

What is Centering/Contemplative Prayer?

The terms Centering Prayer and Contemplative Prayer are becoming well known in Christian circles. For the most part, these terms have been used interchangeably. However, Centering Prayer appears to be the methodology which creates the “spiritual” environment for Contemplative Prayer which is defined as contemplating God with the soul, NOT with your mind or rational thought.

Centering Prayer/Contemplative Prayer was brought into the Roman Catholic Church in 1977 by three trappist monks: (Abbot) Thomas Keating, William Meninger, Basil Pennington. This was in response to Vatican Council II’s call for “the revitalization of the path of contemplative prayer”

These three joined with ecumenically oriented Catholic theologians, an Eastern Zen master who offered retreats on Buddhist meditation and a former trappist monk who taught transcendental meditation. Together they created “centering prayer.”

In the forward to the book Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality by Philip S. Romain, Thomas Keating (the most famous of the three trappist monks) wrote:

“Reading the Christian mystics from the perspective of his [Philip St. Romain] own experience of kundalini energy, the author sees many examples of its working in the lives of Christian saints and mystics. Since this energy is also at work today in numerous persons who are devoting themselves to contemplative prayer, this book is an important contribution to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition. It will be of great consolation to those who have experienced

physical symptoms arising from the awakening of kundalini in the course of their spiritual journey, even if they have not experienced it to the fullest extent described by the author. His [Philip St. Romain] compelling testimony is a powerful affirmation of the potential of every human being for higher states of consciousness.”³

See Full Text of Forward

Although its proponents will argue against it, Centering/Contemplative Prayer IS most definitely a form of Eastern Meditation, i.e. Mystical Meditation. Below is a comparison between what is taught by the New (Age) Spirituality and the method of meditation that is taught for Centering/Contemplative Prayer:

Mystical Meditation	Centering / Contemplative Prayer
Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight	Sit comfortably with your eyes closed
Choose a mantra and repeat it silently	Choose a sacred word or phrase and introduce it silently
If and when you notice that your attention has drifted completely off the mantra, gently begin repeating it again, and continue with minimal effort	Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.) simply and gently return to your sacred word (This obviously results in repetition of the word)

<p>The intended Goal: become enlightened, knowing truth by experience and ultimately “ascension” – which is self-realization, knowing that “I am divine”</p>	<p>The intended Goal: To reach “The Silence” when all distracting thoughts are gone, a thin place where the spiritual barrier is the thinnest, where you can contemplate God with your soul NOT with your intellect.</p>
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As you probably noticed, the steps taken are identical. Both use the same method to induce an altered state of consciousness – void of thought, just contemplating *spiritual truth* in an experiential fashion and accepting it as *truth* without discernment. This is a spiritually dangerous condition. The door to the spiritual realm of intense experience becomes the basis for truth instead of the Word of God.

Works Cited

³Philip St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Path to Growth and Healing*, pp.7, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994.