



## 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.