

Stefan Smart—*Deeper (Contemplative Prayer for Charismatics)*

Contemplative prayer and other forms of Eastern mysticism including prayer labrynth, breath prayers and lectio divina have recently been adopted by many in our churches. But what are the roots of such practises and are they biblical? Smart's book describes his personal journey from the biblical forms of prayer to that described in the title of his book. Interestingly, in the introduction on page 14 of his book, Smart asks the question: *'is it right for a Protestant Christian, for instance, to be interested in forms of prayer practised by Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Christians? What about the influence of eastern forms of religion? Do some of these new approaches in prayer smack of principles we would normally be reluctant to accept? These questions and concerns are understandable in the circumstances. But they are largely invalid.'* Notice that Smart does not hide the origins of Contemplative Prayer—Roman Catholicism. This so-called church also practises 'necromancy' – praying to the dead (the so-called 'saints' and Mary) and believes in salvation through *purgatory* and *the repeated sacrificing of the Lord Jesus in the Mass*, to name just a few unbiblical and abominable practices. Why would anyone want to use a form of prayer borrowed from an apostate church and which initially came from pagan (eastern) religions? This form of prayer had been practised for centuries by Hindus, Buddhists and Sufis (Islamic mystics) to get in contact with their gods (demons). It was then introduced into Christianity by the Desert Fathers and others, and more recently by Thomas Merton. Thus we are dealing with a form of prayer which gains the practitioner an entrance into the occult (spirit) world. It is therefore not surprising that Jesus, nor any other biblical writer, mentioned or encouraged this form of prayer. This is because of the danger associated with this type of prayer as clearly described by one of its major proponents, Richard Foster, in his book *'Prayer: finding the heart's true home'*. Let us hear what he says in this book: *'I also want to give a word of precaution. In the silent contemplation of God we are entering deeply into the spiritual realm, and there is such a thing as a supernatural guidance that is not divine guidance....But for now I want to encourage you to learn and practice prayers of protection... "All dark and evil spirits must now leave."*(page157.) Why would God ask us to become involved in a type of prayer that could expose us to harm from demons? Interesting too that Foster warns: *'Contemplative prayer is not for the novice'* (page 156). It is obvious that contemplative prayer is a deception to lead us away from Christ and the scriptures. At this point, I would like to refer readers to books that show clearly that contemplative prayer is an occult eastern practice and to be avoided by Christians at all costs: *'Running against the wind'* by Brian Flynn an ex-New Age Medium who used to channel many demonic spirits by practicing this form of prayer; *'A Time of Departing'* and *'For Many Shall Come in My Name'* by Ray Yungen; and *'Faith Undone'* by Roger Oakland. Isn't it interesting that (as quoted above), Smart asserts that *'concerns about this form of prayer are understandable'* but *'largely invalid'*. Notice his casual dismissal of the issue compared with that of Richard Foster and also that he uses the term *'largely invalid'* not *'completely invalid'*. And we know why! This is an occult practise clothed in Christian terminology just like *'Christian' Yoga*. Then after ignoring any concerns

that we might have about contemplative prayer, Smart then promises us on page 15: *'You are about to go on an adventure of a lifetime'*. Yes, you sure are—into the occult! Smart's promise reminds me of a similar claim made by Rick Warren in his forward of *'The Purpose Driven Life'*. On page 9, Warren stated a totally unbiblical concept: *'Whenever God wanted to prepare someone for His purposes, He took 40 days'*. Then on page 10 he followed this with a promise: *'The next 40 days will transform your life'*. Both Smart and Warren obviously think that they are speaking for God in giving such unconditional and absolute promises—but are they? In a previous critique I have pointed out how Warren's statements were not biblical. The same can be said of Smart's.

