Spiritual Formation – Omega of Apostasy?

Compiler's words are in italics

"Living Temple contains the Alpha of these theories. The Omega would follow in a little while. I tremble for our people. These beautiful representations are similar to the temptation that the enemy brought to Adam and Eve in Eden. When but a girl I went to New Hampshire to bear warning against these same doctrines. There was a man by the name of Billings and another by the name of Bennet who were preaching a higher spirituality." 1SAT 341

The alpha had to do with reaching a higher level of spirituality. The omega will also most likely have something to do with achieving higher spirituality. There is something that has come into our denomination that is of a most startling nature. It has to do with seeking higher spirituality and has eastern mystical/ pantheistic foundations. It is called Spiritual Formation.

An advocate of Spiritual Formation, Dallas Willard writes:

A) Most of the activities commonly identified as "religious" activities can be a part of the process of spiritual formation, and should be. Public and private worship, study of scripture, nature, and God's acts in human history, prayer, giving to godly causes, and service to others, can all be highly effective elements in spiritual formation. But they must be thoughtfully and resolutely approached for that purpose, or they will have little or no effect in promoting it.

B) Other less commonly practiced activities such as fasting, solitude, silence, listening prayer, scripture memorization, frugal living, confession, journaling, submission to the will of others as appropriate, and well-used spiritual direction are in fact more foundational for spiritual formation in Christlikeness than the more well known religious practices, and are essential for their profitable use. http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=36

The spiritual activities mentioned in paragraph (A) above are clearly taught in scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. However, Dallas Willard believes that these scriptural spiritual activities cannot be "profitable" without the "more foundational" activities mentioned in paragraph (B). Some of these "more foundational" activities are centuries old practices that originated with the desert fathers of the Catholic Church and incorporate eastern mysticism. They are a pathway that once entered upon will lead Protestants to "grasp the hand of spiritualism" and to "clasp hands with the Roman power".

"The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience." GC 588

The hand of spiritualism through the movement of Spiritual Formation with all its associated dangers is even now being grasped by the hand of Protestantism and we as Seventh-day Adventists are in great danger as we are being brought face to face with this movement.

"I saw the rapidity with which this delusion {spiritualism} was spreading. A train of cars was shown me, going with the speed of lightning. The angel bade me look carefully. I fixed my eyes upon the train. It seemed that the whole world was on board. Then he showed me the conductor, a fair, stately person, whom all the passengers looked up to and reverenced. I was perplexed and asked my attending angel who it was. He said, 'It is Satan. He is the conductor, in the form of an angel of light. He has taken the world captive. . . . And they are all going with lightning speed to perdition.' This delusion will spread, and we shall have to contend with it face to face; and unless we are prepared for it, we shall be ensnared and overcome." FLB 319

This new emerging spirituality, through its emphasis on the teachings of the desert fathers (the mystics), is leading many Protestants back into the arms of Rome. Some of the various names under which this Emerging Church is infiltrating the community of faith are ReFormation, Renovare, Rethink; Lighthouse Trails calls it "emerging spirituality". Terms you will find in the Emergent Movement are: Prayer Stations, Breath Prayers, Lectio Divina,

Taize, The Silence, Sacred Space, Ancient Prayer Practices, A Thin Place, Spiritual Direction, Ignation Contemplation, Contemplative, Centering, Centering Prayer, Divine Center, Inner light, Mantra, Beyond Words, Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, Prayer Labyrinths, Prayer Rooms; just to name a few.

I have been documenting this Spiritual Formation encroachment into our church over the past year or so. Many of the people implicated below certainly mean well and would not intentionally engage in spiritualistic activities. My point is not to condemn anyone but rather to warn away from any involvement with New Age practice.

Adventist News Network Feature: Church, Congregations Increase Focus on "Spiritual Formation" February 3, 2004, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States

Spiritual formation is a topic being raised by many pastors and church leaders in a growing number of Christian denominations. It's no longer enough to just know doctrine and facts--in today's hectic society people are searching for something deeper and more meaningful, something that makes sense in their whirlwind lives.

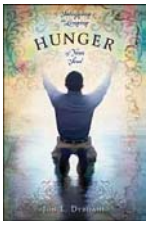
Spiritual formation is not a new idea or concept, and "a lot of Protestants are in the same boat--we are rediscovering it," says Dr. Jon Dybdahl, president of Walla Walla College, an Adventist institution in Washington State. And, he adds, the Adventist Church has some work to do.

