that the voice was from God and that it is the Holy Spirit that guides us.

Waiting in a state of unspoken prayer for the salvation of the Lord can in a general sense be interpreted as an element of Philippians 2:12, “working out your own salvation in fear and trembling.” Many of the Christian spiritual disciplines require silence and are practiced with intent toward growth in our saving relationship with Jesus. Then in verse thirteen Paul tells the Philippians, “...for it is God who is at work in you.” “Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you.” Unspoken prayer is one avenue the seeker can use to attain this partnership with God. Paul is not exhorting the Philippians to work so that they will be saved but to work in union with the Savior to find the depth and meaning of their salvation. William Barclay says that the idea here is for the Philippians to bring their salvation to completion by

²⁴ Andrew Murray, *The Believer's Secret to Living Like Christ*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 93.

enduring to the end and that this requires a dedicated disciple. Barclay uses the well used comparison of an athlete training for the games. He goes on to discuss the nature of salvation and the work of God in us. Barclay's description of the athlete, the disciples, and the internal nature of salvation is completely consistent with the discipline necessary for the effective employment of spiritual formation and to reach the goals of centering prayer.²⁵

Conclusion

The difficulty with supporting the argument of unspoken prayer as a helpful, even necessary, group of Christian spiritual disciplines is that no absolute answers can be had. Each disciple must read scripture and discern for himself or herself how God intends to use a particular portion of scripture in his or her life. In the end, there will be different discernments from each seeker. This short piece is not intended to convince anyone or even to provide an absolute answer of the meaning of the preceding scripture references. However the intent and the hoped for outcome is to open a door in the reader's mind that will give him or her the opportunity to hear what God is saying to them concerning unspoken prayer and whether it is something that may be used by God to lead the individual to a deeper relationship with God through Christ.

Any process of discernment must be based on Scripture, sound theology, historical precedent, and Spirit led discernment and not on preconceptions, prejudice, triumphalism, or pride.

²⁵ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, revised edition, The daily Bible Study Series, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 41-43.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical and Theological Perspectives of Unspoken Prayer

Theology of Prayer, Spoken and Unspoken, From History and Scripture

Prayer is prehistoric in man. Zaleski and Zaleski make a case for prayer from Neanderthal and pre-Neanderthal man noting ritual practice in Neanderthal man's social behavior.¹ According to this text, there is evidence that man has always prayed. It points out an Eastern Indian myth that states the universe was spoken into existence by "...the sacred sounds and syllables of prayer." This myth of ancient India is consistent with the Genesis account of the origins of the universe and of prayer. Genesis 1:3 says, "Then God said..."²

Although some form of early man may have prayed through ritual or with grunts and gesture to an unknown god, it was God Himself who initiated prayer. Before creation the Godhead discussed the design and implementation of creation and the role of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, establishing relationship through communication within the trinity and as an example for the human race yet to come.³ God spoke all being into existence before man existed. God initiated the prayerful genre of communication as He designed the universe and called light into existence. The first thing God created when He spoke was the quiet. God's light illuminated existence before

¹ Phillip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *Prayer: a History*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2005), 16.

² Ibid., 23-24.

³ Howard F. Vos, *Genesis*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 12.

there was anything else. God Himself sanctified existence before there was anything else for Him to work with. Humanity cannot know the status or substance of that period before time began.

Genesis 1:1-2:3

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. **Then God said**, "Let there be light;" and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. **God called** the light day, and the darkness **He called** night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. **Then God said**, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." God made the expanse, and separated the waters which were below the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so. **God called** the expanse heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. **Then God said**, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so. **God called** the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters **He called** seas; and God saw that it was good. **Then God said**, "Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, *and* fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them;" and it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a third day. **Then God said**, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth;" and it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also. God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. **Then God said**, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. **God blessed them, saying**, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. **Then God said**, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind;" and it was so. God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw

that it was good. **Then God said**, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **God blessed them**; and **God said to them**, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." **Then God said**, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food;" and it was so. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then **God blessed** the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

In this passage there are nineteen references to God speaking and either bringing about a new part of creation or blessing that creation as good. Man responded to God and walked with Him and talked with Him in the garden. Before creation, God established an example of communicative relationship within the Godhead as vital to His kingdom and the future of His creation and eventually between His creation and Himself. God said; God blessed elements of creation; God spoke to man; God spoke to the serpent; and God conversed within the trinity. This form of communication from and within the Godhead became the pattern for communication between God and His creation. It was, in effect, prayer. This prayer was a factor in all God did and may be the greatest example for all of humanity, ancient and modern. Hebrews 11:3 says, "... worlds were prepared by the word of God..." and Psalm 33:9 says, "He spoke and it was done." This is the foundation for all prayer.⁴ God meditated on what creation was to be like and then He

⁴ James Houston, *The Transforming Power of Prayer: Deepening Your Friendship With God*, (Downers Grove, IL: Navpress, 1996), 83.

spoke it into existence.⁵ In bringing about creation, God created time as well. The creation of time shaped the need for the contextualization of prayer for man. The finite nature of man means that he requires layers and modes of communication, and God laid the foundation to fulfill this need.

In its first chapter, the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks of the four levels of Christian living. They are: common, special, singular, and perfect.⁶ These four levels are planes of relationship with the Creator. As the Christian gets to know the Father, the relationship matures and progresses on to as yet unrealized avenues of communication. As the relationship changes, so will the way we pray.⁷ This is a model for all relationships, human or divine. Oord and Lodahl describe this as a matter of following God as He walks ahead and prepares the way. Our communication with Him gives us the ability to exercise intent in our multilayered relationships.⁸ These new avenues of prayer will be defined, not by others, but by how prayerful communication with God affects our relationship with others. As we stand before the Holy God, we are transformed; and from this transformative relationship, fellowship, unity, and power emerge intensely coupled to the Presence before whom we stand.⁹ These new patterns of conversation may not require unspoken prayer but certainly leave the door open to it. Howard Britton, a Quaker, sees silence as necessary.¹⁰ It would be wildly lacking to know the mysterious and intricate, but simple, One True God and think that we can avoid what Richard Foster

⁵ Vos, 12.

⁶ Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 1.

⁷ Everett Leedingham, *Teach Us to Pray*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2002), 32.

⁸ Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Response to the Call of Love*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 81.

⁹ Howard H. Britton, *Friends for 350 Years*, (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2002), 25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

calls “experiences of prayer.”¹¹ Many seekers testify that as their relationship with God matures, the mystery of God becomes more profound and meaningful.¹² We are not promised that the Holy Spirit will reveal all and we immediately will be filled with complete comprehension and knowledge; but the Spirit will reveal Christ to us and help us to recall the meaning and life changing gravity of this revelation.¹³ The Spirit will give us the gifts we need to be Christ’s ambassadors in His absence. Kenneth Boa describes the Spirit-filled life as one of twelve facets of Christian spirituality. He describes the help the Spirit bestows to us as a complex relationship with simple results.¹⁴ This relationship is the revelation of Christ in us and is ongoing, maturing, and not sudden and complete in a moment.

We must seek this relationship and its maturation in us. Boa points out that in Ephesians 1 and 3, Philippians 1, and Colossians 1 Paul desires, not only a propositional knowledge of Jesus for His followers, but a personal knowledge as well. This knowledge is revealed in relationship, and this relationship is matured in prayer and in the spiritual disciplines.¹⁵

So prayer has been around forever. It is in the nature of man to pray, whether to God the Father or to an unknown god. Prayer for followers of the One True God, in a relationship made possible and mediated by His Son, has existed since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve conversed with God, and this conversation continues throughout

¹¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), xi.

¹² Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 22.

¹³ Wesley Tracey, “A Moment or a Journey,” in *Holiness 101*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 48.

¹⁴ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 291-294.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

history. This prevalence of prayer in Scripture is the story of God's dealings with His creation.¹⁶

A Jewish Foundation for Christian Spirituality

Urban T. Holmes, III speaks of Jewish spirituality as the foundation for Christian spirituality. Holmes says that Jewish worship was largely kataphatic. He discusses this as dominated by the images grounded in two words, *d'ath* and *shekinah*.¹⁷ *D'ath* is knowledge, not just a knowing about somebody, but a knowing that goes to the very essence of the person known. Holmes calls it, "The knowledge that gives birth to confidence."¹⁸

Holmes depicts *shekinah* as, "The holy in the midst of the profane."¹⁹ This is consistent with how many contemplatives describe their personal sin condition. The truth is that prior to the Parousia, when the Presence is manifest in the midst of man, it is manifest in a world of evil. 1 John 5:19 states, "We know that we are of God, and that **the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**" John 7:7 states, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, **that its deeds are evil.**"

When Jews prayed, they believed that the *shekinah* was present and praying with them.²⁰ This belief mobilized the powers of heaven to come to the assistance of the person praying. The pre-Christian Jews believed in prayer and they prayed earnestly. They also believed in a knowledge of God that was deeper than conversational in nature.

¹⁶ Houston, 85.

¹⁷ Urban T. Holmes, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁰ Zaleski, 46.

They believed in a deep connection with God that was to be founded on a deeply personal relationship through intentional contemplation of the presence of God and its meaning for them.²¹

Historical Foundation of Unspoken Prayer

Does prayer consist only of words spoken directly to God? According to Christine A. Narloch, in a pamphlet distributed by Earnestly Contending and posted on their web site, prayer is talking directly to God the Father. She goes on to quote Webster's 1828 dictionary that prayer is, "a solemn address to the Supreme Being."²² However, a somewhat more modern definition in the 1973 version of the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines prayer as a "reverent petition made to a deity." It goes on to add that prayer is, "**Any act of communion** with God, such as confession, praise or thanksgiving."²³

Everett Leadingham, a prominent author in the Wesleyan holiness tradition, begins his book *Teach Us to Pray* with the idea that prayer is more than conversation. Prayer is a love relationship with God.²⁴ He goes on to describe how this love relationship is fed by a vision of God, not a material or physical vision, but the mysterious vision of who God is and His overpowering majesty. Leadingham uses Psalm 73 as an example.²⁵

²¹ Holmes, 16.

²² Christine A. Narloch, *Contemplative Prayer: Seducing Spirits and a Doctrine of Devils*, Earnestly Contend, www.EarnestlyContend.com/cp.html.

²³ William Morris, ed., *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1973), 1029.

²⁴ Everett Leadingham, *Teach Us to Pray*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2002), 7.

²⁵ Leadingham, 10.

Psalm 73:21-28

When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was *like* a beast before You. **Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold** of my right hand. **With Your counsel** You will **guide me**, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven *but You*? **And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.** My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, **the nearness of God is my good**; I have made the **Lord GOD my refuge**, That I may tell of all Your works.

Those who endorse and use contemplative prayer are motivated by a mysterious relationship described in the bold type in the verse above. The point, for now, is that unspoken prayer in its many forms are a historical part of communion with God, and this communion with God, in any form, is prayer.

Douglas V. Steere, in the introduction to *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*, says Quakers adopted Augustine's words that we "come to God by love and not by navigation." He goes on to add that when Madame de Chantal was asked about the Quakers' method of prayer, she replied that the best method was to have none.²⁶ Howard H. Brinton says that the Quakers were known for the unstructured nature of their meetings and for the power that was present in those meetings. This power often caused them to shake and "quake," giving them the nickname that became their identity.²⁷ The Quakers waited on the Lord and based this approach to prayer on Psalm 40:1 and 2, "I **waited** patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm" and Isaiah 40:31, "Yet those who **wait** for the LORD Will

²⁶ Douglas V. Steere, *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984),

4.

²⁷ Brinton, 2.

gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” He also cites Psalm 27:14, “**Wait** for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, **wait** for the LORD.”²⁸ Brinton states that the early Quakers believed that gathering and waiting were the key ingredients to the powerful coming of the Spirit and, therefore, spiritual power and presence for the seeker. He cites the waiting and gathering in the first century church beginning at Pentecost as examples.²⁹ For early Quakers who hesitated to define prayer or spirituality, this waiting and gathering was prayer in its purest form.

Silence as Prayer - Examples from Biblical History

In the following scriptures, prayer is manifest as silence; and the target of that prayer is God, the “Supreme Being” in Webster’s dictionary. These are not merely scriptural references but events of the past, the future, or the desire of God for His people.

Job 4:16 It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; A form *was* before my eyes; *There was* **silence**, then I heard a voice.

Isaiah 41:1 Coastlands, **listen to Me in silence**, And let the peoples gain new strength; Let them come forward, then let them speak; Let us come together for judgment.

Revelation 8:1 When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was **silence** in heaven for about half an hour.

Isaiah 41:1 says, Listen to me in **silence**.

This is a moment in history as depicted in Scripture. It is undeniable that this is a command to silence by God. The process of this silence is to hear what the Divine Being

²⁸ Ibid., 2.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

is about to reveal. Isaiah was to listen, and the only way he could do that was in silence.³⁰

Revelation 8:1 is not history but the future but is no less real. The seals will be broken; and when the seventh seal is broken, it is a moment of worship in all of heaven. The heavenly beings worship in silence; and in that silence, they are aware of the work of God in His creation.

The history of silent forms of prayer starts in scripture and continues throughout history to the present day. The idea that this form of prayer was picked up by the desert fathers³¹ and infused into the Christian church from occultic sources simply cannot be sustained by Bible study, Biblical scholarship, or history.

The Jesus Factor

Was Jesus a contemplative? How did He pray? Was His communication with God a one-way street in which only Jesus spoke; or did Jesus spend any time listening to His Abba and pondering on the direction of the Father? We know from scripture that Jesus prayed often. He went into the hills alone to pray. He spent entire nights in prayer. He rose early in the morning to seek a place of solitude to pray.³²

John 5:19-20

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the **Son can do nothing of Himself**, unless *it is* something **He sees the Father doing**; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and **shows Him all things** that He Himself is doing; and *the Father* will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel."

³⁰ Geoffery W. Grogan, Isaiah, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 249.

³¹ Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2002), 44-45.

³² Thelma Hall, R.C., *Too Deep for Words*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 13.

