

SPECIAL FOLLOW-UP REPORT: Lighthouse Trails Statement to Assemblies of God Response Regarding Invitation of Ruth Haley Barton

By Ray Yungen and the Editors at Lighthouse Trails

Before we begin our report addressing the [public response issued by the Assemblies of God](#) Superintendent Dr. George O. Wood and Dr. Jodi Detrick, chairperson for the Network for Women in Ministry regarding the invitation of Ruth Haley Barton to the 2013 General Council Conference, we would like to clarify one thing: Lighthouse Trails carries no personal animosity toward Ruth Haley Barton. Our issue has to do with a spiritual practice that Ms. Barton is deeply involved with and that, as we will show, has roots in Eastern mysticism, which does not line up with the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the Word of God.

To begin, we want to clarify that the names we mention below are not people who are loosely and inadvertently associated with this mystical spirituality but rather are practitioners and dedicated advocates of it.

Dr. Detrick suggested in her response [to our April 15th article](#) that what we presented in that article was a “misunderstanding” in that there is a clear and distinctive difference between Eastern mysticism and Christian contemplative prayer. She stated:

Sadly, some are saying that seeking the Lord in such a way equates with the practices of meditation and contemplation in Eastern religions. This couldn’t be further from the truth, and is an unfortunate and inaccurate identification. ([source](#))

What we hope to show in this report is that our conclusions are not the result of a misunderstanding by any means, and we will show that there *is* a direct correlation between the contemplative prayer movement and Eastern meditation.

While we bear no ill feelings toward Dr. Detrick or Dr. Wood, we are compelled to show that the premise of the following statement by Dr. Detrick can be disproven through solid evidence:

We want to assure those with concerns that there is not even the smallest part of us that embraces any form of eastern religion or the New Age movement’s teachings and practices. ([source](#))

Now while it may be Dr. Detrick’s intent not to embrace any form of Eastern mysticism, we will demonstrate that contemplative prayer and Eastern meditation are essentially the same, and different in name only. At the onset of providing this evidence, please bear in mind that while we only give a relatively few examples (for the reader’s time’s sake) in this report, we could provide many many more similar examples as they are ample.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND EASTERN MEDITATION

I. The very person who coined the term New Age, occultist Alice Bailey, saw a direct link between Christian mysticism (i.e., contemplative prayer) and Eastern mysticism. Bailey stated:

It is, of course, easy to find many passages which link the way of the Christian Knower [contemplative] with that of his brother in the East. They bear witness to the same efficacy of method.¹

II. Tilden Edwards, the founder of [Shalem Institute](#) of whom Ms. Barton received her training in contemplative spirituality, also identified the connection between contemplative prayer and Eastern meditation. Edwards said:

This mystical stream [contemplative prayer] is the Western bridge to Far Eastern spirituality.²

III. In his book, *Spiritual Friend*, Tilden Edwards suggests those who practice contemplative prayer and have begun experiencing “spiritual unfolding” and other “unusual experiences,” should turn to a book titled *Psychosynthesis* in order to understand the “dynamics” at “certain stages.”³ The man who wrote *Psychosynthesis*, Roberto Assagioli, was a direct disciple of Alice Bailey! Edwards might as well have recommended people turn to Alice Bailey herself. This is not guilt by association. Edwards knows that there is a connection between contemplative prayer and occultic (i.e., Eastern) mysticism.

IV. Thomas Keating, a major leader in the contemplative prayer movement, also acknowledges that Barton’s contemplative prayer is related to Eastern religious meditation. In a book Keating wrote the foreword to, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality*, Keating states:

In order to guide persons having this experience, Christian spiritual directors may need to dialogue with Eastern teachers in order to get a fuller understanding.⁴

Keating understands that within the DNA of Christian contemplative prayer is Eastern mysticism. Philip St. Romain, the author of the *Kundalini* book says: “This book is an important contribution to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition.”⁵ Contemplative mystics say these things because they know them to be true. Also in the foreword of that book, Keating states that the Kundalini energy “is also at work today in numerous persons who are devoting themselves to contemplative prayer.” Kundalini energy is what is known as the serpent power of New Age mysticism. This statement by Keating should cause any Christian who is even thinking of dabbling in contemplative prayer to run the other way. We encourage you to look up Kundalini on the Internet.