"Traditionally the Adventist Church has emphasized intellectual truth and accepting certain facts and ideas about God," Dybdahl says. "At least in many places it has not talked so much about the importance of directly experiencing God. The difference is between knowing about God and knowing God. Sometimes what we teach people is knowing about God ... That's part of the nature of things. It's much easier to communicate a fact than it is to wield people to experience."

Spiritual formation takes on several forms: "There are disciplines of devotion, meditation, prayer, listening and so on," Feldbush explains. "It's a discipline which can be heeded through the assistance of a person who is trained in helping people grow in these ways." But, he says, it's mostly "growing more and more tuned to God's movement in my life here and now." And, he says, spiritual formation is not something that happens overnight.

The Adventist world church created the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) in September 2001, designed to provide overall guidance and standards to the professional training of pastors, evangelists, theologians, teachers, chaplains and other denominational employees involved in ministerial and religious formation, or spiritual formation, in each of the church's 13 regions around the world.
http://news.adventist.org/data/2004/01/1075843904/index.html.en

As Kellogg's book, "Living Temple" was to the Alpha so is Dybdahl's book, "Hunger" to the Omega. On the back cover it reads:



THERE'S A HUNGER WITHIN US
A longing for something more—
something we can't quite describe.

Something has been missing.
THIS IS IT . . .

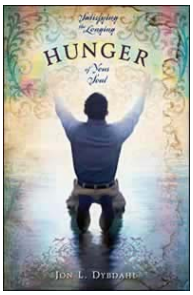
It is an approach to life and religion that may take you by surprise. But as you embrace it, you'll feel a sense of coming home, the confidence that this is how it was meant to be.

It is an invitation to return to the original definition of the Christian religion. It is a call to live a life of communion with God.

Hunger reveals how you can truly encounter God and have a close relationship with Him. You'll discover the joy and fulfillment of such spiritual practices as simplicity, solitude, worship, community, and fasting. With fresh insight and practical guidance Jon L. Dybdahl leads you on a journey that will satisfy the longing of your soul.

JON L. DYBDAHL, PH.D., HAS BEEN A PASTOR, MISSIONARY, SEMINARY PROFESSOR, AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR. FOR YEARS HE TAUGHT THE PRINCIPLES OF HUNGER IN AN INCREDIBLY POPULAR SEMINARY CLASS THAT DREW STUDENTS SEEKING TO TRANSFORM THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES.

This book Hunger is now being sold in our Adventist Book Centers. I can see why Ellen White trembled for God's people as she foresaw the power of the Omega that was to come.



Hunger: Satisfying the longing of your soul
Jon L. Dybdahl
Autumn House, dist by Review & Herald Publishing
http://www.adventistbookcenter.com/Detail.tpl?sku=9780812704587

"The prayer is biblically based [see Luke 18:38] and says simply: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' You can shorten it even more in various ways, such as 'Jesus, have mercy on me' or 'Have mercy on me.' The Orthodox tradition repeats the prayer, either out loud or in the heart, many, many times until eventually it moves from the head to be the constant melody of the heart, influencing all areas of life. Francis of Assisi reputedly prayed all night saying just 'Jesus, my Jesus.' Another method of simple praying is the use of one's own breathing, a form often called the breath prayer. Since most religious traditions practice it, can we consider it Christian? Yes, if the content and context are Christian. The way I use the prayer for myself is to pray for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. I simply say as I inhale, 'Spirit of the living God' and as I exhale, 'Fall afresh on me!' I find the combination of the words with my breath very powerful, especially as I remember that 'spirit' means 'wind' or 'breath.' We can employ any scriptural words. In fact, we pray a shortened Jesus prayer. Simply inhale to 'Lord, Jesus Christ' and exhale to 'have mercy on me (a sinner).'" Page 52

"Multitudes of potential methods for meditation exist, but I want to outline two major possibilities to give an example of what you can do. You can modify both of them to fit your particular need and preference. The first is a variation of an ancient Christian method called *lectio divina*, or sacred/divine reading. One reason I use it is that either an individual or a group can employ it. Often I find people are more willing to try meditation personally if they have had a good experience in a group setting. In class I have often done this type as a means of introducing meditation and of helping people see the discipline's value." Page 62

"Begin with brief prayer for God's presence, guidance, and protection from any evil influence. When we become quiet and open to God, we simply want to make sure that anything that happens is under Jesus' leadership. The prayer itself helps to quiet people and create the setting for meaningful meditation. Help people begin to focus on the present situation in preparation to hear God's Word. Sometimes called 'centering down,' it seeks to minimize distraction and let people concentrate as much as they can on God's Word. For example, suggest that they close their eyes. Also I ask people to relax their bodies consciously and to give any physical tension over to Jesus. Often shoulders and neck in particular need to release their tautness. Occasionally people should take a few deep slow breaths or become conscious of their breathing. I remind them that we have invited Jesus' presence and that He delights to be where invited and His Word cherished. I urge them to savor that presence. Repeatedly read, meditate on, and respond to God's Word. I state—especially if it is a first-time experience for them—that the Scripture passage will be presented three times." Page 63