In John 8:28, Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things **as the Father taught Me.**" Jesus came, not with His own message, but the message of the Father. Jesus had to listen to the Father in order to know the content, meaning, and execution of that message.³³

Listening requires silence and intent to hear, not only the words, but the message. In Mark 7:15-16, Jesus says, "There is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. **If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.**" In effect, Jesus was opening the door to a form of prayer that takes time, is quiet, and listens. When read in context, it is the message of the proponents of unspoken prayer and its forms.³⁴

Unspoken Prayer in the Early Church

Luke 7:36-50

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined *at the table*. And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner." And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of

³³ Merrill C. Tenny, *John*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 64.

³⁴ This subject will be discussed more fully in chapter four. One of the many arguments in defense of the criticisms of unspoken prayer is that the case raised against it is based on proof-texting the message of the various authors out of context.

them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has **wet My feet with her tears** and wiped them with her hair. "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to **kiss My feet**. "You did not anoint My head with oil, but **she anointed My feet with perfume**. "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your **faith has saved** you; go in peace."

The sinful woman at the feet of Jesus is an example of unspoken prayer in the time before the first century church came into existence. Foster calls this *penthos*, the prayer of the contrite or broken heart or the prayer of tears.³⁵ Jeremiah was deeply emotional and his emotions simmered barely under the surface. He was known as the weeping prophet. Job poured out tears to God (Job 16:20). Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus said, "Blessed are you who weep" (Luke 6:21). The woman at the feet of Jesus was praying in her own way, to her Lord, who responded in kindness. These emotions and tears were a very real form of prayerful communication, demonstrating the unspeakable feelings of these people to the God they adored. Not all prayer is in spoken words.

Historical Figures in Unspoken Prayer

St. Antony (251-356), considered by many to be the first monastic and founder of the monastic movement, both attracts and repels.³⁶ It is easy to dismiss Antony and other desert fathers and early monastics because of their unusual characteristics and disciplines.

³⁵ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 37.

³⁶ Zaleski, 203.

However, their actions must be considered in the context of their time in history and the spiritual climate of those times. Antony, Pachomius, Benedict, Evagrius, and others were Christian spiritual leaders who had a heart to know God.³⁷ The zeal of these leaders is unquestionable, and their seeking was in a time of growth and flux for the church. They sought God without the benefit or weight of 2000 years of previous study.

Brother Lawrence (1611-1691) may be the very essence of practicing an intentional discipline that leads to a deep inner spirituality. His spirituality was so attractive because he could not keep it in and those around him saw Christ in him. Brother Lawrence was reluctant to write about his encounters with God. In a time of deep concern over his sinful past and near despair, Brother Lawrence cried out, “It no longer matters to me what I do or what I suffer, as long as I remain lovingly united to Your will.”³⁸ This turning point for Brother Lawrence came some time after he entered a Carmelite monastery as a lay brother. Brother Lawrence was at the point God wanted him. He sought to grow in grace and relationship with the divine by doing only one thing and that was to exhibit his love for God in everything he did.³⁹ The spiritual disciplines were not complicated for Brother Lawrence. He wrote, “Although I found several books describing how to know God and mature spiritually, I believed they would only serve to confuse my soul. What I wanted was simply to belong totally to God, so I decided to give everything I could give in order to attain the greatest blessing in return—knowing Him. I gave myself completely to God, accepting His forgiveness of my sins, after which I renounced everything that might offend Him. I began to live as if there was no one but

³⁷ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 485.

³⁸ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

God and myself in the world.”⁴⁰ Brother Lawrence’s life was a prayer to God as well as the embodiment of his discipline. This certainly was a form of unspoken prayer.

John Wesley (1703-1791) founded the Methodist Church. Wesley never became a Methodist but maintained his ordination in the Anglican Church. Although in a disagreement with them, he endorsed and enabled the ordination of Methodist ministers in America because he was convinced of the value and necessity of the administration of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist as a means of grace. Wesley emphasized the mainstream disciplines of prayer, bible study, and acts of kindness. Wesley also recognized that God worked in many ways to foster grace in the heart of man. John Wesley said of the means of grace, “Yet, as we find no command in holy writ for any particular order to be observed herein, so neither do the providence and the Spirit of God adhere to any without variation; but the means into which different men are led, and in which they find the blessing of God, are varied, transposed, and combined together, a thousand different ways.”⁴¹ Wesley understood that salvation was an ongoing relationship with God. Rueben Job, a Methodist bishop, states, “Wesley was convinced that an awakened heart will return to the old ways of rebellion and death without the regular practice of the means of grace. Humankind is not strong enough or good enough to go on to perfection without God’s help. And God’s help is available through the utilization of the means of grace”⁴²

Job, in his introduction, speaks of silence and, while not quoting Wesley, gives his insight as a Methodist bishop and Wesleyan scholar on the subject.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 52.

⁴¹ Reuben P. Job, *A Wesleyan Spiritual Reader*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998), 93.

⁴² Ibid., 91.

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

God speaks to us in sound and silence, and yet our noisy world often crowds out the voice of God that comes in silence. Take a few moments to sit quietly and just listen. Do not be alarmed at the voices you hear within. Excuse yourself from the presence of those inner and outer voices and gently lead yourself back to silence. Today, speak less and listen more. Tonight, before you enter the silence of sleep, review your experience of silence and its contribution to listening for the voice of God during the day about to close.⁴⁴

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was home schooled except for three years during which she attended private school. Ms. Underhill then attended King's College for Women in London. She also served as the Upton lecturer at Oxford in 1920-21. Her primary contribution was her writings on Christian spirituality and mysticism. Underhill believed deeply in the intentional nature of Christian spiritual formation. She believed formation came about by way of using the spiritual disciplines and a good, close relationship with a spiritual guide or spiritual director; but she also believed deeply that this formation was the result of an intentional planned use of the disciplines. This intentionality left little room for the idea that her spiritual formation resulted from loss of control or capriciously ceding her faculties to satanic influence.

Ms. Underhill was an ardent believer in the use of unspoken prayer for spiritual formation. In the introduction of her edition of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, she wrote that she believed the path to the safe and successful use of unspoken prayer was humility and charity.⁴⁵ Ms. Underhill believed and wrote that prayer began with a clear understanding of where the seeker intended to go and that meditation was a part of the process. She wrote that meditation was “the art of thinking steadily and methodically about spiritual things.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵ Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), ix.

⁴⁶ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Spirituality*, excerpts from www.mrrena.com/2002/underhill.shtml, [11/01/2006].

Ms. Underhill believed deeply in the mystical side of Christian spirituality and was very apophatic in her approach to spirituality and spiritual formation; but she was firmly convinced that Christian spiritual formation was and is a clear cut path to a deeper relationship with Jesus as Lord.

Conclusion

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been believers who, in their efforts to discover the limits of their relationship with Jesus, sought ways of becoming more intimately acquainted with Him. From St. Antony to Richard Foster or Brian McClaren, believers have sought new, more intimate knowledge of God and His Son through the Spirit. History is filled with men and women who used extreme measures to know God better. History tells us that sometimes they forged ahead in error; but this does not make all efforts, mundane or extreme, to be from evil.

History, theology, and Scripture are filled with references to the unknown quality of the Godhead. Within humans, motives and past injuries are not always known and therefore cannot be communicated within the mode of human understanding. In moments of ecstasy or deep pain, we often simply hold our loved ones as closely as possible. In a similar manner, sitting in the presence of our Abba Father and just being with Him may bring more ease and satisfaction to both parties than being restricted to always speaking.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Complexities of Unspoken Prayer

Is unspoken prayer in its various forms—centering prayer, silence, *lectio divina*, meditation, contemplative prayer—a valid tool for spiritual formation in the twenty-first century; or is unspoken prayer being used in a nefarious conspiracy resurrected from antiquity to undermine the kingdom of God in modern times? This is a serious question being asked in many quarters in the current Christian climate in the United States. This chapter will examine the various concerns of those opposed to any form of unspoken prayer for validity and reliability and then examine the position of the proponents of unspoken prayer. It will be clear that this document supports and endorses the many forms of unspoken prayer as valuable to the seeker’s arsenal of tools that may be used to enhance a relationship with Jesus. However, it will be equally clear that the intent of this document is not to simply ignore or gloss over any real dangers of exploring unspoken prayer.

The study of concerns from many quarters has revealed valid matters of caution concerning unspoken prayer and the mystical aspects of Christian formation. Many of the critics of unspoken prayer look at these areas of concern and seem to sincerely feel that a valid response is to not only avoid these forms of formational disciplines but to condemn them and vilify their proponents. Every attempt will be made to be objective

and fair in the assessment of the various arguments in the case for unspoken prayer. In the areas of concern I will attempt to present those concerns in a way that will leave the seeker with the tools to make an informed decision on the merits of the case rather than feeling undue pressure from this or any other source.

First will be a look at the substance of unspoken prayer and its various forms and the authors who oppose it. Second will be a look at the position of a sampling of authors who support and promote unspoken prayer. Third will be a look at the contrast of the two and any avenues of reconciling them. Fourth will be conclusions drawn by the author from the evidence.

Unspoken Prayer

Unspoken prayer is prayer that comes from the heart or soul without the use of words that are uttered or formed in thought. Centering prayer is a form of unspoken prayer derived primarily from *The Cloud of Unknowing* and having the name ‘centering prayer’ coined by Father William Meninger in 1975. Contemplative prayer is a broader term, primarily encompassing “a loving attentiveness to God” in silence.¹

Meditation is a pondering of the word or person of God and is primarily linked to the current message of scripture to the contemporary reader and seeker. *Lectio divina* is a form of “holy reading” in which the reader travels from prayer to reading to meditation to contemplation. It is, in a sense, a linking of reading, meditation, and contemplative prayer around a short passage of scripture not for guidance but insight into the character of God.

¹ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 158.

Unspoken prayer is more than the sum of these parts. Unspoken prayer endows Christian seekers with a set of tools to help them fulfill the admonition of 1 Thessalonians 5:14,

“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always **seek** after that which is good for one another and for all people. **Rejoice** always; **pray** without ceasing; in everything **give thanks**; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **Do not quench** the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But **examine** everything *carefully*; **hold fast** to that which is good; **abstain** from every form of evil.”

Unspoken prayer can assist the Christian seeker to pray, seek, examine, hold fast, and abstain in a spirit of rejoicing and thanksgiving. Unspoken prayer is a powerful tool in the seeker's arsenal that allows him or her to confidently obey the command of Paul in Ephesians 4:24 to “**put on** the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Unspoken prayer is not a definable rule that can be distinctly practiced with certain or guaranteed results. Unspoken prayer is a set of tools that will be expressed differently in the hands of every user. Unspoken prayer is a set of disciplines for Christian spiritual formation. Every Christian exercises Christian spiritual disciplines in some form and every Christian uses unspoken prayer in some form or another. Every Christian prays. It is a given that in order to maintain and to grow a relationship with the Father through the Son, in the care of the Holy Spirit, the Christian must pray as the basic element and evidence of that relationship. Every Christian experiences undertakings in unspoken prayer at one time or another. Every Christian ponders the meaning of a passage of scripture within their own heart and mind. Every Christian wonders at the meaning of grace, love, power, and the presence of the Spirit at one time or another.

When we sit and wonder; when we obey the command of Jesus to observe (*katamanthano*) the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28); when we sit quietly on the front porch and marvel at the gift of God in the sunset, we practice unspoken prayer.

There are arguments from those who oppose unspoken prayer or feel that prayer consists only of interactive personal forms of communication from a posture of submission before a formal and specifically conventional God.² It is not the intent of this dissertation to dissuade any Christian or seeker from their traditional and conventionally held beliefs. If a narrow interpretation of prayer is held and insisted upon, this work will have little to say in opposition to that area of belief. Nor is it the intent of this dissertation to demean or injure the committed beliefs of any believer. It is the intent of this dissertation to provide a fair and, as much as possible, an objective assessment of unspoken prayer and its proponents and opponents.

Unspoken prayer is not the heart of the Christian's relationship with God. Yet it is like the unseen wink from a spouse, the feeling of contentment in giving rather than the more tangible enjoyment of receiving, or a child's hug. Prayer is the intentional exercise of relationship between the believer and the divine, and unspoken prayer is the most intimate and esoteric manifestation of that relationship. The relationship of man and wife is not made healthy and enduring by the words they exchange but in the many experiences that they share and the treasuring of those relationships, good and bad, in their hearts. The heightened joy at the nearness of a spouse is similar to the experience of the spirit in unspoken prayer. Unspoken prayer is a form of spirit to Spirit communication.

² John D. Dreher, *The Danger of Centering Prayer*, www.saint-mike.org/library/Occult/CenteringPrayer.html [10/02/2006].

The Parts of a Whole

Unspoken prayer can be compared to harmony. Harmony is described as—the pleasing interaction of the parts of a whole.³ Unspoken prayer, in its various forms, works to strengthen, fulfill, guide, and mature the Christian disciple in spirit to Spirit communication. *Lectio divina*, centering prayer, contemplative prayer, and meditation can work together to form the Christian into a disciple with a strong and growing relationship with Christ. Unspoken prayer can also take the Christian disciple into a place of error and gluttonous misuse that can destroy the usefulness of their relationship with Christ, or lead them into absolute error and destruction of the very relationship that they so desire to cultivate. The course of the disciple's journey is not based on desire or purity of intent. It is based on honesty, openness, brokenness, a gentle spirit, and a sincere willingness to die to self.

Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is the first form of unspoken prayer to be considered because it is the most commonly known and used, as well as controversial, maligned, and attacked. Centering prayer was developed by a mutual concern in Thomas Merton, Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, and William Menninger and is a specific style of unspoken prayer. These Catholic priests and monks developed a concern in the 1970s that the church offered little in the way of mystical spirituality for the youth coming out of the 1960's who were seeking just that; and when failing to find it, they were turning to other

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, (1973).

non-Christian sources to meet their needs.⁴ These men saw youth turning from the church to seek spiritual experiences in India and other non-Christian sources.

