



THE CENTERING PRAYER MOVEMENT CHRISTIAN PRAYER OR HINDU/BUDDHIST PRAYER?



The Centering Prayer Movement, taught by Fr. Basil Pennington and Fr. Thomas Keating, is very popular with Catholics today. Many people think it is the same as Contemplative Prayer. However, after a three month study of CP and ten years of study of the New Age Movement, I have found that some of the teachings of CP introduce the reader to the major concepts and practices of the New Age Movement (NAM). Although Catholic prayer and beliefs are presented in many of the pages, New Age ideas also appear off and on throughout their books. These New Age ideas would not be obvious to the average Catholic.

Those in the New Age Movement believe that we are all connected to an impersonal energy force which is god, and we are part of this god. They think that because we are god, we can create our own reality, and experience our god-power. This awareness of our **godself**s is called god-consciousness, self-realization or **pure consciousness**. To reach this awareness, New Agers use mantras or yoga to go into altered levels of consciousness (semi-hypnotic state) to discover their own divinity. Many of their concepts come from Hinduism and Buddhism, and are mixed with occult practices.

When a person begins to learn about Centering Prayer, they often think that it is merely a technique to get rid of distracting thoughts. They are told to use a “sacred word” to ignore all thoughts, letting them go by as boats going down a stream. This technique is supposed to put them in direct contact with God. The idea is to go to the center of your being to discover the True Self. This process is supposed to dismantle the False Self, which is supposedly the result of the emotional baggage we carry.

Most Catholics are not aware that the **mantra**, which is the repetition of one word or short phrase, has a **special effect on the mind. It is a mind-emptying technique which leads to an altered level of consciousness.** Fr. Keating claims that the “sacred word” is not a mantra, but if it is used to rid the mind of all thoughts and feelings, then it does the same thing as the mantra if it is said often enough for a certain period of time. Fr. Keating says, “**All thoughts pass if you wait long enough**” (*Open Mind, Open Heart, p. 97*) Fr. Keating also admits that the goal is mind-emptying. He says in his book, “**The method consists of letting go of every thought during the time of prayer, even the most devout thoughts.**” (*Open Mind, Open Heart, p.35*). This is

the opposite of Christian prayer, which is a conversation with God, involving the mind and the heart.

The purpose of the mantra is to empty the mind and reach an altered level of consciousness. This state of mind, often called **pure consciousness**, is referred to by Keating in the same book, on pages 51, 73, and 74. On p. 51, he states, “**As the spirit gradually takes more and more charge of your prayer, you may move into pure consciousness, which is an intuition into your true Self.**”

The concept of the True Self is taught by Fr. Keating and Fr. Pennington in many of their books. It is the belief that the soul is the same as God, and it originates from Hinduism. Fr. Keating states, “God and our true Self are not separate. Though we are not God, God and our true Self are the same thing.” (*Open Mind, Open Heart, p. 127*) As Christians, we know that the soul is NOT THE SAME AS GOD. It is created by God; it is sinful; and it will be judged by Him.

The Vatican recently released a document which exposes New Age ideas and practices. It is called *Jesus Christ, the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age*.

While it does not mention the Centering Prayer Movement, it does identify the True Self, mantras, and altered levels of consciousness as New Age. It also identifies Transcendental Meditation (TM) as New Age. CP and TM are almost identical, except that in TM, the person is calling on Hindu gods. In CP, the sacred word is usually peace, Jesus, or love. Let us look at the similarities:

- 1) Both CP and TM use a 20-minute meditation.
- 2) Both CP and TM use a mantra to erase all thoughts and feelings.
- 3) Both CP and TM teach that in this meditation you pick up vibrations.
- 4) Both CP and TM claim that this meditation will give you more peace and less tension.
- 5) Both CP and TM teach you how to reach a mental void or altered level of consciousness.
- 6) Both CP and TM have the common goal of finding your god-center.