"Seek mentorship and spiritual guidance. The expression 'spiritual guide' may wave red flags to some Protestants, but it need not do so. A spiritual guide is not an authority who tells us exactly what we should do, but, as a fellow pilgrim, listens to us and tries to help us on our way. If the term truly bothers you, use the word 'mentor.' It implies someone of experience who can help us grow in the knowledge and practice of the disciplines." Page 136

Dybdahl's new book, published in 2008, promotes the following authors who are leaders in the contemplative spiritual formation movement: Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Morton Kelsey, Tilden Edwards Dallas Willard, Brother Lawrence, Thomas Keating, Tony Campolo, Scot M. Peck.

Henri Nouwen: "The quiet repetition of a single word can help us to descend with the mind into the heart. (*The Way of the Heart*)

Richard Foster: "[W]e must be willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation. In their writings, all of the masters of meditation strive to awaken us to the fact that the universe is much larger than we know, that there are vast unexplored inner regions that are just as real as the physical world we know so well." (*Celebration of Discipline*)

"Thomas Merton has perhaps done more than any other twentieth-century figure to make the life of prayer widely known and understood ... his interest in contemplation led him to investigate prayer forms in Eastern religion ... [he is] a gifted teacher" (*Spiritual Classics*)

If only they [people] could all see themselves as they really are ...I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other ... At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusions, a point of pure truth ... This little point ...is the pure glory of God in us. It is in everybody." (Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*)

Morton Kelsey: "You can find most of the New Age practices in the depth of Christianity [Christian church tradition]. (*In the Spirit of Early Christians*)

Tilden Edwards: "This mystical stream [contemplative prayer] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality." (*Spiritual Friend*)

Brother Lawrence: a 17 century Carmelite monk who developed a technique--mostly through inspiration and intuition--which led to results akin to those developed by the continued practice of either Zen or mindfulness meditation.

Thomas Keating: a Trappist monk who began teaching a form of Christian meditation that grew into the worldwide phenomenon known as centering prayer. Twice a day for 20 minutes, practitioners find a quiet place to sit with their eyes closed and surrender their minds to "God". "My acquaintance with eastern methods of meditation has convinced me that … there are ways of calming the mind in the spiritual disciplines of both the east and the west … Many serious seekers of truth study the eastern religions," (*Open mind, Open heart*)

"We should not hesitate to take the fruit of the age-old wisdom of the East and "capture" it for Christ. Indeed, those of us who are in ministry should make the necessary effort to acquaint ourselves with as many of these Eastern techniques as possible … Many Christians who take their prayer life seriously have been greatly helped by Yoga, Zen, TM and similar practices …" (*Finding Grace at the Center*)

"For the centering prayer practitioner, regular practice of "contemplative" prayer sets in motion a dynamism of "divine psychotherapy, organically designed for each of us, to empty out our unconscious ... As this false self is dismantled, we come to see our true Self, the center of which, so say proponents, is God"

"[I]f you are aware of no thoughts, you will be aware of something and that is a thought. If at that point you can lose the awareness that you are aware of no thoughts, you will move into pure consciousness." (*Open Mind. Open Heart*)

M. Scott Peck: "I have said that the ultimate goal of spiritual growth is for the individual to become as one with God ... It is for the individual to become totally, wholly God." (*The Road Less Traveled*)

“Zen Buddhism should be taught in every 5th grade class in America.” (*Further Along the Road Less Traveled*)

”Christianity's greatest sin is to think that other religions are not saved.” (*Further Along the Road Less Traveled*)

“If the New Age can reform society rather than just adversely challenge it then it can be extremely holy and desperately needed.” (*Further Along the Road Less Traveled*)

“Since the unconscious is God all along, we may further define the goal of spiritual growth to be the attainment of godhood by the conscious self.” (*The Road Less Traveled*)

Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: You are looking at an outline of our plan for the next five years. We are the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Christ-centered, Bible-based, interested in the wellbeing of man as a whole, and with an endtime focus. (page 20)

1.5 Spiritual Formation and Nurture
1.5.1 Discipleship and Spiritual Formation - Paul Clee

GOAL: Build widespread awareness and practice of discipleship in all fields, including the disciplines of spiritual formation.