Historically the Christian church, Catholic and Protestant, had taken a sharp turn away from any form of mystical spirituality after the reformation. This trend sharpened as times progressed and modernism began to dominate western thought. By the 1960's, mystical spirituality had become the 'red-headed' and 'buck toothed' step-child of the modern church. Prayer, liturgy, and communication with the Spirit had become not only blasé, but negative experiences in the view of Catholic and Protestant leaders and the public. Silence, contemplation, and solitude were relegated to the lazy as a waste of time. Discipleship in Christ had become a matter of busyness and multitasking. Action was the word and tangible calculable results were the goal not only of the working middle class but the Christian seeker and disciple as well.

The result was that anything related to quietness, silence, rest, solitude, and contemplation was not only out of date but the enemy. The need for grandeur, super-sized portions, and personal achievement dominated the landscape. Suddenly here were four men who were promoting silence, listening rather than talking, and withdrawal rather than dashing ravenously into the future. These men spoke of their sin and absence of merit rather than their achievements and skill sets. They were out of step with their church and their society.

Shortly after these four Catholic priests began to teach in retreat after retreat and conference after conference, the word on centering prayer and the contemplative lifestyle began to spread. In 1978, Richard Foster published a book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. At the time, Foster hoped this book would become popular

⁴ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 13.

within a small cadre of Christians who would take it as a call to the contemplative life and become a catalyst for a movement within the Protestant and Catholic Church that would provide a source of knowledge and motivation for those few who may seek a more well formed relationship with Jesus. The book became an international best seller with major revisions in 1988 and 1998. Foster has lamented the massive popularity of his book in his *Renovaré* newsletter. He feels spiritual formation grew so large that its very popularity has weakened the impact he had hoped it would have; and while pleased with its broader popularity, the power may have been diminished. Foster envisioned a deeply committed group that would be an inspiration rather than a broad cross section that would be an image in the fog. Foster believes that as in times past genuine Christian spiritual formation can happen today “if we will: 1) understand the absolute necessity of Spiritual Formation (no more optional discipleship); 2) make a firm intention to pursue it at all costs; 3) learn something of its means; and 4) faithfully practice it in daily life.”⁵

Although Foster does not mention centering prayer specifically in *Celebration of Discipline*, his celebration of the use of the disciplines to grow in Christ and to become more well formed as a disciple of Christ became a catalyst for many seekers and disciples coming to centering prayer as a primary force in their spiritual and formative lives.

Concurrently there was a rediscovery of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This anonymous ancient text from the fifteenth century teaches a system of prayer that is very similar to centering prayer. It was written by a teacher for a student and it was written in Middle-English for the common man rather than in Latin for the priest or scholar. The teacher takes the student through the need for a formative relationship with Jesus and a picture of the character of the disciple if he is to succeed in his Christian journey rather

⁵ Richard Foster, A Pastoral Letter from Richard Foster, *HEART-TO-HEART*, May 2003, 1.

than in the world. *The Cloud of Unknowing* teaches a style of prayer that uses a sacred word and a focusing of the mind on the higher plane of silent waiting away from the distractions of the world.⁶ This is very like the style of prayer taught by Merton/Keating/Pennington.

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is in essence a form of Bible study or Bible reading. However, because it is a process that takes the disciple through a series of four steps (including mediation and contemplation) that opens up communication between the disciple and the Savior, it is included in the groups of prayer types that make up unspoken prayer. *Lectio divina* is an ancient discipline that is experiencing a revival of interest and use today.

The steps of *Lectio divina* are:

Lectio— Gently reading the word and finding the text and focusing on a word or phrase.

Meditatio—is not a discursive mindless meditation but an intense resting on the word that comes off the written page to the disciple as he reads the chosen text.

Oratio—is the prayer of praise or thanksgiving that comes forth from the disciple's meditation on the focus word. *Oratio* is a response of the heart to the word of God.

Contemplatio—is the period of abiding in the new message communicated from the Spirit as the disciple praises God in his moment of meditation on the word.⁷

⁶ Evelyn Underhill, ed., *The Cloud of Unknowing*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), iii.

⁷ Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 63-66.

Lectio divina is an ancient form of scripture reading introduced to the west by the desert monk John Cassian in the fifth century.⁸ Kenneth Boa calls *Lectio divina*, “Extraordinarily beneficial” as it combines the disciplines of study, prayer, and meditation into a “powerful method that, when it is consistently applied, can revolutionize one’s life.”⁹

Lectio is included as a subtype of unspoken prayer because its ultimate goal is contemplation of a word or phrase within the chosen scripture section. This contemplative time in *lectio divina* is a time of listening to the Spirit and the “Real Presence of the Word in our presence.”¹⁰ This listening phase of *lectio divina* is contemplative in nature and a form of unspoken prayer. It is also included because it is often attacked by those who criticize all forms of unspoken prayer.¹¹

Contemplative Prayer/Meditation

Kenneth Boa defines contemplation as “The prayer of silence and yieldedness in the presence of God.” Contemplative prayer has a broader meaning than the two forms of unspoken prayer previously mentioned. The word is often defined differently from author to author. Many readers tend to relate their own response to texts concerning contemplation, contemplative prayer, and meditation without reconciling them with the

⁸ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, (Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 96.

⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁰ Pennington, 151.

¹¹ Brian Flynn, *Running Against the Wind*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2005), 133-134.

context in which they are written. Ray Yungen defines contemplative prayer as “Going beyond thought by the use of repeated prayer words.”¹²

Thomas Merton says, “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life in us proceeds from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source.”¹³

Wherever contemplation or contemplative prayer takes the disciple, clearly there are very different views of the essence of the experience. Many of the critics of unspoken prayer see contemplation as a mindless exercise of lostness. The proponents of contemplative prayer as part of contemplation, meditation, *lectio divina*, or centering prayer see it as a masterful exercise in spirituality that is the pinnacle of Christian spiritual formation. The critics see it as not Christian at all but from the basest form of occultic mysticism. It is a real problem that most critics of unspoken prayer apply their own definition or interpretation of the aspects of unspoken prayer with complete disregard for whether it is completely out of sync with the context of the author’s meaning.

Christine A. Narloch describes all forms of contemplative prayer as “Not Biblical prayer at all, rather it is a type of mystical meditation leading the mind into an altered state of consciousness. It goes beyond thought, providing an experiential union with so-called God or with the nature producing body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections.”¹⁴ This is in absolute contrast to the statement by Merton above.

¹² Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing: How a Universalist Spirituality is Changing the Face of Christianity*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2002), 138.

¹³ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (Boston: Shambhala Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁴ Christine A. Narloch, *Contemplative Prayer: Seducing Spirits and a Doctrine of Devils*, Earnestly Contend, [www. EarnestlyContend.com/cp.html](http://www.EarnestlyContend.com/cp.html).

Clearly, contemplation, meditation, and contemplative prayer stir strong opinions and emotions whatever the approach or acceptance or rejection. This is likely because of the mystery and indefinable nature of contemplative practices. Many questions arise concerning spiritual formation, especially the contemplative disciplines and these questions are hard to understand and answer.¹⁵ Unfortunately these questions often create strife rather than resolution.

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction is included as a sub-group of unspoken prayer because a session between director and directee often includes long periods of silence. Spiritual directors often seek to help their directees find their niche in using the spiritual disciplines in their journey with Christ. Chester Michael describes spiritual direction as “A one-on-one relationship with another individual for the purpose of obtaining spiritual guidance.”¹⁶ In chapter fourteen of *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction*, Fr. Michael makes it clear that spiritual direction does not necessarily include a contemplative lifestyle but that it frequently does.¹⁷ Novene Vest says that the seeker, even the novice, often comes seeking a deeper mystical experience and that this assists the director in the methods used to guide the directee. The director, at the leading of the Spirit, guides the directee into the place she is seeking and ultimately allows the Spirit to be the guide as the director takes the role of messenger.¹⁸ So, spiritual direction often results in some

¹⁵ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, (New York, Doubleday, 1999), 20-31.

¹⁶ Chester Michael, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., 171.

¹⁸ Novene Vest, *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 51.

form of contemplative discipline used by the directee and is included here as related to unspoken prayer.

The Points of View-What the Skeptics Say

In the following sections some of the arguments against unspoken prayer will be reviewed and many of the sources mentioned. The primary sources here are the writings of Ray Yungen and Brian Flynn. Mr. Yungen first published *For Many Shall Come in My Name* in 1991. This work is primarily a look at the New Age Movement and how its various techniques of spiritual expression may have invaded everything from the blue collar work place to the halls of medical practice. However, he does include in these practices the use of centering prayer as a New Age invasion of the Christian church. Yungen says that centering prayer is being promoted by ‘mainline’ churches “under the guise of prayer.”¹⁹

Brian Flynn’s book, *Running Against the Wind*, is the recounting of his experience as a new age medium. Flynn also speaks out against the new age movement in general and specific new age mystical practices and the new age movements’ view and rational of seeking God. He very eloquently speaks of the similarities of new age practices to the language of Christian spirituality. Flynn includes in his critiques the various forms of unspoken prayer as new age mystical practices.²⁰

¹⁹ Ray Yungen, *For Many Shall Come in My Name*, revised, (Woodbridge, OR: Solid Rock Books, 1991), 163.

²⁰ Brian Flynn, *Running Against the Wind*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publications, 2005), 148-9.

Unspoken Prayer as Eastern Occultism

The opponents of unspoken prayer are many. There are a few books and many articles in magazines, journals, and on websites that condemn unspoken prayer as not only not useful to the Christian disciple, but declare any form of unspoken prayer or silence as not Christian, un-biblical, and harmful to any who indulge in them. Many sources refer to any form of unspoken prayer, listening prayer, or contemplative prayer as being Satanic in nature. Ray Yungen states in *A Time of Departing* that those who use contemplative prayer malign God's grace and goes on to state that Christians have the Holy Spirit and therefore do not need silence.²¹ In the following paragraphs a few of the more specific concerns of those opposed to unspoken prayer will be listed.

The first and primary concern emitting from almost every source is that unspoken prayer is not Christian but is a product of occultic or eastern forms of meditation. Brian Flynn compares Richard Foster to Satan in his book *Running Against the Wind* because he promotes silence and contemplative prayer.²² Ray Yungen, in *A Time of Departing*, insists that all modern meditation is New Age and is always harmful to true Christians.²³ Speaking specifically of centering prayer, Rev. Joseph Deher in an article in "This Rock" titled "The Danger of Centering Prayer" says that centering prayer is "neither Christian nor prayer." He does not compare centering prayer directly to the occult but to a form of self-hypnosis that is similar to eastern spiritual practices.²⁴ Yungen, Flynn, and virtually every article on centering prayer or meditation not only compares these components of unspoken prayer to eastern occultism but accuses the authors who write about them of

²¹ Yungen, 124.

²² Flynn, 148.

²³ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 23.

²⁴ John D. Deher, *The Danger of Centering Prayer*, The Rock, Vol. 8, No. 11, 1997. www.saint-mike.org/Library/occult/centeringprayer.html, [November 2, 2006].

conspiring to seduce the “true” church into a vast downslide by drawing it into occultism.

Yungen describes contemplative prayer as “The western bridge to far eastern spirituality.” He then goes on to refer to the desert fathers’ attempts of spirituality as “folly laden.”²⁵ Later Yungen describes the writings of Richard Foster and Brennan Manning as “core shamanism.”²⁶

Brian Flynn even speculates that the desert fathers’ development of contemplative prayer may have been polluted in their spirituality by contact with “someone” from the East. Or perhaps, they simply thought of it themselves. At any rate, Flynn, as many other writers on the subject, simply pronounces all contemplative prayer as evil and occultic.²⁷

Unspoken Prayer as the Deception of Familiar Spirits

Yungen describes any form of unspoken prayer as the deception of familiar spirits and how these spirits will lead the whole world astray.²⁸ Yungen refers to various forms of unspoken prayer, primarily contemplative prayer, as the work of familiar spirits six times in *A Time of Departing*. This is not to deny the active presence of deceiving spirits; indeed they are real and we are surrounded by them, (1 Tim. 4:1).

In an earlier work, Yungen writes at length about the end times, the anti-Christ, and the meaning of several scriptures concerning these subjects. He examines the most accepted interpretations and then gives his own.²⁹ He comes to the reasonable conclusion that familiar spirits will play an important and direct role in the deception of the masses at

²⁵ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 49.

²⁶ Ibid., 84.

²⁷ Flynn, 137.

²⁸ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 109.

²⁹ Yungen, *For Many Shall Come in My Name*, 131-147.

the end but then goes on here and in *A Time of Departing* to make the jump to these familiar spirits being channeled through any author who supports unspoken prayer in any form. Yungen compares unspoken prayer and any move toward the promotion of unspoken prayer in any form to the Mystery Babylon or its alternate, the metaphysics of Chaldea.³⁰

Issues of Language and Understanding

Essentially every critic of unspoken prayer takes the position that all forms of unspoken prayer are of occultic origin. They examine the similarities of unspoken prayer to the practice of various new age prayer methods, occultic practices, and ancient metaphysical mystery religions and because of similarities, which may be perceived only, pronounce them guilty by association.

John Dreher, pastor of Our Lady of Czenstochova Church in Coventry, Rhode Island, in an article titled *The Danger of Centering Prayer* wrote that “Centering prayer is neither Christian nor prayer.”³¹ This identical comment was earlier also attributed to Yungen. He then goes on to discuss the malevolent intent of those who use centering prayer in their own personal devotional lives or who teach centering prayer. He offers no insight as to how he can discern the intent of those he has no personal contact with who use centering prayer

Many authors refer to silence as a sinister element of unspoken prayer that must be avoided. They abhor not only silence in prayer, but in any form at all. The primary basis that silence is dangerous in prayer is that eastern occultic groups, the new age

³⁰ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 109.

³¹ Dreher, 1-2.

movement, and other groups use silence in their practices and, therefore, all silence is of evil origin. Ray Yungen, in *A Time of Departing*, refers to silence in a negative manner fifteen times. The only connection between the silence of unspoken prayer and the silence used in non-Christian spirituality is guilt by association. Of course the proponents of unspoken prayer refer to silence as a necessary and valuable element of their prayer lives.