In regard to vibrations, Fr. Keating says, “As you go to a deeper level of reality, you begin to pick up vibrations that were there all the time but not perceived.” (*Finding Grace at the Center* by Thomas Keating, p.20) Fr. Pennington also speaks of “...physical vibrations that are helpful” in his book, *Centering Prayer* on p. 234. **The concept of vibrations is common TM or New Age language.** (New Agers believe that during meditation, one begins to feel the subtle **universal energy vibration**) Also, in Keating’s book, *Invitation to Love*, p.125, he speaks of “Energy Centers”, common New Age language. New Agers believe that the body has seven energy centers called chakras. In Benkovic’s book, *The New Age Counterfeit*, p. 11, she explains, “Hinduism teaches at the base of the spine is a triangle which lies in the “Kundalini Shakti” (**Serpent Power**). It is usually dormant, but when it is awakened, it travels up the spine to the top of the head passing through six psychic centers called “chakras”. As it passes through a chakra, one receives **psychic** experiences and powers. When it reaches the top chakra, supposedly the power to perform miracles and liberation is realized”. Fr. Pennington also refers to energies flowing up and down the spinal system in his book, *Awake in the Spirit*, p. 97. Actress Shirley MacLaine, promoter of the New Age Movement, makes a similar statement in her book, *Going Within*, on p. 64.

Ralph Rath says in his book, *Mantras*, p. 25, “In a foreword to the book, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality* by Phillip St. Romain, Keating calls kundalini “an enormous energy for good” and does not point out that uncontrolled kundalini can kill or drive a person mad or that some cults use kundalini in an extremely debased way. He does not show discernment here, since all spiritual power comes from the Holy Spirit or the Evil One. **KUNDALINI POWER IS OCCULT, AND OCCULT POWER IS DEMONIC.**

Keating and Pennington both refer to our God as an “energy force” just as the New Agers do. In Keating’s new book, *Invitation to Love*, on p. 102, he says, “the divine energy in itself is infinite potentiality and actuality.” Fr. Pennington makes similar statements in his book, *True Self, False Self*, speaking of God as the Divine Love Energy in many places.

Keating and Pennington speak of **unleashing energies** in their books. Clare Merkle, the former New Ager, has written an article on her website, crossveil.org, exposing **CP as occult meditation**. She quotes Basil Pennington in his article on CP, “Love is God’s Being” from *Contemplative Prayer Online Magazine*. She quotes Pennington and places in **BOLD** print the New Age statements. He said “When we go to the **center of our being** and pass through that center into the **very center of God** we get into immediate touch with this divine creating **energy**.” Then he says, “When we go to the **center of our being** and pass through that center into the **very center of God** we get into immediate touch

with this divine creating **energy**.” Then he says, “When we dare with full assent of love to **unleash these energies** within us surprisingly the initial experience is a flood of **chaotic** thoughts, memories, emotions and feelings. A few lines down, he says “But it is this release that allows us all of this chaos within us with all its imprisoning stress to be brought into harmony so that not only there might be peace and harmony within but that the **divine energy may have the freedom to forward the evolution of consciousness** in us and through us, **as a part of the whole, in the whole of the creation.**” Merkle then explains these statements. She says “Typical of New Age meditative practice, the soul becomes the “center”, energy replaces grace, God actually becomes a pantheistic energy, and the unleashing of this “energy” leads to chaos and then, mysteriously, an evolution of consciousness” Then she says that New Agers believe that the “evolution of consciousness leads to the awakening of the “Self” as God.” She describes CP as a mixture of Buddhist meditative practice and kundalini yogic practice.

Keating also gives a strange definition of the Eucharist in his book, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, p. 128, He says, “The Eucharist is the celebration of life: the coming together of all the material elements of the cosmos, their emergence to consciousness in human persons and the transformation of human consciousness into Divine consciousness. It is the manifestation of the Divine in and through the Christian community. We receive the Eucharist in order to become the Eucharist.” On the contrary, the Eucharist is not composed of all of the elements of the universe. It is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, the statement regarding consciousness is the basic belief of New Agers, that we are all one and that we are all god.

In summary, the Centering Prayer Movement introduces the reader to mantras, ALC’s, True Self, energy centers, vibrations, evolution of consciousness, kundalini energy, and other New Age ideas not presented in this leaflet. St. Teresa of Avila says that true contemplation is a gift from God, initiated by Him, and that no techniques can make it happen. She says in *Interior Mansion*, “For it to be prayer at all, the mind must take a part in it.” Mind-emptying prayer was not recommended by Pope John Paul II, who said “it makes no sense in Christianity”. Also the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes this type of prayer as erroneous in (#2726)

For more detailed information, read my article on CP, “A Closer Look at Centering Prayer” published in the October 2004 issue of *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*.

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