It is interesting that Smart acknowledges that the concept of contemplative prayer is not from the Bible but *pagan (eastern) religions (page 14)*. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray why did He not say: *'You need to try contemplative prayer or walk prayer labyrinths, do breathing exercises, employ relaxation techniques, use His name as a vain repetition etc.?'* No, He taught them what we term *'The Lord's Prayer'* as described in Matthew 6v9-13. It is significant that Smart used to use biblical modes of prayer and quotes them in Chapter 1 of his book, namely those described in *'The Lord's Prayer'* (Matthew 6v9-13), *'speaking in tongues'* (1 Corinthians 12-14), *'confession'* (1 John 1v9), *'petition'* and *'thanksgiving'* (Philippians 4v6-7), *'praise and adoration'* (Psalms), *'intercession'* (Romans 1v9) etc. Unfortunately, Smart fell into the trap of thinking that he should always be able to *'feel'* or *'experience God's presence in a tangible way'* (page 32) and this is a trap that many Christians today are falling into. Hence the popularity of *'the Toronto blessing'*, *'Pensacola'* and *'Lakeland, Florida'* debacles etc. I believe in all the gifts of the Spirit as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, but not the so-called *'moves of the Holy Spirit'* mentioned above that seem to be leading the flock away from biblical Christianity and into similar experiences with the occult as obtained with contemplative prayer. The scriptures clearly teach that Jesus has promised *to be with us always* (Matthew 28v20) and that *he will never leave us nor forsake us* (Hebrews 13v5). Are we willing to trust His word or our feelings? Feelings are subject to change for all sorts of reasons. Jesus said *'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed'* (John 20v29). Moses *'endured as seeing Him who is invisible'* (Hebrews 11v27). We are to walk by *'faith, not by sight'* (2 Corinthians 5v7). I am not denying that sometimes God does speak to us clearly or that we may experience His presence in a more tangible way. But that is His prerogative as to when and how. God is not bound by formulas (*'Prayer of Jabez'*) or techniques like contemplative prayer. He cannot be dictated to or controlled by us. We are called to walk by faith. Instead of being willing to embrace costly discipleship and servanthood where we die to self, many Christians (usually Western ones) are self-centred and focusing almost exclusively on having their needs met, rather than seeking to be a servant to others.

In chapter 2 Smart quotes Psalm 46v10 *'Be still and know that I am God'* out of context. This verse is addressed to warring nations and has nothing to do with

contemplative prayer. In the same chapter we are introduced to relaxation and breathing techniques employed by eastern religions. Smart says that our *'in-breath can become a symbol of God's Spirit entering your body'*. Actually the Bible states that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and He dwells in us already (1 Corinthians 3v16 and 6v19). We do not have to use *'breath-prayers'* to experience His presence. The same with using the name of Jesus as a mantra (another Buddhist practise) as described on page 40. How strange that Jesus never taught His disciples this method. He just gave them an unchanging promise that He would be with them always. Jesus obviously thought that was better than any changeable feeling. In Chapter 3 Smart introduces us to imagining or picturing Christ sitting in a chair near you. The problem with that is we reduce Jesus, the Lord of glory, to something out of our imagination which is idolatry, because the Jesus we picture or imagine is not going to be the real one at whose feet the Apostle John fell down as dead (Revelation 1v17).

Not only does Smart take Psalm 46v2 out of context to give a false biblical foundation for contemplative prayer, he does the same with Ecclesiastes 5 v1-2 which he interprets as *'a need to be silent as we approach God in prayer'* (page 99). However, the context of these verses is a warning not to be hasty in making vows not about contemplative prayer (Ecclesiastes 5v 1-7). Jesus confirms this in Matthew 5v33-37.

I could go on with this critique but it would take too long to challenge everything said in the last few chapters of Smart's book. Enough has already been said about the occult origins of contemplative prayer and readers are encouraged to read the above mentioned books for a more in-depth analysis.

In conclusion, we must learn to test all that we read and hear against God's word and not be taken in by charismatic or persuasive personalities. When the Antichrist comes, he will have both these characteristics and will be able to deceive the whole world.

'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world' (1 John 4v1). Some of these false prophets have produced Sufism, Buddhism, Hinduism etc and introduced contact with the occult through techniques like contemplative prayer etc.