

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: Poisoning Bible-Classes and Bookstores.

Just recently I was engaged in a series of email exchanges with a (rightly) concerned Christian lady and at the conclusion of our exchanges I sought her permission to pen an article based upon those exchanges and she very kindly and readily agreed, for which I am truly grateful She was concerned at what was being taught and promoted by three leading figures in the church she was attending – the Pastor, the pastor's wife, who was leading a bible class, and another assistant bible-class teacher. These then are extracts from the exchanges that took place –

I am in a Baptist church and in the Sunday morning Bible class the study is based on the book by Henri Nouwen, 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'. I have done a little research on Henri Nouwen who was a Catholic priest and also admitted he had homosexual tendencies. I am concerned about why in a Christian church are we doing a study based on a book by a person who was not even a Christian. Would you please give me your opinion on this? Thank you for your consideration. xxxx

Dear xxxx,

You are discerningly right to be concerned and your assessment is also correct - Henri Nouwen was no Christian (and) here are some helps (I hope) I penned an article on Henri Nouwen, back in 2004 and it can be accessed on this link and you need to scroll down to 'Mystic Musings of Henri Nouwen'

<http://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-june-2004/>

Then in 2006 I included an article in my September ministry newsletter warning about this man and the fact that 'Our Daily Bread' were quoting him favourably. That article can be accessed as follows - go to the following link and scroll down to the heading "The 'leaven' in Our Daily Bread". This is the link

<http://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-september-2006/>

With the passing of time 'links' change and I think the one to 'Lighthouse Trails' that I included doesn't 'function' now so here is one that does and I would recommend it

<http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=10793>

I would also highly recommend the book 'A Time of Departing' by the late Ray Yungen and it can be obtained via

http://www.lighthousetrails.com/home/684-a-time-of-departing.html?search_query=a+time+of+departing&results=25

Another non-functional link relates to 'Contemplative Prayer – Don't even think about it' and it can be accessed by scrolling almost to the end of this link –

<http://www.takeheed.info/news-from-the-front-january-2003/>
(I no longer have copies of 'A Time of Departing' available to purchase)

For Christ

Cecil

I wanted you to see this email to get your opinion. He (my Pastor) is talking about another book by Henri Nouwen apart from 'The Return of the Prodigal Son' which we are doing in the Bible study. xxxx

Ponderings from Pastor xxxx : 2 February 2018

Pastor xxxx and I are reading a book together on leadership. It's not the typical leadership perspective that either the Wharton School of Business or Bill Hybels would strongly recommend. It says little about being smart, contemporarily relevant, visionary, and accomplished. It says a lot about being irrelevant and humble and other-centered and finely tuned to Jesus' style.

The book is, 'In the Name of Jesus' by **Henri Nouwen**. Nouwen, a successful leader in his own right having taught the brightest and sharpest future leaders at Harvard, writes this little gem from a different chair. He speaks of true leaders of the future being willing to be "irrelevant." Whoa, now that is a different animal than the one that roars of leadership having to be powerful, domineering and trend setting! I mean, what leader sets out to be an "inapplicable, unsuitable, misplaced" leader?

Nouwen left Harvard and was assigned to lead and pastor the mentally handicapped in L'Arche, a community of broken and marginalized people. It was here among these humble, unpretentiousness, and mentally challenged people that **Nouwen** began to get what the Lord was saying to him about his life and leadership. It was among the people at L'Arche that **Nouwen** found the presence and "voice" of God in his life in a profoundly new way. Eventually **Nouwen** was able to dismiss the highly accomplished leader (his relevant self)— "the self that can do things, show things, prove things, build things," the one who feels he must be in charge and "change stones into bread and do the spectacular."

In a new way, **Nouwen** developed a capacity to love and be loved in real and unconditional ways that have nothing to do with accomplishments or titles. No longer seeking to lead as a famous, published professional (the residents of L'Arche neither knew nor cared for such things), **Nouwen** realized that a Christ-like leader must be a vulnerable servant who confesses one's own brokenness and weaknesses; who needs others as much as they need him; who takes his example from Jesus not the latest trends. I am afraid that is often not the case with what I see and read today. Instead, most leaders work hard at honing their vision and establishing their lofty goals while keeping their distance and hiding their brokenness from those they lead. The people don't need an implacable, powerful and perfect leader, one who keeps his distance and believes his press releases. I have known too well the mess that **Nouwen** writes against. And I have, far too often, seen the casualties.