IMPLEMENTATION: Develop and use seminars for local training on the use of spiritual disciplines: Inwardly (meditation, prayer, fasting, study), Outwardly (simplicity, solitude, submission, service) and Corporately (confession, worship, guidance, celebration).

RESOURCES: Literature such as: The Equipping Church (Sue Mallory); Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home (Richard Foster); Celebration of Discipline (Richard Foster)
http://www.ted-adventist.org/about/files/strategic.pdf

When Richard Foster speaks of the silence, he does not mean external silence. In his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Foster recommends the practice of breath prayer; picking a single word or short phrase and repeating it in conjunction with the breath. This is classic contemplative mysticism.

In the original 1978 edition of Celebration of Discipline, he makes his objective clear when he states, ‘Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind in order to fill it.’ In *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home,* he ties in a quote by one mystic who advised, ‘You must bind the mind with one thought.’
http://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/breathprayer.htm

Richard Foster’s books are arrayed with quotes and instructions from New Age teachers who are well versed in the beliefs and agenda of the occultists. Although many of his musings and enthusiastic devotions are “pleasant” to read, indeed quite inspiring to those who are unaware of the traps, they either directly contradict the Bible, or lead into demonic possession. When I read “Celebration of Discipline” for the first time, many years ago now, I was strangely moved by it, until my eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit. It seemed “spiritual” and seemed to promise a new way of living. Foster seems to present deep love of Christ in his teaching. Some of the book is just common sense, such as the teaching about living a simpler life-style, being less concerned about material possessions. But, the “good” is vastly out-weighed by the questionable sources and lead-in to the spirituality of the New Age.

Albert James Dager, of "Media Spotlight" writes of the mystical practices Foster teaches and indulges himself in: "Unfortunately, all these exercises serve to do is open the person up to demonic influences that assuage his or her conscience with a feeling of euphoria and even "love" emanating from the presence that has invaded their consciousness. This euphoria is then believed to validate that the person is on the right spiritual path. It may result in visions, out-of body experiences, stigmata, levitation, even healings and other apparent miracles."

Writes Dager: "Like John Wimber of Vineyard International Ministries, it is out of the religious traditions of Quakerism that Foster has come with the message that today's Church is missing out on some wonderful spiritual experiences that can only be found by studying and practicing the meditative and contemplative lifestyle."

Foster's book "Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth" is a book which calls for deeper spirituality than that which the Bible teaches! Foster's teachings are filled with Buddhism, Yoga, T. M., the exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, Eastern religion, and extremely spiritually destructive practices.
http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/Foster_Expose.htm

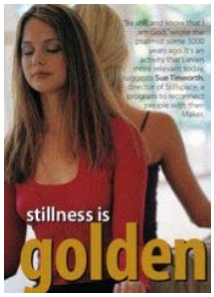
Steve Muse of *Eastern Regional Watch* writes: "I have been researching the trends in the postmodern church era and I keep coming across the term, spiritual formation. So I spent a few days reading through many web sites, papers, articles and monograms about the subject. I found that for many years, within Christian circles, the term Spiritual Formation has been defined as a shaping process that begins when one becomes a new believer in Christ, as He takes our life, like a piece of clay, and begins to mold it into the image of Himself, through the process of discipleship. This molding and shaping is based upon our willingness to surrender ourselves completely to His hand and will for us. As we deny ourselves and daily take up the cross, He is free to form us into His image. All sounded well and good until I started reading through some articles discussing the disciplines listed for spiritual formation which included references to contemplative, Psychological and Eastern religious techniques, all in the attempt at a deeper relationship to God in Jesus Christ but through occult means. This can and does open doors to experiences that are more than just imagination but are real and very dangerous if we practice these techniques; we then come into contact with other spirits thinking that we are meeting God."
http://www.erwm.com/FormationOrAdultery.htm

Things are changing. The goal is honorable, but what's being done to get there is, quite frankly, apostasy. We can put many labels on these people who are pushing for change in the postmodern church: post-conservatives, post-fundamentalists, post-foundationalists, post-propositionalists, post-evangelicals, post-everything, reformists…or the more popularly known "emerging church". Whatever the label, they all have some common characteristics about how to re-do church and become a new kind of Christian. Christianity is being seen as more a narrative rather than doctrines/principles or propositions of truth; tradition, culture and the contemporary experience is being seen as the source of theology rather than just the Bible itself. The shift is towards a spirituality-based experience of God, instead of a creed-based one; and how this spiritual formation should be done is to look to Richard Foster and Dallas Willard for methods that stem from Roman Catholicism and eastern mysticism.
http://www.sixsteps.org/category/emergent/