The issue of salvation, what is meant by salvation, and issues of who is saved recurs throughout the writings of many critics of unspoken prayer. The issue is primarily related to the concept of man's, saved or unsaved, relationship with God. Many proponents of unspoken prayer see God as universally available and universally at hand for all people; whereas the opponents of unspoken prayer see the power of God and interaction with Him as available only to those who are saved.

Yungen et. al., seem to take offense that those who promote the intentional use of the spiritual disciplines see God as available to all who will listen and take heed of what they hear. The opponents of unspoken prayer seem to relate this idea of universal access as universal salvation. Many proponents of unspoken prayer simply fail to see the need to decide who is *in* and who is *out*. Yungen especially condemns Brennan Manning as universalistic who sees no need of Jesus in the salvation process. Yet in *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think Like Jesus*, Manning uses the fourth chapter to consider the power of the cross and the role of the cross and the resurrection on the life of the Christian. Manning writes, "The power of the Spirit is dynamically operative only in

those Christians who experience the fellowship of Jesus' suffering and the shame, humiliation, and pain of his Cross."³²

In *A Time of Departing*, Ray Yungen associates the attempts of some involved with unspoken prayer to carry on a dialogue with Buddhist, Hindus, and others who use meditation in their spirituality as an endorsement of those religions and an indictment of Christian salvation.³³ The primary areas of concern for opponents of unspoken prayer are that it has similarities to the methods used by other religions and cults to reach a heightened spirituality or vision of their god and that this similarity may lead Christians astray. This concern is powerful and heartfelt; and in the following pages of this chapter, the validity of unspoken prayer and the authenticity of its possible errors will be examined.

The Points of View-What the Proponents Say

Unspoken Prayer in its many forms has experienced a new life of utilization and popularity since the mid 1970's. This revival of interest and use in unspoken prayer started not so much with interest in unspoken prayer but with interest in a more mystical apophatic form of spirituality. This interest started in the Catholic Church and quickly spread into many Protestant denominations and continues to spread today. Soon after Fr. William Meninger developed the tag of "centering prayer" from the form developed from the writings of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, interest and use spread with extreme rapidity. There is little doubt that this rapid spread of popularity was not healthy for this new interest in more mystical disciplines of spiritual formation or its users. It is likely that

³² Brennan Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think Like Jesus*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 153.

³³ Yungen, 135.

much of the controversy that surrounds the forms of unspoken prayer today has been strengthened by the rapid influx of new and enthusiastic users who are, despite their passion for spiritual strengthening, led into error and misuse by their lack of maturity.

As noted in chapter one, Thomas Merton became involved in unspoken prayer when he observed young people coming to the monastery searching for a deeper spiritual encounter and leaving to go to India or other non-Christian sources to fulfill their deep need for spiritual comfort. Americans immersed in materialism and self-involvement were looking for a more genuine spiritual experience. Many found this experience in the various forms of unspoken prayer. Donald Miller in *Blue Like Jazz* says that he turned to the Imago Dei Church in Portland, Oregon because he “felt like I didn’t fit in” in other churches.³⁴ He goes on to say that in other churches he felt, “accepted but not understood.”³⁵ In another passage, Miller says that he understands why people that he knew were wearing crystals and saying chants. He says that he came to see that they were lonely. They were hungry for a new spirituality that was mysterious and so big and so powerful that they could not understand it but wanted to be led by it.³⁶

Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is the center piece of the disciplines involved in unspoken prayer. Centering prayer is the most frequently employed of these disciplines and the most controversial. Centering prayer is often used as a synonym of contemplative prayer or contemplative life style. This is not accurate; in its modern form centering prayer is a fairly specific form of unspoken prayer with a concise and specific method of practice.

³⁴ Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*, (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2003), 131.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

Thomas Merton, Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating each advocate an approach to centering prayer that exhibits little variation between them.

Thomas Keating's organization, Contemplative Outreach, is very active in promoting centering prayer and teaches a very specific approach to it. The opening paragraph of the Contemplative Outreach overview of centering prayer states:

Centering prayer is a **method of prayer**, which prepares us to receive the **gift of God's presence**, traditionally called contemplative prayer. It consists of **responding to the Spirit** of Christ by Consenting to God's presence and action within. It furthers the development of contemplative prayer by quieting our faculties to cooperate with the gift of God's presence.³⁷

Keating and Pennington describe the method of centering prayer as follows.

In the center of your being lives God: Father, Son, and Spirit. Centering prayer allows you to experience His presence and be touched and transformed by Him.

Simply sit, relaxed and quiet, enjoying your own inner calm and silence. For a few moments, listen to His presence and allow yourself to be touched by it.

After a time, perhaps a single word will come, *Jesus, Lord, Love*, or any word that captures your response to His inner presence. Place into this word all your faith, your love, as you enter more and more deeply into Him. Slowly and effortlessly, repeat your word. Allow it to lead you more and more deeply into God's presence at the center of your being, where you are in God and God in you. Surrender to His re-freshment and re-creation.

Center all your attention and desire on Him, leaving your faculties at peace, allowing Him to draw you into His perfect prayer of adoration, love, and praise. Let it happen. Whenever you become aware of any thoughts or images, simply return to your word.

In coming out of prayer, move slowly to silent awareness and then a conscious interior prayer, such as the *Our Father*, savoring the words and meaning, entering into them.

The centering prayer may be used once or twice daily for twenty minutes or more.

If you are faithful to it, you will soon discern in your life the maturing of the fruits of the *Spirit*: love, joy, peace, patience, quietness, and kindness.

³⁷ Contemplative Outreach, *Centering Prayer Overview*, www.centeringprayer.com/cntrgprypr.htm [10/4/2006].

You shall be truly abiding in Him and He in you.³⁸

The method is simple and varies little from author to author. However maturing in the method of centering prayer is a process that takes time. Much of the literature that promotes and teaches centering prayer is from Catholic priests and nuns. This is one area that seems to raise the ire of the many critics of centering prayer; however centering prayer is well established, respected, and promoted in many mainline Protestant denominations as well. This concern with the Catholic source is uneasiness with the high church source and the fact that so many Catholic promoters of centering prayer are from a monastic background.³⁹ Even Conservative Wesleyan Holiness denominations are embracing forms of unspoken prayer as valid disciplines of spiritual formation and the vital role of spiritual formation in the holiness of the individual.

In the book *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*, the authors do not specifically refer to centering prayer or promote it. However they do describe a form of prayer that is absolutely in line with the use of the practices of unspoken prayer. In the chapter “Meeting God in Prayer,” the authors say that in order to keep prayer from becoming spiritually impotent, we must interpret it in its broadest sense. Their initial definition of prayer is “talking to God;” but then they go on to describe prayer with terms like “Aligning ourselves with the purposes of the divine creator,” and “Prayer is linking our will and spiritual energies with the power of God.”⁴⁰ They also say that, “Prayer is change.”⁴¹ In the same chapter, the authors stress the need to break from the

³⁸ M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, Thomas Keating, OCSO, and Thomas E Clarke, SJ, *Finding Grace at the Center: The Beginning of Centering Prayer*, (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), 92.

³⁹ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 131, 41.

⁴⁰ Wesley D. Tracy, E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, et. al., *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation for the Holy Life*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 81-84.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

entanglement of the busy life of modern materialism and an obsession for efficiency and production and find a place of rest where we can offer up our prayers of adoration.⁴²

In a later chapter, the need for spiritual reading and meditation is presented, urging the reader to indulge in “reading for holiness.” The chapter goes on to describe the unspoken prayer method of *lectio divina*, and uses this nomenclature for this type of prayer. Of course the author assures the reader that *lectio divina* will lead the reader into meditation that will, “provide the psychological and physical benefits of other forms of meditation but much, much more.”⁴³ The authors of these chapters say that, “meditation is simple and natural, like a seed growing and becoming a tree. At the same time it requires the right conditions, conditions not provided by the secular world today.”⁴⁴

These comments, while not speaking directly of centering prayer, use the same language, tone, and imagery that the supporters of centering prayer use. This book also acknowledges and endorses *lectio divina*, though using the term **spiritual reading**.⁴⁵ This endorsement is very important as the worship tradition and heritage of the authors of *The Upward Call* is very different from that of Keating and friends. All of the authors of *The Upward Call* are from the Church of the Nazarene and are engaged in key leadership positions in a denomination that is conservative in theology but very progressive in the administration of the gospel to the lost. Despite this conservative heritage, the Wesleyan Holiness denominations always seek ways to refine their relationship with the Lord. Many of them, despite their traditionally conservative values have discovered the value of unspoken prayer.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

⁴³ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 107.

In the preface of *The Upward Call*, the authors' state that the Wesleyan teaching of holiness and spiritual formation has so much in common that a marriage between the two is in order. The author goes on to say that this compatibility centers on a mutual concern—holy living.⁴⁶

Lectio Divina

As noted, *lectio divina* is also mentioned in *The Upward Call*. This is another form of unspoken prayer that the critics respond to as wholly unacceptable for Christians and as being from sources of evil. Yet nearly every source that promotes centering prayer promotes *lectio divina* as a valuable adjunct or a necessary companion. Many sources instruct in the use of *lectio divina* as a precursor to centering prayer or other forms of meditation on Scripture or contemplative prayer. *Lectio divina* can be used by itself as a form of study and meditation in the daily devotions or quiet time. This form of unspoken prayer is used by many and is, at times, misused to ignore other types of study and exposition of Scripture.

In the introduction of *Listening to God through John* from Wesleyan Publishing House, one in a series of aids for young people seeking to use *lectio divina*, the author urges the reader to “slow down, read Scripture, meditate in it, and prayerfully respond to God’s word.”⁴⁷ The model used by this series, distributed jointly by Wesleyan Publishing House and Beacon Hill Press, is a bit different than seen in descriptions of *lectio divina* in other works. The Wesleyan authors recommend that the reader use the following steps in the process of *lectio divina*.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷ *Lectio Divina Bible Studies, Listening to God Through John*, (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2005), 4.

- Silence, *Silencio* - Quieting oneself prior to reading the word
- Preparation, *Preparatio* - Focusing the mind on the central theme of the text
- Reading, *Lectio* - Carefully reading a passage of scripture
- Meditation, *Meditatio* - Exploring the meaning of a Bible passage
- Contemplation, *Contemplatio* - Yielding oneself to God's will
- Prayer, *Oratio* - Expressing praise, thanksgiving, confession, or agreement to God
- Incarnation, *Incarnatio* - Resolving to act on the message of Scripture

These more kataphatic guidelines or steps are different from the usual method offered by Basil Pennington, the modern master of the ancient prayer form of *lectio divina: lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio*.⁴⁸ Barefoot Ministries, the creator of the *lectio divina* series, gives no explanation for the modified steps for the process. It may simply be a mechanism to demystify the process and make the introduction to new users as gentle as possible.

Lectio divina is a form of Bible reading that uses or includes meditation and contemplation in the essence of its process. It is an ancient method that is experiencing a revival in the modern church. It, like so many other forms of unspoken prayer, is adored, scorned, or vilified while receiving few neutral responses to those who use or study it.

⁴⁸ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 88.

Discipleship, Guides, Directors, and Friends in Unspoken Prayer

Many Christians, either after the initial experience of accepting Jesus as Lord or at some time further along in their journey, seek help from other more mature Christians. Other seekers, especially the un-churched or those badly misinformed, often maintain a deep desire to discern an opportunity of knowing about God and finding a comfortable place in an often negatively experienced ecclesial structure. Many people who do not have a relationship with the Holy Spirit seek to “know god” when, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, they can only know about God.

This need for someone to lead them in their journey of discipleship often leads to an earthly relationship fed by the Holy Spirit. This relationship may take the form of a discipleship leader, Christian spiritual director, or Christian spiritual guide. The biblical precedent for this is clear as God sent Ananias and then Barnabas to minister to Paul (Acts 9:10-31). Paul later acted as Timothy’s spiritual guide calling Timothy his “True child in the faith” (1Timothy 1:2). The Christian spiritual guide or director does not use the relationship with the disciple to mold him but assists the disciple in finding, defining, and responding to his own relationship with the Holy Spirit. In this fashion the Holy Spirit leads, guides, and enlightens the disciple as he works out his own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

Gerald May defines spiritual direction as, “A rather general term referring to all attempts, means, instructions, and disciplines intended towards deepening the faith and furtherance of spiritual growth.”⁴⁹ This definition clarifies that it is not required that the Christian spiritual director lead the seeker into methods of unspoken prayer, but this very often happens; and therefore, Christian spiritual direction often receives a great deal of

⁴⁹ Gerald May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 7.

criticism from the critics of unspoken prayer. The many methods of discipling, spiritual direction, instruction, or guidance used by one Christian to assist another can be placed into an overarching category of soul care. Essentially every pastor is a soul care provider. Many lay persons become soul care providers either by intent or often by default when those around them are in need. Soul care is a natural part of Christian maturity whether it is on a formal level or through casual friendship with those encountered daily by the Christian. Soul care easily becomes a method not only of a mature Christian disciplining a less mature one in their relationship with the Holy Spirit, but it is an essential, effective, and gentle means of evangelism.

Often times a Christian spiritual director does lead the seeker onto the mystical areas of the seeker's relationship with the divine. Thomas Merton describes spiritual direction as:

“A continuous process of formation and guidance, in which a Christian is led and encouraged *in his special vocation* (emphasis Merton's), so that by faithful correspondence to the graces of the Holy Spirit he may attain to the particular end of his vocation and to union with God. This union with God signifies not only the vision of God in heaven but, as Cassian specifies, that perfect purity of heart which, even on earth, constitutes sanctity and attains to an obscure experience on heavenly things.”⁵⁰

Merton goes on to emphasize about spiritual direction that, “it is spiritual.”⁵¹

Merton says that the goal of spiritual direction is to produce the spiritual man.⁵²

He goes on to describe the spiritual man as one who, “Whether he eats or drinks or whatever does all for the glory of God’ (1Cor. 10:31). Again, this does not mean that he merely registers in his mind an abstract

⁵⁰ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 13-14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 14.