As xxxx and I read 'In the Name of Jesus', we are reminded that leadership is about powerlessness and humility and Christ-likeness. It doesn't mean that leaders are weak or wishy-washy or spineless. But rather, they are so in love with Christ that they are willing and eagerly ready to follow Him wherever He calls. Ready even to become "irrelevant" for the sake of Christ and the love of others.

Hi xxxx

First of all he (your pastor) states about Mr Nouwen that 'It was among the people at L'Arche that Nouwen found the presence and "voice" of God in his life in a profoundly new way' - this 'God' was not the one true God but the false 'God' of Roman Catholicism - very similar to the 'God' promoted by another Roman Catholic who is much admired by so-called Evangelicals and called 'Brother' Lawrence who majored on 'the presence of God' - you can read about him on <http://www.takeheed.info/pdf/February-2014/Brother-Lawrence.pdf>

Another who is usually much revered by those who like Mr Nouwen is Dallas Willard and again you can read about him on <http://www.takeheed.info/pdf/February-2014/Dallas-Willard.pdf>

Also I read 'It's not the typical leadership perspective that either the Wharton School of Business or Bill Hybels would strongly recommend' - that would appear to be holding Bill Hybels (of Willow Creek) up as a sound leader - he most certainly is not as these articles would demonstrate <http://www.takeheed.info/is-willow-creek-the-way-to-go/> and <http://www.takeheed.info/willow-creek-connection-to-the-foul-mouthed-jersey-boys/>

In addition, I felt when he wrote 'a successful leader in his own right' he could have been more open and honest by mentioning that Mr Nouwen was in fact an ordained Roman Catholic priest - why was this never mentioned?

Finally, whilst some commendable attitudes are mentioned the reality is that if your pastor would properly expound the pastoral epistles of the Apostle Paul he would find these commendable attitudes detailed in God's word.

In Christ

Cecil

I emailed some of my concerns to a woman who I have become friends with at xxx and she is also an assistant teacher in the bible study using Nouwen's book... I just got her reply back and she is pretty much dismissing my concerns and says some of these websites accuse other people of the same things that they accuse Nouwen of (I did not give her any websites to look at and have asked her which ones she looked at and am waiting to hear back from her). She says she hasn't seen anything wrong in his book (and) says the book was used because of the painting by Rembrandt which is the basis of the book. xxxx

Hi xxxx, just because she says she hasn't seen anything wrong in his book doesn't mean that there isn't something wrong in it. Apart from that, just as we must compare scripture with scripture to discern its true meaning so we must compare all the writings of someone to get the full picture of what they believe and when you do that with the likes of Mr Nouwen then you discover he was no Christian. If Nouwen is wrong, which he is, and others are likewise wrong, then why would these others not also be identified, as Paul instructs in Romans 16:17 "Mark (publicly identify) them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them". (On the Rembrandt painting) I am reminded of Paul's warning about people not enduring sound doctrine but preferring rather to have their ears "tickled" (2 Timothy 4:2-4) rather than having God's Word preached and expounded and this seems an apt example. Cecil.

I have been reading the book you recommended, 'A Time of Departing', and then this you tube video came up by wherein Ray Yungen was speaking at a church about the book. It is a good video. I asked my friend xxxx who is a teacher in the class I told you about in which we are using the Henri Nouwen book, Return of the Prodigal Son (to watch it) She won't even listen to the video and here is some of her reply: xxxx

Okay.....he (Ray Yungen) is with a fringe group called Lighthouse Trails. I won't listen to it because that group puts out garbage. They accused David Jeremiah, Chuck Swindoll and John MacArthur of preaching new age mysticism. I followed those people for a long time. (She is talking about Lighthouse)

They are unscriptural and when they accused some of the greatest bible teachers of all time of being new age I realized that some of the things they claimed were false. I excused them because I know I'm not going to agree with everyone. But they claim they alone are right and everyone else who reads scripture are just trying to pervert it because they don't use the KJV. I realized they were lunatics who did not know how to read scripture and accurately interpret it. They use it for their own purposes.