V. Ruth Haley Barton identifies with Keating. In her book, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, she admits that Thomas Keating helped her to understand the contemplative idea of “the true self” (man’s divinity):

The concept of the true self and the false self is a consistent theme not only in Scripture but also in the writings of the church fathers and mothers. Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen (particularly Nouwen’s *The Way of the Heart*) and Father Thomas Keating are contemporary

authors who have shaped my understanding of this aspect of the spiritual life.⁶

Merton, Nouwen, and Keating believe that man can attain to his “true self” (perfect self) through mystical practices. This is actually the crux of the Spiritual Formation (i.e., contemplative prayer) movement, that man realizes his divinity through mystical experiences. Ruth Haley Barton’s Transforming Center has a mission of helping people find their “higher” true self through contemplative practices.

VI. Henri Nouwen, the late Catholic priest, who is touted highly by Barton as well as by virtually every contemplative proponent, knew very well that Eastern mysticism was at the underlying roots of contemplative prayer. In a book written by universalist Catholic priest, Thomas Ryan, Nouwen (in the foreword) wrote:

[T]he author shows a wonderful openness to the gifts of Buddhism, Hinduism and Moslem religion. He discovers their great wisdom for the spiritual life of the Christian . . . Ryan [the author] went to India to learn from spiritual traditions other than his own. He brought home many treasures and offers them to us in the book.⁷

VII. Regarding a book written by Philip Goldberg titled, *American Veda*, the book shows how “Hindu mysticism has profoundly affected the world view of millions of Americans and radically altered the religious landscape.”⁸ Goldberg saw fit to devote an entire chapter to contemplative prayer stating:

Perhaps the biggest shakeup by the eastern winds has been . . . the reawakening - of Western mysticism . . . the long sequestered vaults of contemplative Christianity and Jewish mysticism [Kabbalah] begin to be unlocked.⁹

If contemplative prayer has nothing to do with eastern mysticism, then why does Goldberg devote an entire chapter to it? He saw it as an adjunct to Hinduism. One final point to consider is this: Virtually every major New Age bookstore has a sizable section on Christian meditation (i.e., contemplative prayer). Call one up in your own town or city and ask if this is so. We believe you’ll see it is.

WHERE DID CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE COME FROM?

I. Carl McColman, in his book, *The Big Book of Mysticism, The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality*, states:

It is important to note that, throughout the history of Christianity, Christian mystics have displayed an unusual openness to the wisdom of non-Christian philosophy and religion. . . . Ultimately, however, no absolutely clear distinction can be drawn between Christian and non-Christian mysticism . . . It is precisely in this dimension of mystery that people of different faiths and different wisdom traditions can relate to each other.¹⁰

II. Brian C. Taylor said:

These contemplatives also recognize their soul mates in other traditions, as did Thomas Merton in his pilgrimage to Buddhist Asia. This is because they have passed beyond the confines of religion as a closed system to an open awareness of God-in-life.¹¹

III. The contemplative prayer movement that is rising rapidly within evangelical circles largely through the early work of figures like Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Ruth Haley Barton, and now many of their protégés, stems primarily from the Catholic church. Michael Leach, past president of the Catholic Book Publishers Association, explained this:

The irony is that the best of the New Age ideas—those flowing from a spiritual understanding of God, humankind and the universe—have been jewels in the Catholic treasury since the very beginning, but for too long have been neglected, forgotten or buried.¹²