⁵² It may be noted here that Merton always refers to the directee in masculine pronouns. This book and many of Merton's others were written to the monastic community made up of males. Spiritual direction is as valuable for the female gender as the male.

intention to glorify God. It means that in all his actions he is free from superficial automatism of conventional routine. It means that in all that he does he acts freely, simply, spontaneously, from the depths of his heart, moved by love.”⁵³

Christian spiritual direction is spiritual. It takes the directee and director into mysterious areas of their relationship with the Godhead. Often the director and directee will sit for long spells or even an entire session in silence, and yet these are often the most rewarding and even productive times for each. This silence raises the ire of the critics and at the same time makes the session of direction precious.

CONCERNING THE DIFFERENCES

As noted previously, the differences between the two schools of thought tend to be extensive in content, view, and reflection on each other. These keen differences and intense positions make it difficult to find a middle ground. Much of the rhetoric concerning the validity and usefulness of unspoken prayer emanates from very definite starting positions in each camp. An abundance of influences lead to the preconceptions that so strongly influence the path that the leaders and followers of the positions on unspoken prayer pursue. The influences that lead to these positions are unassailable by mere human words. If there is error on either side, only the Holy Spirit can alter the course of the chosen path. The hope is that this work will aid others in finding a wholesome position on the narrow way (Matt. 7:13-14), the highway of holiness (Isa. 35:8).

⁵³ Ibid., 15.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Critical Issues of Opposition to Unspoken Prayer

A number of specific issues concerning the opposition to unspoken prayer can be identified. A few of these issues are vital concerns that must be examined in this paper. As with any area of theological study or scriptural issues, there are differing opinions about unspoken prayer. The viewpoints, pro and con, are varied and convincing. One thing that makes the orderly and objective assessment of opinions difficult is that the critics are very vocal and the proponents of unspoken prayer are nearly silent concerning the criticisms. The proponents produce a plethora of texts and articles explaining their thoughts on unspoken prayer but very little in the way of directly responding to criticism. When contacted for their position on the criticisms of unspoken prayer, the staff at Contemplative Outreach, headed by Thomas Merton, emailed a one page response that has been cited elsewhere in this document. As gracious as this position may be, the neophyte may benefit from an orderly and gracious response to the various critical issues. This position is not intended to dismiss the power of prayer in the neophyte's formative life but to recognize the reality that discernment is enhanced when made with a bounty of quality information.

In a paper on seducing spirits, John MacArthur points out that the hesitation for those who succumb to seducing spirits to offer bold aggressive arguments for a position

may be a ruse of false humility.¹ In his article MacArthur describes the signs of vulnerability to and corruption by seducing spirits. The description he offers can be made to fit the critics or the proponents of unspoken prayer depending on the evaluator's point of view. What MacArthur says is that the critic must exercise discernment in conjunction with a solid relationship with Jesus. Merton's brief statements and his broader work do not lack clear bold content and clearly affirm his basis of support for his stands. Merton fulfills MacArthur's description of one who clearly understands his biblical foundation. Jesus rarely or never debated with His opponents or their lackeys. He merely stated His case and let the evidence speak for itself (Matt. 12:2-14, Matt. 9:1-17, Mark 7:5-13, Luke 11:38-39, John 9:1-41).

It is not the intent of this paper to exalt proponents or discredit critics of unspoken prayer. The goals of this paper are to thoroughly examine unspoken prayer in scripture, in history, and in current usage in the space allotted, to appraise the viability of unspoken prayer as a useful tool for Christian spiritual formation and to caution the seeker concerning areas of possible misuse.

Some of the issues that will be considered in the following chapter are as follows. One is the adamant stand of some critics that unspoken prayer, in all its forms, is a deception of Satan and is always done in error. Another is that silence is not a useful tool of the disciple seeking to become more well formed in Christ. A third is the unyielding statement by many critics that any person, church, or denomination that uses or promotes any form of unspoken prayer is in error and is being deceived by unfriendly spirits and promoting error. A fourth is to look at the concerns of Jesus for the types of error that He

¹ John MacArthur, *Qualities of an Excellent Servant: Understanding the Seducing Spirits*, Bible Bulletin Board, www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/Sg54-29.htm, [Nov. 29, 2006].

encountered and the warnings He issued concerning being led astray by aberrant doctrine or traditions.

The Essential Opposition to Unspoken Prayer—Mysticism

A large body of the opposition to unspoken prayer and its parts is very extreme and dismisses all areas of unspoken prayer—centering prayer, contemplative prayer, meditation, *lectio divina*, contemplative lifestyle, silence, and solitude—as erring from scripture, damaging its users, and opposed to the doctrine that salvation is in Christ and Christ alone.² These opponents take the view that unspoken prayer forms come from eastern occult religions and were infused into Christianity by the desert fathers in the third and fourth centuries.³ These extreme opponents also take the view that any indulgence in unspoken prayer is in error and that unspoken prayer is a tool used by the new age movement to create an atmosphere in the Christian Church of universalism and to negate the need for the death of Christ on the cross for salvation. They claim that there is no Biblical foundation for unspoken prayer⁴ and that any person involved in the use of unspoken prayer has been deceived by unfriendly spirits.⁵ These concerns are not without merit but the absolute nature of the claims and the assumptions that tie unspoken prayer to the new age movement merely with guilt by similarity weaken all of the arguments rather than strengthen them.

The first query is to examine the basis for some of the research used by the authors. The following paragraphs will point out a few of the concerns that this author

² Lighthouse Trails Publications, Research Page, www.lighthouse trailsresearch.com/aboutus.htm.

³ Brian Flynn, *Running Against the Wind*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publications, 2005), 137.

⁴ Yungen, 76.

⁵ Yungen, 18.

has encountered in the challenging material. Are the research methods valid and does the gusto of the authors and publishers obscure their objectivity? Any time an author enters into a research project, any time any Christian reads scripture, or any time any person establishes a view on any subject, their decision is influenced by preconceptions. These preconceptions can easily lead to opinion rather than beliefs formed on a foundation of attentive discernment. Presuppositions lead to confusion and ultimately fog an issue and destroy dialog. The terms of an issue must be known to both parties studying the issue or confusion and disharmony ensues.⁶ This appears to be the case in the study of unspoken prayer. Those opposed are adamant and strongly promote their case. Those who use unspoken prayer generally are unaffected by opposition and do little to quell the criticism.

Ray Yungen whose book *A Time of Departing* is the prime source of information outlining the concerns of the more conservative side of the question leaves no area for open discussion. It is very difficult to discuss, analyze, or dismiss Yungen's arguments against Christian unspoken prayer practices because Yungen, from the beginning of his book, discounts all forms of meditation, contemplative practice, and traditional spiritual formative disciplines as either new age or occultic in source and nature. Yungen never examines any unspoken prayer practice for authentic use by Christians. He simply denounces the practices of unspoken prayer as from deceiving spirits, etc.⁷ This absence of examination leaves no traction for discussion. On the first page of chapter one of *A Time of Departing*, Yungen announces that we are in the end times and that the

⁶ LingualLinks, *What is Presupposition*, www.sil.org/linguistics/glossaryoflinguisticTerms/WhatIsAPresupposition.htm.

⁷ Yungen, 18.

contemplative movement in the Christian church is the proof.⁸ In the Forward to this same work, Pastor Ron Comer denounces unspoken prayer and the contemplative movement in the Christian church as antithetic to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These statements are made before any evidence, research, or scholarly work is offered for the reader to reflect on. The only crack in the wall of opposition offered by the works published by Lighthouse Trails Publications is when Yungen, as he discusses deceiving spirits, says that these practices of the contemplative movement “*may* cause them to abandon the faith (emphasis mine).”⁹ However, even this small opening of using the word ‘may’ rather than the word ‘will’ is given as the door to discussion swings shut in the following pages. In the remainder of the book, Yungen leaves no room for the Christian using unspoken prayer to find their way within the discipline but paints an either/or course of coming into his camp of total rejection of any element of unspoken prayer or to perish if they choose to pursue any practice of unspoken prayer. This line of thought places the conclusions of a small aberrant group to bear precedence over the body of belief of the fullness of the church and centuries of prayerful scholarship. To these groups the *analogia fidei* appears as meaningless.

Regardless of the subject, presuppositions and assumptions affect the eventual conclusions of any study and the only way to diminish this is to recognize and acknowledge them and allow them to be a part of the evaluative process. Also for conclusions to contain a modicum of validity the subject must be examined with some acknowledgement that there are two sides to the issue. The opponents of unspoken prayer decline these acknowledgements.

⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

Yungen, Flynn, and the Dombrowskis attack any form of unspoken prayer and silence as from evil.¹⁰ The Dombrowskis started Lighthouse Trails Publishing after reading *A Time of Departing* in manuscript form. When they found no publisher willing to accept the book, they published it themselves. The concern is that these attacks come in the form of concern for the innocent, but they are unbalanced and fail in every case to consider the position of the proponents of unspoken prayer. If an author supports unspoken prayer, he is immediately condemned as being New Age and supporting occultism and Eastern forms of spirituality.

This is an indication that these are not precise unbiased conclusions. The authors of Lighthouse Trails and the publishers determine their conclusions and then set out to re-enforce them with their manuscripts. Regardless of the explanations to the contrary, this group denounces all forms of unspoken prayer and silence as New Age and those who practice them as promoting the New Age Movement.

This group advances their work as research,¹¹ but it is essentially a series of works that appears to be calculated to reinforce their opinions of the elements of unspoken prayer and those who use them. It is a given that opinions concerning unspoken prayer vary and that difference of opinion is healthy and leads to a more informed base of knowledge in a subject. It must also be a given that to have a different opinion than a brother or sister in Christ is a good thing and that to be different does not make one bad by definition. My concern is that it is impossible to critique the research of nearly all who write about unspoken prayer because the critics of unspoken prayer ignore the definitions and explanations of those who write in its favor and criticize them on their

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

own terms without regard to the context of their writings. Not only is this a violation of objective principles of scholarship and debate, but it also refuses to consider the consensus of long traditions of mainline Christianity.

Yungen repeatedly criticizes Foster or anyone else who acknowledges that there may well be problems and dangers of misuse of unspoken prayer but that there is a great deal of good to learn from it. Yungen, Flynn, and the Dombrowskis have assembled a cadre of followers who take an absolute all or nothing stand against anything contemplative, mystical, or associated with unspoken prayer. Is this reasonable? Is this stand accurate? Is it heroic or triumphalistic? Are their arguments sufficient and acceptable? These and other questions will be considered in the following sections.

What is Good, What is Bad—Eastern versus Western or Eastern and Western?

One of the primary arguments that the opponents of unspoken prayer offer is the Eastern versus Western one. The opponents, in virtually all of their documents, consider Eastern thought as evil, occult in origin and nature and opposed to “true” Christian thought.¹² But is this the case? Are the two forms of thought incompatible; or more specifically does Eastern Christian thought offer views that are incompatible with “true” Christianity? Is there a difference between Eastern mysticism and occultism and Eastern Christian spirituality? In the cited document, Mahon does not ask these questions. He follows the pattern of painting contemplative thought, and especially centering prayer, as opposed to Biblical truth but offers no real examination of the issues. A more disturbing string in this tapestry of anti-unspoken prayer teaching is Mahon’s and others’ clear anti-

¹² T. A. Mahon, *Please Contemplate This*. The Berean Call Newsletter 03/00, www.deceptioninthechurch.com/newpage3111.htm, [Nov. 8, 2006].

Catholic sentiment. While not being directly derogatory in language, Mahon and many other authors mentioned take the stand that to be Catholic is to be in error and unsaved. Mahon states, “How much of this movement with its mystical saints and classic works is Catholic, advancing the Catholic way of salvation?”¹³ Mahon et. al., ignore the fact that all Christianity was Catholic prior to 1517 and that the heritage of the entire modern Christian community lies in Eastern or Western Catholicism. On the Lighthouse Trails website, listed with articles opposed to unspoken prayer and its types is an article that denounces Catholics as in error and sharply criticizes Chuck Colson for an article pointing out the mutual beliefs and goals of the Protestant and Catholic Churches.¹⁴

In other articles on the same website, Lighthouse Trails indicates that they are more concerned that Leith Anderson, the replacement for Ted Haggard at the NAE, promotes contemplative prayer than the ordeal that Haggard, his family, and his former church face in the coming weeks and months.¹⁵

Is Eastern Orthodoxy Christian? Why is it so different than what Western Christians believe and are accustomed to? These are questions that if unanswerable must still be addressed. They may be unanswerable when the most clearly authenticated answer is of little use and carries no convincing power to the one who has decided their position before the debate has started. Many of the writers who disavow any positive or constructive uses for unspoken prayer associate it with “Eastern” thought and condemn many of the writers from the East as of the occult rather than acknowledging them as

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lighthouse Trails Research, *Evangelical Christians Combine Contemplative Mysticism With Catholic Eucharist*, Lighthouse Trails Research, www.fromthelighthouse.com/blog/index.php?cat=27 [Nov. 9, 2006].

¹⁵ Deborah Dombrowski, Ted Haggard Story Will Raise Serious Questions for All, www.fromthelighthouse.com/blog/index.php?cat=27 [Nov. 9, 2006].

Eastern Orthodox Christians. Many of the critics who associate dangers in unspoken prayer with eastern thought fail to recognize or perhaps to know that Eastern Orthodoxy is soundly Christian and the primary source of the foundations of Christian doctrine.

Not all opposed to unspoken prayer are quick to make the Eastern connection. Gary G. Gilly of the Southern View Chapel does not link unspoken prayer to Eastern mysticism or Eastern orthodoxy but to subjective Pietism.¹⁶ But in reading many articles on the internet and a number of books critical of unspoken prayer, Mr. Gilly is the only source that did not vehemently associate the error of unspoken prayer with Eastern mystic practices and no source was found that separated Eastern Christian thought from Eastern mystic thought or occultism.¹⁷

Eastern Orthodox Christianity is different. Does that make it bad, in error, or inherently evil? Two additional questions must be asked. What are the differences and unique nature of Eastern orthodoxy and how did Jesus treat those who were different? One, what is Eastern Orthodoxy? “Orthodox spirituality is the experience of life in Christ.”¹⁸ Orthodox spirituality emphasizes the experiential nature of the Christian’s encounter with Christ through the Holy Spirit, not on an abstract level, but on a here and now real time intensity.