So I finally deleted them from my favorites several years ago and in my mind they are delusional. I don't remember all that I disagreed with as I can only keep the truth in my mind. I don't have room for lies.

It is pretty disappointing to me that she won't even listen to the video. I have sent it to the Pastor's wife who teaches the class and am waiting for a response from her. xxxx

Dear xxxx,

The ministry of Lighthouse Trails has several 'strings to its bow' including publishing books by 'independent' authors (like the late Ray Yungen), alerting Christians to questionable connections by people whom many regard as totally 'sound'. She is wrong to describe them as 'fringe' and 'delusional' as they have worldwide support from many sound individuals and fellowships/churches.

Her claim that they say that anyone who doesn't use the KJV is trying to 'pervert' scripture is utter rubbish as I have a number of Lighthouse-published books and in several they acknowledge quotations in the book from bibles other than the KJV and one was actually published using the New KJV.

When it comes to the likes of David Jeremiah and Chuck Swindoll they quite rightly alerted people to the willingness of these men to identify with and commend those who advocate the dangerous practice of so-called 'contemplative prayer. There are a number of articles related to each of these men and they can be accessed on

<https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?s=david+jeremiah> ; (David Jeremiah)
<https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=22084> ; (Chuck Swindoll)

I myself had occasion to write a warning article on a matter concerning Chuck Swindoll and it can be accessed on

<http://www.takeheed.info/the-inaccuracies-in-chuck-swindolls-amazingly-accurate-passion-movie/> ;

and just recently I posted a warning article about the direction that Dallas Theological Seminary is taking in relation to Roman Catholicism and some of that 'downgrade' began under Mr Swindoll's time of heading up DTS. The article is on

<http://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2018/February/dallas-theological-seminary-and-roman-catholicism.pdf> ;

In relation to these men, Lighthouse and myself were just following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11 - an example that was commended by the Apostle Paul.

In relation to John MacArthur I am a BIG admirer of his ministry but there are some areas in which I see things differently from him. The area of concern that Lighthouse mentioned was a legitimate area of concern because it could be construed as him putting his 'imprimatur' upon a man called Dallas Willard. I actually don't think he was doing that but some might have thought he was.

The article that Lighthouse wrote was factual but gracious in content and in tone and certainly not 'garbage' and you can judge for yourself by going to

<https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/?p=13006> ; (John MacArthur)

Again, I myself wrote two articles warning about Dallas Willard - the most recent can be accessed by going to this link (and early on it contains a link to the first article)

<http://www.takeheed.info/pdf/February-2014/Dallas-Willard.pdf> ;

You wrote - It is pretty disappointing to me that she won't even listen to the video. It is required of Christians who are teachers to also be teachable. She seems unwilling to acknowledge the reality of the heart of the problem here - that Mr Nouwen was an unregenerate Roman Catholic priest and faithful to the Roman Catholic religion which is both non-Christian and anti-Christian.

Cecil

I thought I would like to share with you the response I received from xxxx, the Pastor's wife, after I sent her the video by Ray Yungen. She thinks Rick Warren and Richard Foster are sound? I have read enough and heard enough now to know that could not possibly be true. xxxx

Good morning. How did you find this video? Who is this guy? He takes shots at a lot of very good, sound people. I have skimmed through back and forth. He takes shots at Rick Warren, Beth Moore, Richard Foster...all very sound people. I have not seen what he is saying about Henri...but I suppose he is doing the same with him.

First of all, God is a mystery. He is wrapped in mystery. We don't pray enough, we don't sit silent enough and the truth is our minds churn and are bent on thoughts that get in the way of the Word and God. The Word tells us to renew our minds. Take every thought captive to the Lord. Personally, I think if more Christians meditated on the Word and sat before the Lord, they would not be controlled by the thoughts and desires of the flesh.