I have spent hundreds of hours and several years studying Richard Foster and other spiritual formation mysticism teachers and psychology which has virtually taken over Evangelical Christianity and the Church. But I mainly have studied the Bible for much of the 50 years I have been a Christian. It has not been difficult to spot error, with this foundation, because I simply immediately see a red flag every time I read a statement or concept which does not line up with the plumb line of Scripture. Well all I can say is that I hope that you are now convinced that it is Richard Foster who possesses and promotes hollow and deceptive philosophies contrary to Scripture.
http://www.abrahamic-faith.com/James/Richard-Foster.html

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The November, 2004 issue of Signs of the Times Magazine – Australia New Zealand edition, Centering Prayer is promoted in an article called Stillness is Golden. "Contemplation is essentially wordless, but its core cry is "I consent to Your presence and Your action within." (See Psalm 139:1-4; Romans 8:26, 27.) Feel your hunger for connection with the Divine and express your adoration. God is waiting to connect with you (Revelation 3:20), but it may take some time for you to focus. If you are distracted by thoughts, let them float past you without following. One method, called "centring" prayer, encourages you to refocus on God by internally saying one of the names of God that you relate to. This can help you to be present to God again."
http://www.signsofthetimes.org.au/archives/2004/november/article5.shtm



Centering prayer is essentially a form of self-hypnosis. It makes use of a "mantra," a word repeated over and over to focus the mind while striving by ones will to go deep within oneself. The effects are a hypnotic-like state: concentration upon one thing, disengagement from other stimuli, a high degree of openness to suggestion, a psychological and physiological condition that externally resembles sleep but in which consciousness is interiorized and the mind subject to suggestion. After reading a published description of centering prayer, a psychology professor said, "Your question is, is this hypnosis? Sure it is." He said the state can be verified physiologically by the drop in blood pressure, respiratory rate, lactic acid level in the blood, and the galvanic conductivity of the skin.
http://www.catholic.com/thisrock/1997/9711fea1.asp
http://www.newmorningtv.tv/todaysshow_101303.jsp (*see centering prayer video under Waking Up*)

GODencounters Schedule for 2008
GODencounters is a movement of (SDA) young adults who are wholeheartedly seeking a 24/7 experience of GOD, recklessly living for His renown. Daring to deepen intimacy with God, GODencounters gives focus to seven discipleship themes where practices of the Christian faith are emphasized.

"We prayed GODencounters would be a catalyst for deep, personal experiences with GOD," asserts co-founder Jeff Gang. "[GODencounters is] not an act or a program, but an everyday, every moment way of living." GODencounters aims to deepen devotion to Jesus by developing disciples, walking recklessly in His footsteps.
http://www.godencounters.org/primary/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=182&Itemid=86

May 23-25, 2008 – GODencounters @ Florida Conference Camp Meeting
May 26, 2008 – GODencounters Intensive Training @ Forest Lake Church
May 28-31, 2008 – GODencounters @ Georgia Cumberland Conference Camp Meeting
June 20 & 21, 2008 – GODencounters @ Pennsylvania Conference Camp Meeting
June 28, 2008 – GODencounters @ New Jersey Conference Camp Meeting
http://www.godencounters.org/primary/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=185&Itemid=1

The Art of "Being Still": A Work in Progress Here are some helpful hints for "being still." First, identify "sacred space" where you spend nonnegotiable time with God free of distractions. Yes, that means turning off the cell phone! For some this may be a special room in the house, your patio, under a tree in the yard, your car during your lunch break, taking a walk. Second, take some deep breaths imagining Christ breathing the breath of life into you and you exhaling out your worldly cares. Third, ask God to speak to you. If you choose to read Scripture ask yourself what might God be telling you in that passage. Next, learn to listen. If you find your mind wandering, slowing repeat the names of Jesus over and over again. When I have done this I have never come away empty handed.
http://www.godencounters.org/primary/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=82&Itemid=76

If you wish to understand more about these issues, read the books "Hidden Agenda" by Jan Voerman (SDA author), "A Time of Departing" by Ray Yungen and "Faith Undone" by Roger Oakland
http://www.amazon.com/Hidden-Agenda-Jan-Voerman/dp/1572584513/ref=sr_1_1/103-9943120-8052669?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1182882226&sr=8-1
http://www.amazon.com/Time-Departing-Ray-Yungen/dp/0972151273
http://www.amazon.com/Faith-Undone-emerging-reformation-deception/dp/0979131510

To download (Word or pdf) the 30 page document from which this article came from that will identify many more inroads of Spiritual Formation into the Seventh-day Adventist Church go to: http://sdaomega.wordpress.com/

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