This experiential factor in orthodox spirituality is a real problem with many of the critics of unspoken prayer. Yungen criticizes Henry Nouwen for his use of the term

¹⁶ Gary G. Gilly, *Mysticism-Part 5*, Think on These Things, vol. 11, Issue 2, Feb. 2005, www.svchapel.org/resources/v11issue2articles.read_articles/ASP?=-107#_ednref3, [Nov.8, 2006].

¹⁷ In an aside it is noted that Mr. Gilly is as strongly opposed to unspoken prayer as any other author mentioned. In *Mysticism—Part 5* Mr. Gilly relates a story in which a group that radically criticized his alma mater, Moody Bible Institute and even marched around the building seven times condemning their theology and deliberately calling the seminary a cemetery. He dismisses this group as in absolute error even though they were doing exactly what he is doing in his articles, as they were standing up for their own narrow position on an issue.

¹⁸ Bishop Nafpakos Hierotheos, *Orthodox Spirituality, part 1*, www.vic.com/~1scon/pelagia/htm/bl5en.orthodox_spirituality.01.htm [Nov. 8, 2006].

“active presence” in *The Way of the Heart*.¹⁹ The active presence mentioned is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Yungen redefines this as meaning the active presence of seducing spirits when Nouwen refers to Prayer as “Soul Work” where “all is one” and the “unity of all that is.” The concern, and it is a legitimate concern, that will be discussed later is that Nouwen is promoting a form of pantheism that goes hand in hand with universal salvation and at the very least negates the work of Jesus on the cross and the need of that work for salvation. What is Nouwen thinking? I do not know and neither does Ray Yungen, Brian Flynn, Gary G. Gilly, T. A. Mahon, or anyone else. We only know what he wrote, and that is open to discussion and interpretation by all and not for an absolute verdict by one point of view.

The important point is that Orthodox spirituality is different than traditional Protestant spirituality. It promotes an apophatic relationship with the Holy Spirit that insists that the soul or spirit is not a place in the body but permeates and fills the entire body and beyond that the entire identity of a person.²⁰ The union with God that the orthodox Christian experiences is a powerful experience of the presence of God fully within the body of the human. This expression of the experience of the Presence is as much a matter of culture as it is theology and is very difficult for a Westerner to understand even with a great desire to do so.²¹

The difference in Eastern and Western is based on the apophatic leanings of Eastern Christian thought and the more kataphatic leanings of Western Christian thought. Western thought is grounded in reason, the intellectual perception of God, and the knowledge of studying His word in black and white. Eastern Christian thought is toward

¹⁹ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 64.

²⁰ Bishop Nafpakos Hierotheos, part 1.

²¹ Ibid., section 1.

a more therapeutic model that the seeker comes to Christ not just for forgiveness, but to be fixed or healed as well.²² “Protestants do not have a ‘therapeutic treatment’ tradition. They suppose that believing in God, intellectually, constitutes salvation. Yet salvation is not a matter of intellectual acceptance of truth; rather it is a person’s transformation and divinization by grace.”²³ Divinization is an issue that creates a great breakdown in the exchange of ideas between Protestants and Orthodox Christians. Divinization is the process of the Orthodox Christian sharing in the nature of the divine.

If one is looking for a point to criticize and denounce on the surface, this is a powerful tool. However, once studied with a degree of objectivity, the process of divinization bears many parallels to the protestant process of growing in maturity or Christ likeness. Protestants look at the influence of the Spirit as a more external relationship, whereas orthodox Christians tend to look at the process as a more internal work of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox Christians do not believe that they become God in essence. They do believe that over time the presence of the Holy Spirit heals them and this healing helps them to take on more of the character of God. There is very little difference in the two processes and the similarities may need to be celebrated rather than the differences assaulted.

Another big problem between the Protestant Church, and especially those who feel compelled to see themselves as protectors of the church, and the Orthodox Church is dogma. Every branch of Christianity has its dogma. Every Protestant denomination has its dogma. The Eastern Christian Church has its own dogma. The role of dogma is to

²² Ibid., section 3.

²³ Ibid., section 3.

make an organization unique and preserve that uniqueness. The role of dogma is not to elevate a person or group in triumph over any other person or group.

W. T. Purkiser suggests in *Conflicting Concepts of Holiness* that the differences between denominations need a clear definition of the issues between the groups and not a melding or “leveling down” of beliefs.²⁴ This adherence to dogma requires that the defender of his or her organization know what they believe, why they believe it, and are confident enough in their dogma to respect the beliefs of others without feeling threatened. Unfortunately the adherence to dogma often leads to ‘who is right, who is wrong’ controversies that cannot be solved.

Is the Orthodox Church ever in error? Certainly. Earlier on the same page Purkiser says that error “has a perennial quality about it—recurring in cycles, generation after generation—it is always important to relate one’s central doctrines to whatever turn the issues of the day may take.”²⁵ The most dangerous quality error can ever take on is the assumption or denial that it may exist at all.

An example outside the theological or ecclesial realm of how eastern and western thought differ can be found in pottery. Western potters and consumers value the most perfect pots that can be produced. Any pot with a flaw becomes a ‘second’ and sold for less or is destroyed. Many eastern potters value pots with a flaw above the perfect ones. To the eastern potter the flaw, a small bubble or run in the glaze perhaps, makes the pot more specific and the flaw becomes its identity and makes it special. Eastern Christians can look beyond perfection and revel in their identity.

²⁴ W. T. Purkiser, *Conflicting Concepts of Holiness: Issues in Holy Living*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972, revised), 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

Where is God?

Another issue with the critics of unspoken prayer is the position of those who promote the contemplative life and use of unspoken prayer on pantheism and panentheism. The critics insist that Merton, Foster, and company are pantheist and that their stand on panentheism is as much in error as pantheism. The Lighthouse Trails Research website adamantly insists that the panentheism of God in or with all is essentially the same as all is God. Yungen says that if a Christian promotes contemplative prayer that he or she promotes pantheism as well because, “to promote one is to promote the other.”²⁶

This statement creates several issues. What is panentheism? Where do the critics of unspoken prayers stand on it? What is the stand of the proponents of spoken prayer on it and what does it really mean? Yungen states, “Here lies the core of panentheism: God is in everything and everything is in God. The only difference between pantheism and panentheism is *how* God is in everything (emphasis Yungen’s).”²⁷ Yungen is wrong here. The question is who or what is god or God? Yungen is confusing the presence of God with being God. The presence of God does not make the item that is inhabited God and the proponents of unspoken prayer do not claim that it does.

Romans 8:9-11 “However, you are not in the flesh but **in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God **dwells in you**. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. **If Christ is in you**, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead **dwells in you**, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies **through His Spirit *who* dwells in you.**”

²⁶ Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, 72.

²⁷ Ibid., 35.

2 Timothy 1:14 “Guard, through the Holy Spirit **who dwells in us**, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.”

1 Corinthians 3:16 “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the **Spirit of God dwells in you?**”

The Spirit dwells in the Christian but the Christian does not become God or God like. However with the indwelling of the Spirit, the Christian may become Christ like in character. But aside from the salvation experience and the Christian’s encounter with the Holy Spirit, where is the presence of God, and what effect does it have on the persons or things that stand before it?

1 Chronicles 29:14 “But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? **For all things come from You**, and from Your hand we have given You.”

Psalms 8:4 “What is man that You **take thought of Him**, And the son of man that You care for him?”

Psalms 119:91 “They stand this day **according to Your ordinances**, For all things are Your servants.”

Luke 10:22 “**All things** have been handed over to me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the

John 1:3 “**All things came into being through Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

John 13:3 “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given **all things into His hands**, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,”

This list of Scriptures indicates that God created all things. He is aware of all things and he is interested in all things. Does God, here or elsewhere, expressly indicate that he dwells physically in all things? He does not, but his word speaks for itself. What his word does say is that He alone is God and that he cares deeply for His creation and longs for its restoration to His kingdom.

Kenneth Leech states it this way, “The aim of contemplative prayer is union with God. When the Christian mystics speak of union with God, they mean a union of wills. They are not referring to a dissolving of the human personality into the Godhead, in which the human ceases to exist.”²⁸ When the mystics speak of the union of the wills, they are essentially speaking of Christ likeness. But the experience is so powerful and exuberant that their language is, “often very extravagant” and this extravagance often leads to misunderstanding.²⁹ This phenomenon is found throughout Scripture when a prophet attempts to use mere human language to explain a message from God.

Henri Nouwen describes the spiritual life as not “before, after, or beyond our everyday existence.”³⁰ This is not the description of the spiritual life of a pilgrim rabidly seeking to become god. In a later chapter titled “His Kingdom First,” Nouwen says that Jesus “in no way wants us to leave our many faceted world; rather he wants us to live in it, but firmly rooted in the center of all things.”³¹ He goes on to say, “What counts is where our hearts are. Jesus asks us to move our hearts to the center, where all other things fall into place. What is the center? Jesus calls it the Kingdom.”³² The center is where we can be in the presence of God and be attuned to his Spirit as he leads into Christ likeness. The worst state of man is to be in his presence and to be unaware. To make the center a physical location is to diminish his greatness.

H. Ray Dunning describes the holiness experience of the Wesleyan holiness movement as not an experience but a relationship. He credits J. O. McClurkan with

²⁸ Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1995), 47.

²⁹ Ibid., 47.

³⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), 21.

³¹ Ibid., 42.

³² Ibid., 43.

imparting this concept to him.³³ Thomas Merton says that Christians “Should not make the mistake of thinking that the sinner understands nothing of this mystery of love, suffering, death, and life. There is enough of the image of God in every man’s soul to enable him intuitively to sense the presence of spiritual death under the exterior appearance of saintliness and life.”³⁴ Perhaps the presence that contemplative Christians profess is the presence of relationship. Certainly there are those whose relationship with their Maker is minimally existent. But as a child estranged from a parent, the relationship exists and can be rekindled. Jesus is the evidence that God is ready and desirous for the flame of relationship to burn brightly in all humans.

John 14:6 “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one **comes** to the Father but through Me.”

John 14:12-21 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. I will ask the Father, **and He will give you** another Helper, that He may **be with you forever**; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that **I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you**. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; **and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father**, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

This concerns Christians and it is not contested that Christians know God and He knows them. What about the rest of humanity, those who do not know him or choose not to follow Him? Is God unaware of their presence or uncaring of their plight or uninvolved in their lives?

³³ William M. Greathouse and H. Ray Dunning, *An Introduction to Wesleyan Theology*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1989), 7.

³⁴ Thomas Merton, *The New Man*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961), 193.

John 2:24-25 “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, **for He knew all men**, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.”

Acts 1:24 “And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of **all men**, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

Romans 5:18 “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to **all men**, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to **all men**.”

Scripture here and elsewhere makes it clear that God knows all men. Quakers call this the inner light (John 1:9). He is aware of all men and He has made a way to be reconciled to Him through Jesus. This is the thrust of the “in God” passages from the various authors who write of unspoken prayer or the contemplative life. Do some take it too far and fall into error? Some certainly do. Are they all in error? Certainly they are not. But when any of us closes our mind to discussion, we all lose. Bradley Holt says:

The Christian Community lives as an inheritor of almost two millennia of thought, action, and prayer by people seeking to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Great saints have exemplified the courage and love of Jesus, being living witnesses of God’s power to redeem. But the history of Christianity is also marked by continual departures from the way of its Lord, of social and personal injustice, error, and violence. Therefore being heirs of a tradition does not mean that we approve of everything in it. Rather, it means that we sift out what is valuable from what is not and creatively develop neglected strands of thought.

It is vitally important for Christian spirituality today that we take a wide view of that tradition and of the global family of Christians, not simply enshrining the small strand of tradition that may be familiar from our home, congregation, or ethnic group. The sweep of that tradition will open our eyes to wide resources of spirituality and give guidance for our own choices.³⁵

In a word, we can use our differences; or we can lose the rich heritage and opportunities to hear God speak through our brother or sister who is gloriously different.

³⁵ Bradley P. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1993), 7.

This goes back to earlier statements that different is just different, and it is God's prerogative to judge that which is wrong. The Church has withstood many horrible failures; and yet because it is founded not on the human ability to police itself but on God's loving grace, the Church of Jesus as Lord has survived and thrived.

A Mindless Search

Brian Flynn defines centering prayer as, "synonymous with contemplative prayer, which is a means of going into the silence (an altered state of consciousness)."³⁶ He and other critics of unspoken prayer repeat time after time the charge that contemplative prayer is means of altering one's state of consciousness. This is achieved through repeating mantras, breath prayers, and vain repetitions. The critics charge that this is identical to the methods used by Buddhists, Hindu mystics, and others to achieve altered states and assisting them in "reaching god." Is this accurate? In a word, no. So what is?

Thomas Keating says the following:

Centering Prayer does not "empty the mind" or "exclude other forms of prayer." It is not a "technique" that automatically creates "mysticism" or a means "to reach and altered state of consciousness." **It is important not to confuse Centering Prayer with certain Eastern techniques of meditation such as Transcendental Meditation (TM). The use of the Sacred Word in Centering Prayer does not have the particular calming effect attributed to TM mantra. Nor is the sacred word a vehicle leading to the spiritual level of one's being as it is in TM. There is no cause-and-effect relationship between using the Sacred Word and arriving at some altered state of consciousness.** The Sacred Word is merely the symbol on the consent of one's will to God's presence and action within based on the faith in the doctrine of the Divine Indwelling. The Sacred Word is simply a means of reaffirming our original intention at the beginning of our period of prayer to be in God's presence and to surrender to the divine action when we are attracted to some other thought, feeling or impression.³⁷

³⁶ Flynn, 205.

³⁷ Thomas Keating, e-mail attachment to Wayne Lewis, June 2006.

Keating also states that Centering Prayer “is not the suspension of all activity, but the reduction of many acts and reflections into a single act or thought to sustain one’s consent to God’s presence and action.”³⁸

Johan Malan of the University of Limpopo in South Africa, in a paper on the Bible Guidance website, describes contemplative prayer as a form of TM, Buddhist, or Hindu prayer. He writes several lines describing contemplative prayer as going into a trancelike state of ethereal being.³⁹ Malan, as others, defines and describes contemplative prayer as he envisions it and desires it to be. He and others ignore the context and outright clear descriptions of any who differ.