Where is our battle? What did we learn in the study on Satan? (Eph. 6:12) Why do we need the whole armor of God? The battle is in the spiritual realm.

This comes down purely to the fact that you have to trust me. Henri Nouwen and many of the people that this guy takes shots at, are good, sound teachers and men and women of God. You have to trust me with the study, the book and the author. If you can't you are free to stop attending.

xxxx (the pastor and this lady's husband) teaches **spiritual formation** for xxxx Seminary. We understand that **spiritual formation** comes not from doing for God but being with God. (The whole basis of what I taught at the Women's Retreat last year.) This is partially what this guy is taking shots at. He has a hobby horse...and I think it lies in a fear of the mystery of a God. This is not uncommon. We want to put God in a box and make the spiritual life tangible. By the nature of its name "spiritual life" it is not possible.

Much love,
xxxx

Shortly I will post my thoughts on this response from the pastor's wife but firstly I suspect that at this point you are perhaps saying to yourself – '**What exactly is spiritual formation?**' In my response to the pastor's wife I will give links to a series of VERY helpful articles written by **Pastor Gary Gilley**, articles which then formed the basis of his book '**Out of Formation**'. On the back cover of the book there is a helpful explanation about the background to this expression '**Spiritual Formation**' – I now plan to copy that explanation here and then I will also give a short but helpful quotation found on page 38. But first the explanation on the book back cover –

'Spiritual Formation' will not be a term that is familiar to everyone, but most Christians will be aware of the effects of it and many will have experienced at least some aspects of it, perhaps through the writings of men like **Richard Foster** and **Dallas Willard**. Ancient mystical books and practices are being revived to feed the 21st century need for substantial roots to faith. This is no 'flash in the pan' or passing fad: the movement has grown in power and influence over the last forty years and seminaries and other influential authorities are promoting it. The great question is, 'are these things in harmony with the Word of God?' Dr Gilley examines the movement and those heading it and issues this direct challenge:

Do we, as believers in sola scriptura, take our marching orders from the written Word, or do we look to the 'white spaces' in Scripture to determine how we live? Do we actually believe that the Lord has given us in Scripture the teachings and practices He wants us to follow, or do we believe that we must supplement the authentic words of God with our imagination and traditions of men?

This vital book is one that all serious Christians need to read.

Then on page 38 we read the following –

While some use '**spiritual formation**' as a synonym for discipleship, this is a mistake. However spiritual formation is officially defined, the means of **spiritual formation** within the movement is always spiritual disciplines drawn almost entirely from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mystics. Some evangelicals attempt to clean the disciplines up and redeem them for non-Catholic use, but the fact remains **these disciplines are not taught in Scripture as channels for spiritual growth and discipleship**.

The following was my response to the comments made by the pastor's wife -

Dear xxxx,

Thank you for sharing xxxx's email with me – it is **VERY** revealing. The truth is that xxxx is deceived, deluded and dangerous. She says '**God is a mystery**' – the proper truth is that there are things about God, His will and His ways, that are '**mystery**' but through His Word and through Christ incarnate He has chosen to reveal some of those '**mysteries**' that He considers necessary to His people.

Vines Expository Dictionary states '**In the ordinary sense a "mystery" implies knowledge withheld; its Scriptural significance is truth revealed**'.

xxxx clearly has no '**spiritual antennae**' for discerning deception when she labels the likes of Rick Warren, Beth Moore and Richard Foster as being '**very good, sound, people**' – nothing could be further from the truth.

She then states '**This comes down purely to the fact that you have to trust me**' – those words could in a different setting have been spoken by Jim Jones of '**The People's Temple**' and through telling his followers '**trust me**' nearly 1200 ended up being poisoned to death – it's the mark of a '**cult**' – we don't trust leaders to the extent that we don't check their teachings out against the Word of God (Acts 17:11).

One key to understanding the problem is when xxxx wrote '**xxxx teaches spiritual formation**'. This is a deception that has been '**brewing**' very much for about 40 years and Richard Foster is very much responsible for it.

A good friend of mine is Pastor Gary Gilley of Southern View Chapel in Springfield, Illinois and he was my guest here some years ago when he addressed issues and figures connected with what was called '**The Emergent Church**'. Gary has also written a number of **VERY** helpful articles on '**Spiritual Formation**' and these are links to them –

<http://tottministries.org/spiritual-formation/>

<http://tottministries.org/contemplative-prayer/>

<http://tottministries.org/sacred-reading-lectio-divina/>

<http://tottministries.org/solitude-and-silence/>

<http://tottministries.org/spiritual-formation-at-worship/>

<http://tottministries.org/ignatius/>

<http://tottministries.org/discrimnent-and-revelation/>

<http://tottministries.org/fasting-and-spiritual-direction/>

<http://tottministries.org/biblical-discipleship-prayer/>

<http://tottministries.org/biblical-discipleship-the-scriptures/>

<http://tottministries.org/biblical-discipleship-fellowship/>

<http://tottministries.org/biblical-discipleship-the-transforming-life/>

<http://tottministries.org/roots-of-the-spiritual-formation-movement/>

These articles then formed the basis of a book that Gary had published called ‘Out of Formation’ and it can be obtained via the church bookstore on this link

<http://www.svchapel.org/bookstore>

xxxx, it is clear that the folks being ‘taught’ by xxxx and xxxx are being led into all manner of deception but thankfully the Lord has given you a good measure of discernment and it certainly would be spiritually beneficial for you to now consider seriously separating from this fellowship and to begin seeking a new spiritual home.

Cecil

In conclusion, on the web site of the church concerned in these exchanges, they state the following under **‘Our Core Values’** - **Spiritual and Biblical Formation** “We are committed to being transformed into the likeness of Jesus through submission and obedience to Scripture and through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.”

Sounds good, but as these exchanges have shown, **‘Spiritual and Biblical Formation’** can be ‘double-speak’ for introducing the unscriptural teachings of dangerous non-Christian authors – **‘Take Heed’!**

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 19 February 2018

APPENDIX

13th March 2019

I came across this powerful, relevant testimony on **FACEBOOK** concerning the ‘poison’ that **SPIRITUAL FORMATION** is and, with permission, I am publishing it here

“About a year ago, I sought guidance regarding my life’s direction from the pastor at my former church. He suggested **spiritual formation** (or spiritual direction). I asked around, and a friend who was in full time ministry assured me that **spiritual formation** was biblical. Satisfied, I booked my appointment with a Spiritual Director through the Tyndale University & College Seminary. Its website states –

“Spiritual Directors are those who have received specific training in Bible, Theology, and **Spiritual Formation**, who assist individuals (called directees) in their spiritual journey. **Spiritual directors** are interested in the spiritual health, well-being, and spiritual growth of the directees they serve. **Spiritual Directors** provide this ministry through regular one-on-one sessions (or group sessions) that are focused on listening to, and working with both the directee and the Holy Spirit.”

I now clearly see the red flags in this description; however, back then this definition seemed okay. Famous last words, right?

Spiritual formation was developed from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox mysticism, and it promotes the false idea that we can journey inward and engage in disciplines to develop the likeness of Jesus Christ. Disciplines such as meditation (listening silence), contemplative prayer, and solitude are just a few of the disciplines that, without these false methods, we purportedly cannot experience true spiritual growth.

Spiritual formation falsely teaches that anyone can practice these mystical rituals, and that anyone is able to find God within himself or herself. It is a works-based practice to becoming perfected, which in itself is a lie. **I was told, “Once we are aware what our responsibility is, that is where the transformation will happen”.**

This is in stark contrast to what the truth in Scripture declares:

- * **Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth (John 17:17)**
- * **Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely (1 Thessalonians 5:23)**
- * **God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13)**
- * **And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)**

You see, only God is able to sanctify us; only God can make us conform to the image of Christ. True spiritual transformation occurs when we realize we are sinners who need to be forgiven and who need to be reconciled to God through the atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. **As we submit to God and the Holy Spirit, God transforms us. He transforms us.**

At the time, I was completely deceived by many false teachings, but had somehow managed to escape the practices of Roman Catholic mysticism. That was about to change.