Thelma Hall describes the superficial self as an illusion and depicts *contemplatio* in *lectio divina* as letting go of that superficiality. This leads the disciple into strange territory but not out of his or her mind.⁴⁰ Terry Wardle, professor of spiritual formation at Ashland Theological Seminary, describes the process of prayer as coming before God to list concerns and needs, listening to God in silent prayer, and sitting quietly and enjoying the relationship of His presence. “In these times,” he says, “very little will be said, but volumes will be communicated across the deep lines of love and devotion.”⁴¹

Merton insists that “solitude is not separation” but is the place the contemplative’s mind goes. He then spends an entire chapter explaining why this is the case and how we cannot in due course be separated from ourselves or our neighbor if we are to function as Christians.⁴² In this work he speaks of a vision of God beyond understanding, but not

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Johan Malan, Bible Guidance, www.bibleguidance.co.za/Engartibles/contemplation.htm, [Nov. 9, 2006].

⁴⁰ Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words*, (Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1988), 50.

⁴¹ Terry Wardle, *The Transforming Path: A Christ Centered Approach to Spiritual Formation*, (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2003), 122.

⁴² Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (Boston: Shambhala Library, 2003), 54-65.

about stepping out of ourselves or our mind. The language necessary to describe an indescribable experience is multifarious and will inevitably lead to misunderstanding in some quarters, confusion in others, and occasionally attack.

The search is not mindless. Indeed, the search for God enhances the experience of God, not because the journey is complete but because it goes on. The process of the search reveals God in the life of the Christian who seeks Him. This does not require a separation of the mind from the body or soul. When read in context, the reasonable promoters of unspoken prayer do not call for an out of mind experience but quite the opposite; they describe their experiences as a true awakening to the presence in their lives.

Conclusion

There are those who, in their zeal for progress in relationship with Jesus, go beyond the kingdom of God because they go on a journey in quest of their own power, control, and pre-determined results. Those who appear to be beyond acceptable bounds, who do promote an uncomfortable level of Eastern influence and activity in their Christian experience, who in all outward appearance teach a universal salvation, who are syncretistic in their view of God, and who deny scripture or a distinct message of the cross for salvation yet declare a salvation experience, who is to judge these people? It may be prudent to avoid their methods but it may also be inviting judgment to judge them. In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus said, "Do not **judge** so that you will not be judged. For in the way you **judge**, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

We are not to judge. We are to be busy about His work. It is important to avoid error but evangelism is not to save the church from error but is salvation into the kingdom of God by the work of Christ on the cross.

Jesus warns of the ravenous way Satan will attack all Christians while they remain in the world. He calls them out from the world to live in the kingdom of God and walk the earth as ambassadors and not participants in the culture of the world. He also promises the protection of God for His ambassadors. However, He is the one who credentials His ambassadors. It is not a democracy. Christians do not have a say in who is in or who is out. That has been, remains, and will be the prerogative of God; and the Father has commissioned the Son for that task. Matthew 25:31-46 makes it clear that there are those who fail to live as the ambassadors of His perfect love, fail to love their neighbor, and fail in becoming vessels filled with His love for all of His creation.

Matthew 25:31-46 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, **to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.**’ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty,

or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You. Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that **you did not do it to one of the least of these**, you did not do it to Me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Acts 17:30-31 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He **will judge** the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Romans 2:14-16 "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God **will judge** the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

We are each called to "work out our own salvation in fear and trembling."

We are not called to police the church, declare other parts of the body to be ill or in error.

We are called to keep watch over our worship community, not to condemn but to be a correcting factor within the body as a means of preserving the souls of those who are failing in relationship with God

Like so many other jewels in our relationship with Jesus, the use of the disciplines of unspoken prayer can be abused and turned from treasure to trash. The key is the partnership of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7, Romans 5:5) and a resolute determination to maintain that living link to the kingdom.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS—The Benefits of Wise Use and the Dangers of Misuse of Unspoken Prayer

No where does Scripture graphically tell us to go to our prayer closet and to sit quietly; empty our minds of the activities, distractions, and busyness of daily life; and wait patiently for the presence of God to be felt or not. Nor does it spell out that we are to listen intently for the message that will most likely be manifest only as a deeply satisfying sense of His love. These one hundred plus pages have been written about a subject that, in all honesty, cannot be proven. The arguments for and against any form of unspoken prayer are based on the consulted authors' interpretation, understanding, preconceptions, and personal preferences concerning his or her preferred element of unspoken prayer or his or her disdain for the same.

The Scripture that to one disciple or scholar proves the absolute validity, usefulness, and value of unspoken prayer is regarded by another as thinly veiled excuses to progress toward the dark side of spirituality that is not Christian and promoted only by deceiving spirits whose only job is to prevent or destroy salvation in any and all persons.¹

Clearly, from the information previously presented, the two views of unspoken prayer differ widely. One view is that the many forms of unspoken prayer can be used as tools within the spiritual disciplines to bring the Christian into a richer relationship with

¹ Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing: How a Universal Spirituality is Changing the Face of Christianity*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2002), 14-15.

God in Christ. The other view is that any form of unspoken prayer is founded in and grounded in occultic thought and religion and can lead the Christian only into error.²

Is either of these views right? Could both of them contain correct elements? Is it of any value to attempt to discern whether one or the other is good or bad, superior or inferior? One element that makes this debate difficult to discern is that those who oppose silence and unspoken prayer are very vocal and insistent that their views are correct, Biblical, and solely accurate; whereas those who use and promote silence and unspoken prayer do little beyond their writings to defend or promote unspoken prayer and leave it to the individual seeker. This leaves a lopsided debate in which only one view is forcefully represented.

The issue is not that there is little or sparse literature from those who practice unspoken prayer in Christian spiritual formation. There is a plethora of literature. Those who practice unspoken prayer in their pursuit of Christian spiritual formation are or were prolific authors. The issue is that the thrust of the literature is very different. The authors who examine the mysteries of Christian spiritual formation are very productive while those who are opposed are less productive but more insistent and specific in their onslaught against unspoken prayer. This difference makes objective assessment more difficult. The authors who oppose unspoken prayer do not offer an alternative, but only demean unspoken prayer by attempting to tie it to the New Age. The goal of this paper is not to decide on a “winner.” The goal of this paper is to assess the safety of the elements of unspoken prayer for use in Christian spiritual formation and examine the potential for

² Sandy Simpson, *New Age/Eastern Mysticism in the Churches*, 09/18/05, www.deceptioninthechurch.com/simpson.html, [Nov. 6, 2006].

misuse and how the Christian disciple seeking a formative relationship with God through Christ can achieve that goal.

The Issues of Use

Safety of Unspoken Prayer

Safety is the most important and, therefore the first issue considered. If it is unsafe to use unspoken prayer or any of its parts under any circumstance, then any other issues are immaterial at least for the Christian on their journey of spiritual formation. Is it safe to practice any form of unspoken prayer? After examining the literature, opinions, teachings, facts, and non-facts considered in this paper, it does appear safe and sound biblically to use unspoken prayer in the formative disciplines of Christian spirituality. However, there is a potential for abuse or misuse of any of the elements of unspoken prayer.

A contributing factor to the potential for abuse is that the elements of unspoken prayer are many and emanate from many sources. There is a mountain of literature available, some very sound and some very perilous. The elements of unspoken prayer, without exception, have existed for centuries to millennia. This has allowed them to be refined as well as bastardized and abused. The critics are concerned that the elements of unspoken prayer are used by many spirituality types outside the Christian Church. Unfortunately in the post-modern era in which we live, “spirituality” is popular and any sort of experiential, decidedly mystical, act of seeking is popular and sought after. The external show of spiritual exercises is important to the New Age movement; perhaps because the “light” is from within, the person is emphasized. At the dedication of the

new Martin Luther King memorial in Washington, DC on November 13, 2006, Oprah Winfrey mentioned the inner light leading the way as did President Bill Clinton.³ The New Age, Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as many of the more superficial pop religions of our modern materialistic society use silence, meditation, solitude, and contemplation to increase the practitioner's spiritual depth. However when power is the goal, God is not. Our seeking must be after Him and He must be allowed to define the goals, the destination, and the path that the journey is to take (John 10:14, John 14:6, John 15). Seeking is one of the great mysteries of the kingdom. We are called to work hard but to surrender the opportunity to set the agenda.⁴

The authors who oppose unspoken prayer reveal a particular discipline to be used by the New Age Movement, show where a similar discipline is written about by a pro unspoken prayer author, and declare them to be of the same sources, motive, and intent. The truth is that how the New Age or other religions use the discipline and how a Christian author describes it is completely different.⁵ Often authors who write in support of unspoken prayer give the same cautions the opponents do.⁶ In a real sense, the fact that a discipline may be imitated or pirated by non-Christian seekers can be seen as a compliment or affirmation of its merit. The use of a Christian discipline for spiritual formation by the New Age movement or mystical cult has no bearing on its viability as a useful Christian discipline.

³ NBC Evening News with Brian Williams, Monday November 13, 2006.

⁴ Thomas Merton, *Ascent to Truth*. (New York: Harcourt, 1978 reprint, New York: Harvest Books, 1981), 30.

⁵ It is important that novices in the more mystical forms of spiritual formation like unspoken prayer read from a good variety of sources and season this reading with prayer before settling on a path to spiritual formation or on a guide, director or class.

⁶ Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 156-157.

How many fanatics, cultists, child predators, or sexual deviants have used religion and the name of Christ to pursue their nefarious ends? Genocide, bigotry, and material gain are all pursued in the name of a Christian God. Criminals have used the guise of healing and evangelism to promote their evil pursuit of money, but we certainly do not relate these noble Christian ministries to the evil use in their names.

There are many, many Christians over the entire world and throughout the centuries that have used unspoken prayer to enrich their understanding and relationship with God. Many Christian leaders endorse the use of unspoken prayer as a set of valuable tools for Christian Spiritual formation. Yet, the opponents write all these leaders off as being duped or in error.⁷

Amy Grant, Brennan Manning, Larry Crabb, Henri Nouwen, Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, Anthony deMello, Rick Warren, Meister Eckart, Richard Foster, John of the Cross, Brother Lawrence, Gerald May, Chet Michaels, Mike Yaconelli, Mark Yaconelli, Phillip Yancey, all of the desert fathers and spiritual writers prior to the reformation, and many, many more are on the list of names of leaders prescribed to be in error and conspiring to do harm to the church by the opponents of unspoken prayer.⁸ Are all these leaders wrong in their assessment?

There is value in challenging unspoken prayer. It is always valuable to examine the parts of the whole. This effort helps to maintain a balanced perspective. However it is not good when an agent for one 'side' takes an either/or approach to his case and creates division in the church. This is especially true when division is created in order to promote one specific view over all others. When controversy leads to or encourages

⁷ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), xv.

⁸ Yungen, 70-85.

division then error has triumphed over discernment. In John 17, Ephesians, and elsewhere, Jesus called for unity in the church regardless of differences. He even suggested that we place others before ourselves and no where left room for us to belittle, berate, or question our brothers or sisters faith.

Value of Unspoken Prayer

Is there value in the use of unspoken prayer? Clearly this question has two very distinct answers that are separated by a vast void of non-communication. The opponents say 'no;' not only is there no value but indeed there is absolute danger, harm, and error. The proponents say 'absolutely yes.' There is great value and advantage in the use of unspoken prayer and every Christian should at least consider it.⁹

The answer lies somewhere in the middle. Unfortunately this is an area that is seldom or never explored. Prayer is a valuable and necessary part of the life of the Christian. Scripture contains 339 references directly to a form of the word 'pray.'

Matt. 5:44-45 "But I say to you, love your enemies and **pray** for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

When you **pray**, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and **pray** in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you **pray**, go into your inner room, close your door and **pray** to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Matt 6:9-13 "**Pray**, then, in this way:

⁹ Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 161.

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 “Rejoice always; **pray** without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

1 Tim. 2:8 “Therefore I want the men in every place to **pray**, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”

The value of unspoken prayer is the intimacy it brings into the disciple's relationship with God. We are commanded to be with God in a secret place.

Matthew 5:48-6:6 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. **Beware of practicing** your righteousness **before men** to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in **secret**; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, **when you pray, go into your inner room**, close your door and pray to your Father **who is in secret**, and your Father who sees *what is done* in **secret** will reward you.”

God desires intimacy with each of us. We are His creation and He desires to commune with us as a body of believers and as individuals. Somehow in the mysterious power and abilities of God, He can have private intimate conversations with each of us and come close and sit quietly with us individually and just enjoy our presence and we His. This relationship works best when the disciple can find a refuge away from the

cacophony of the activities of daily living. This is the secret prayer closet (Matt. 6:6) and it must happen in quietness.

Isaiah 3:17 "The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be **quiet** in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."

2 Thessalonians 3:12 "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in **quiet** fashion and eat their own bread."

Psalms 131:22 "Surely I have composed and **quieted** my soul; like a weaned child *rests* against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me."

NAU Proverbs 17:1 "Better is a dry morsel and **quietness** with it than a house full of feasting with strife."

Isaiah 30:15 "For thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you will be saved, In **quietness** and trust is your strength." But you were not willing."

And in this quietness we are called to meditate.

Genesis 24:63 "Isaac went out to **meditate** in the field toward evening."

Joshua 1:8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success."

Psalms 4:4 "Tremble, and do not sin; **Meditate** in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah."

Psalms 27:4 "One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to **meditate** in His temple."

Psalms 63:6 "When I remember You on my bed, I **meditate** on You in the night watches."

Psalms 77:6, 12 "I will remember my song in the night; I will **meditate** with my heart, And my spirit **ponders**...I will **meditate** on all Your work And muse on Your deeds."

Psalms 119:15 "I will **meditate** on Your precepts And regard Your ways.

Psalm 119:27 “Make me understand the way of Your precepts, So I will **meditate** on Your wonders.”

Psalm 119:48 “And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, Which I love; And I will **meditate** on Your statutes.”