Eager to begin my new direction in life, I met with my “**Spiritual Director**”, whose quiet way of being and acceptance was exactly what I needed in this confusing time. In the early sessions, she explained that God had made me a certain way; subsequently, she shared many “impressions” about my relationship with God, and these impressions were often paired with Scripture verses. In determining ‘God’s will’ for my life, my first assignment was to make a scrapbook of my interests and of everything that was important in my life...because it’s all about me, right? **[wrong!]**

During one session, I was directed (**a visualization technique**) to think of the scene in Matthew 8:23-27 in which Jesus calmed the storm. I was asked to imagine **[this is actually visualization, an occultic New Age technique: Cecil – Identified in particular with ‘Silva Mind Control’]** ... myself in the scene and to ask Jesus what He wanted me to do in my life. I asked my director if this was contemplative prayer, because I had heard that it was dangerous. She assured me it wasn’t since we were filling my mind with Scripture and scenes from the Bible. **[Yes, visualization! mysticism!]** My mind assuaged, I continued with the exercise.

In the following weeks, many exercises started with prayer to Jesus. These prayers were followed by silence, so I could ‘listen’ to what Jesus would say. Naturally, the name of Jesus flowed constantly **[like a mantra!]** We also prayed before the sessions, declaring that the room we were in was for Jesus only and demons were not allowed in there. I wasn’t sure how that provided a fortress of spiritual protection - we might as well have encircled ourselves with ‘protective white light’ while we were at it.

Following on, my director advised me to read works by contemplative mystic **Brennan Manning**, **[wait! I thought this wasn’t contemplative prayer!]** Roman Catholic mystic **Henri Nouwen**, and a book about interpreting my dreams, which I had read as a former New Ager (that’s why I ignored this last piece of advice altogether).

Are you perhaps wondering why I remained ignorant about this practice in which I was a willing participant? Well, by now my pastor, seminary graduates, and ‘mature’ Christians had all given their support to this. One of the formation’s defenders got exasperated at my questioning and told me I needed to read the Bible more. She was correct, but oh, the irony.

Looking back, I had put the opinions of man above the Word of God and had also made God’s will an idol. I had been so focused on trying to find what He wanted for me that I missed Him altogether. Back to the train-wreck.

Outside of the sessions, I studiously completed my readings, and I practiced the so-called presence of Jesus. I was also attuned to any ‘signs’ of God in the world, thanks to **Henri Nouwen** and his book, ironically named: “**Discernment**“

Having come out of various New Age and occult practices that had taught me how to be ‘one’ with everything and to look for synchronicity, I was unfortunately rather good at this. And so, once again, I started worshipping the creation and not the Creator (Romans 1:25).

I continued seeing my **Spiritual Director** for another month (**two months in total**). While I wasn't one hundred percent sure that **spiritual formation** was unbiblical, I had an uneasy feeling, which was enough for me to stop attending the sessions.

The spiritual direction I was heading in was leading me to devastating eternal consequences, and the Jesus I was invoking was the one spoken of in **2 Corinthians 11:4**: “**For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.**”

And like so many in the visible church, I too ‘put up with it readily enough’.

Through contemplative prayer, I was unknowingly communing with a different Jesus. Looking through my well-kept journal from those sessions recently, I noticed words like ‘surrender’, ‘gentle’, ‘presence’, ‘the Way’, and ‘paths’, all words which are commonly found in channelled books (**such as Jesus Calling**) which are the products of this mystical form of prayer.

While consulting my journal for this post, I noticed it was exactly a year ago (**from the time this entry was posted**) that **I repented of spiritual formation** and its very dark practices.

The truth did not come to me from any mystical practice or discipline, and it did not come from a sign in nature or from the silence in my mind. It came only because God had chosen to reveal the truth out of His mercy and grace, delivered through the more sure word of God, which is all we need (2 Timothy 3:16).

Soli Deo Gloria.”

Excerpt: by Pamela Couvrette