Psalm 119:78 “May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; *But* I shall **meditate** on Your precepts.”

Psalm 119:148 “My eyes anticipate the night watches, That I may **meditate** on Your word.”

Psalm 143:5 “I remember the days of old; I **meditate** on all Your doings; I muse on the work of Your hands.”

Psalm 145:1 “On the glorious splendor of Your majesty And on Your wonderful works, I will **meditate**.”

The endorsement of Scripture makes unspoken prayer valuable to the Christian.

The Lord calls His people to seek Him in a quiet, secret place and to listen for His voice and meditate on His word. The meditation described in Scripture is remarkably like the meditative practices of the New Age and some Eastern religions. According to the opponents of unspoken prayer, this would place Scripture on the list of unacceptable literature and the practices commanded as from evil spirits. Of course this is not the case. To practice the disciplines of unspoken prayer is to be obedient to God and His word and this is the foundation of their value for the Christian disciple.

Effectiveness of Unspoken Prayer

The effectiveness of unspoken prayer in the disciple's life is a matter of personal acuity and growth. There are no formulas that can be promoted as universal or definitively effective. The effectiveness of unspoken prayer is a matter of relationship. The Christian spiritual disciplines are intended to be practiced as a means of grace leading toward a fuller, more satisfying relationship with God and not as a self-help route

to success in the world or the kingdom of God.¹⁰ The Christian spiritual disciplines are not a shortcut to Christ likeness or spiritual maturity.¹¹

Pennington assures us that the benefits of centering prayer take time to achieve.¹² Merton, in *The Ascent to Truth*, urges us not to seek any experiential moment and that any ecstatic thrill is of no value and not to be sought, treasured, or attempted to repeat.¹³ The effectiveness of the practice of the Christian spiritual disciplines are proved out in the consistency and Christ likeness in the spirit of the disciple made manifest in his relationship with God and others.

The effectiveness of unspoken prayer used as a part of our arsenal of disciplines for spiritual formation is proven by the development and refinement of the fruit of the Spirit in our inner self and the outward expression of them to those around us. This fruit is given in Galatians 5:22-23 as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Initially we are told in Galatians 5:20-21 to put off immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these; because “I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21).” Galatians 5:25 says that if we “...live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

Practicing the Christian spiritual disciplines is a part of the Christian’s life of walking and then living by the Spirit. The effectiveness of unspoken prayer results from

¹⁰ Steve Harper, “Spiritual Disciplines: From Legalism to Liberty,” *Spiritual Disciplines 101*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2005) 20-21.

¹¹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

¹² Basil Pennington, *Finding Grace at the Center: The Beginning of Centering Prayer*, (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), 60.

¹³ Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth*, (New York: Harvest Books, 1981), 85-87.

practicing its elements of centering prayer, *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and meditation. These techniques within unspoken prayer are merely a subset of the Christian's arsenal of Christian spiritual disciplines used to generate this spirit to Spirit communication creating maturity in the relationship with Christ.

Hazards of Unspoken Prayer

This may be the most important section of this paper. The arguments pertaining to unspoken prayer are futile unless an objective, open, and reasonable mind considers them. Each opinion is right for the person expressing it. But if harm can be done to the innocent disciples seeking to improve their relationship with Jesus, then that potential for harm must be exposed and avoided. It is better to bypass the assets of unspoken prayer than use them and bring harm into the relationship with Jesus.

Eagerness for change, growth, or deepening of relationship is the key to disaster. Growth and maturity will come as God pleases. Patience will do more to encourage the process than hurry. Impatience is an effort to impose your will into God's timing and His plan and will lead to disaster.¹⁴ When we are impatient, we take short cuts, skip steps, and allow our pride and ego to rule our decision making process. When we are over eager, we fail to be objective in our own assessment of progress or danger and become deaf to God's warnings. When this happens, we have usurped control from God and engaged our own means of relationship. If we do this, we have abandoned the relationship that we are trying to enhance. Romans 12:16 says, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. **Do not be**

¹⁴ Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 58.

wise in your own estimation.” Paul is telling us to look to God as our source and to trust in His ways. We must honor God by allowing Him to lead the way in our journey with Him in the kingdom of God.

Unspoken prayer includes meditation and contemplative practices that are similar to the practices used by many other religions to find their god. There is no clear cut distinctive in how to differentiate the line between the value of unspoken prayer and the danger. Brian Flynn, in a cavalier fashion, makes a statement about praying for protection. He says, “The prayer that requires protection? What is the purpose of this type of prayer?”¹⁵ The purpose is that the Christian is to be at all times moving forward in his relationship with Jesus and this takes him repeatedly into unexplored territory where danger lies. The enemy never ceases his efforts to undermine the disciple’s relationship with Jesus. Protection is always a needed item in the Christian life. Jesus Himself gave the example of praying for protection when He urged His disciples to pray in this manner, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The sincere disciple who earnestly seeks to mature in Christ likeness in his or her life will be under constant attack from Satan and his minions. C. S. Lewis seemed sure of this when he penned *The Screwtape Letters*.

Many cautions in Scripture urge us to beware of the evil one, to seek God’s protection, and to place our trust in Him, not only in the means of grace that we use in our Christian spiritual formation but in all that we do.

Psalm 41:1-2 “How blessed is he who considers the helpless; The LORD will deliver him in a day of trouble. The LORD will **protect** him and keep him alive, And he shall be called blessed upon the earth; And do not give him over to the desire of his enemies.”

¹⁵ Brian Flynn, *Running Against the Wind*, (Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishers, 2005), 144.

Psalms 121:7-8 "The LORD will **protect** you from all evil; He will keep your soul.

The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever."

Thessalonians 3:3 "But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and **protect** you from the evil *one*."

1 Peter 1:3-9 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are **protected** by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

Isaiah 27:5 "Or let him rely on My **protection**, Let him make peace with Me, Let him make peace with Me."

Matthew 7: 15 "**Beware** of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

Mark 12:38 "He was saying: "**Beware** of the scribes..."

Luke 12:1-5 "**Beware** of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

If the Christian disciple has any hesitation about the methods to use for Christian spiritual formation, the best course of action is to wait. If at any time the efforts for formation become a self-motivated endeavor, it is time to wait on the Lord, seek counsel from a guide or director,¹⁶ and pray. God will reveal His strategy in His own time. He has revealed the path to salvation through the work of His beloved Son Jesus. But the complete mystery is not yet revealed. In 1 Timothy 3:14-16, Paul writes to Timothy, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By

¹⁶ Margaret Silf, *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 90.

common confession, great is the **mystery** of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.” The mystery of the work of Jesus appears plain and simple to those who believe, but it is a mystery still; and evil spirits can use that mystery to draw the disciple of Jesus into error. Does that mean that we do not seek to know Him further or that we confine our knowledge to the written page? No, it means that we proceed to desire an unquenchable thirst for Christ likeness that will lead us to seek Him but to do so in the safety of His loving care (Luke 13:34).

The Practice of Unspoken Prayer

There are many disciplines within unspoken prayer, most falling within centering prayer, contemplation and contemplative prayer, meditation, and *lectio divina*. Many Christians seeking to become well formed spiritually indulge in some form of one of these even though they may have no formal knowledge of the method or even of its existence. Looking at the sunset and wondering how God came to cause it is a method or form of contemplative prayer.

Centering prayer in its modern form is a more formal method with specific steps or procedures; but in practice, many groups vary the actual method. Keating teaches a very simple method as a baseline for entering into centering prayer:

Guidance in Unspoken Prayer

Centering Prayer/Contemplation

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence

and action within.

2. Sitting comfortably, with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.¹⁷

Some forms of contemplation are easier to enter into. In Matthew 6:28, Jesus said, “**Observe** how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin.” When we observe God's creation, we are in a form of contemplation. However, this easily degenerates to the John Walton ‘school of theology’¹⁸ and then essentially becomes a form of pagan universalism. Contemplation and contemplative prayer should be done with a degree of intent on the part of the disciple. The intent is not a way of control but of focus. Using the word of God as a point of focus is the safest method for a safe focus in our contemplative life.

Lectio Divina

The practice of *Lectio divina* also contains elements of unspoken prayer and has a standard method from which to approach it. This form of unspoken prayer is also a very easy method to enter into but perhaps more difficult to master. Pennington describes the process thusly:

¹⁷ Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, reprint, 2002), 64.

¹⁸ John Walton was the Father on the TV program “The Waltons.” He doggedly resisted going to church and insisted that the spirituality he found as he fished on Sunday mornings was of a higher quality than that dispensed in church.

Method of Lectio

Keeping the Sacred Scriptures enthroned in our home in a place of honor as a Real Presence of the Word in our midst, we benefit by the daily practice of lectio.

1. Take the Sacred Text with reverence and call upon the Holy Spirit.
2. For ten minutes (or longer, if you are so drawn), listen to the Lord speaking to you through the Text and respond to Him.
3. At the end of the time, choose a word or phrase (perhaps one will have been “given” to you) to take with you, and thank the Lord for being with you and speaking to you.

More briefly, we might put it this way:

Come into the Presence and call upon the Holy Spirit.

Listen (read or hear) a portion of Scripture for ten minutes.

Thank the Lord and take a “Word.”¹⁹

The practice of unspoken prayer is a compound set of disciplines for spiritual formation that has been an enormous asset for many and can be for many more; yet it must be entered into with some degree of caution. There is no need for fear or for entering into the journey of spiritual formation with a sense of dread that doom is around every corner. The important point is that there is a distinct advantage in the use of unspoken prayer in our formative life as Christians, and it can be done safely and with the glorious reward of a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ as our Savior. Our walk with Christ is a blessing of grace that brings great peace and joy to our lives and

¹⁹ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1991), 151.

restores us to a proper relationship with God our creator. But the Christian journey and the formative life of the Christian are serious affairs that must be handled with proper heed. The charge to the Church and to each Christian is to make disciples. That charge must not be lost or even camouflaged in a desire or effort to achieve perfection in our own relationship with Jesus. The best relationship with Jesus is the one balanced between tending to our own relationship in our inward journey and exhibiting the joy of relationship with Christ to a sorrow laden world in our outward joy. Spiritual formation is not for the benefit of the individual Christian; it is for the advancement of the kingdom of God and His efforts to reconcile lost souls to Himself.

The practice of Christian spiritual formation is to establish a system that will bring the disciple closer to the Savior and protect him or her from evil. Initially the disciple needs to establish goals and embark on a journey toward them. Why does the disciple want to enter into a formative journey? If it is personal gain, it is best to stop before he starts. The only valid reason to embark on an inward journey, a journey to know your heart, is to please God with a greater sense of your presence in His kingdom. When God is in the center of the disciple's formative efforts, then the outward benefits, the fruit of the Spirit, and a stronger bond with Jesus will happen. This Christ-centered focus is an issue of growth. It is not a crisis experience but comes with growth and growth leads to growth. When these things happen, Jesus is lifted up and those whose hearts are ready will come to Him. In other words, the most effective way for the disciple to build the kingdom of God is to enter into a more formative relationship with Him.

The first thing is determine not to enter this journey alone. The disciple must seek out a spiritual director, a spiritual guide, a soul care provider, or at least an accountability partner. An accountability partner must be a person who can be frank, direct, and inquisitive with the disciple. Only in peering with loving objectivity into the disciple's life can an accountability partner help the disciple to keep within the confines of the narrow way.

Next the disciple needs to read and educate himself in the various disciplines and to pray about how God may want him or her to use them. There are many sources on the market and the sources that criticize and condemn unspoken prayer should not be avoided.

The third thing the disciple needs to do is to pray God's protection on himself from the efforts of unfriendly spirits that may try to lead him astray. The disciple needs to have a circle of prayer partners, preferably others who are on their inward journey as well, who are praying regularly for his safe but sure journey.

The fourth thing the disciple needs to do is to pray the prayer of examen morning and night as a means of keeping in the narrow way. During the prayer of examen, anything that comes to the disciple's mind that leaves him uncomfortable should not be pursued further until discussing with his soul care provider.

The fifth thing the disciple needs to do is be tenacious. When failure happens, start again the next day but do not stop.

The sixth thing the disciple needs to do is to establish a plan of reflection and during this time adjust goals, recognize and acknowledge errors, and enjoy progress. Part of this plan needs to be a system of retreats with at least one three-to-eight day retreat a

year and at least one weekend retreat every six months. At least a portion of this time needs to be spent in silence and at least every other retreat needs to be a directed retreat. Chester Michael teaches his students to give the Lord an hour a day, a day a month, and a week a year. This is a good plan.

This plan will make the disciple into a pure vessel ready to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit and eventually full and running over with the fruit and with living water.

Conclusion—Whose Church?

The most distressing matter of this entire subject is that it leads to division in the Church. Scripture tells us to avoid division and places the burden on us to be in a relationship with Jesus that makes us the sort of citizens of the kingdom of Heaven that will be able to avoid division. Galatians 5:18-26 reads:

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, **enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions**, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law**. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another**, envying one another.

It is never in the interest of the kingdom for the members of the body of Christ to create factions and strife among themselves. This often happens in the name of preserving the Church, as though the propagators of criticism and dissent can save God's Church and He cannot. The Church is the Body of Christ and, as such, the Father will

care for it. The Charge is to be gentle and at peace with one another. Colossians 3:12

tells us:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things above**, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and **your life is hidden** with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For, it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, **put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth**. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self who **is being renewed** to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--*a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you**. Beyond all these things **put on love**, which is the perfect bond of **unity**. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in **one body**; and be thankful. **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God**. Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father**.

In this passage Paul leaves no room for a faction within the church to condemn another.

We are one Church, called to be parts of a whole that interact in a way that pleases God and exalts Him to those who need Him, and attracts them into the fold with the other sheep. It is not my church to protect or to build; it is His. When there are differences, they must be resolved in a way that brings honor to God and will never lead anyone away or cause dishonor to be associated with the head of the Church.

Because the Church is His and He has chosen us to be the tools that build it, we should all be involved in a formative process that does not make us better warriors but more gentle servants of one another. Unspoken prayer and its parts can be an indispensable part of the journey.

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