IV. How did Eastern meditation enter the Catholic church in the first place? Did the early church fathers get it from the apostles, Jesus' teachings, or Scripture? No, they did not. On the contrary, the Desert Fathers (monks such as St. Anthony who became hermits) experimented:

It was a time of great experimentation with spiritual methods. Many different kinds of disciplines were tried . . . many different methods of prayer were created and explored by them.¹³

And in this experimentation, they “discovered” a prayer tool. According to one meditation scholar:

The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest Christian monks bear strong similarity to those of their Hindu and Buddhist renunciate brethren several kingdoms to the East . . . the meditative techniques they adopted for finding their God suggest either a borrowing from the East or a spontaneous rediscovery.¹⁴

And thus:

The fourth-century Desert Fathers understood that a simple device was needed to keep the “monkey mind” from wandering. Thus, the mantra method of prayer, which had been introduced centuries before by Buddhists and Hindus, came to be a stable form of Christian prayer, not only for the Desert Fathers and Mothers but for Christians down through the ages.¹⁵

One of Christian contemplative's own, Marcus Borg, reveals the role the mantra plays in contemplative prayer:

Contemplation typically involves the silent repetition of a mantra—a single word, a short phrase or a series of short phrases. . . . Ultimately

the purpose of contemplative prayer is to descend to the deepest level of the self, of the heart, where we open out into the sea of being that is God.¹⁶

V. Christian contemplative teachers will often say that in contemplative prayer one is not using Buddhist or Hindu mantras, so therefore it cannot be called Eastern meditation. While it is true that different words or syllables are repeated in the contemplative mantra than those used by Eastern mystics, the method (mantra or focus) of entering an altered state of consciousness is the same. Furthermore, as we will demonstrate later, the fruit of contemplative prayer has been shown time and time again to be the same – that of a pantheistic (or panentheistic) mindset of divinity in all things. In short, one would have to conclude – after witnessing the teachings of countless contemplative prayer mystics – that contemplative prayer and Eastern mysticism alike connect the practitioner with spirit guides that will erode – and in time destroy – their belief in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Once the practitioner establishes the belief, as contemplative prayer will bring him to, that he has divinity within, there is no longer the need for the Cross. Yes, and countless contemplative mystics have already come to this conclusion.

PROOF THAT CONTEMPLATIVE IS OCCULTIC

I. Perhaps the strongest evidence to prove that the realms entered during contemplative prayer are not God's realm (i.e., the Holy Spirit) but rather demonic occultic realms is observing the "fruit" that contemplative prayer bears in a practitioner's life. Probably the most profound example is that of the late Catholic monk and mystic, Thomas Merton, who said once that he was "impregnated with Sufism"¹⁷ (Islamic mysticism).

Merton's mystical experiences ultimately made him a kindred spirit and co-mystic with those in other Eastern religions. At an interfaith conference in Thailand, he stated:

I believe that by openness to Buddhism, to Hinduism, and to these great Asian [mystical] traditions, we stand a wonderful chance of learning more about the potentiality of our own Christian traditions.¹⁸

Please understand that contemplative prayer alone was the catalyst for such theological views. One of Merton's biographers made this very clear when he explained:

If one wants to understand Merton's going to the East it is important to understand that it was his rootedness in his own faith tradition [Catholicism] that gave him the spiritual equipment [contemplative prayer] he needed to grasp the way of wisdom that is proper to the East.¹⁹

II. A second remarkable example of the "fruit" of contemplative prayer can be found in an author (often quoted by evangelical contemplative advocates, including Barton) named Sue Monk Kidd. Monk Kidd was once a conservative Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher. One day, she was handed a book by Thomas Merton. It changed her life dramatically (that's an understatement). Monk Kidd explained:

I found a host of Christian thinkers and saints talking about a way of “being with” God—a way of needing Him and experiencing Him in the depths of one’s being—that opened the door to oneness with Him. They called it contemplation. I was amazed to realize that I had known practically nothing about this ancient and powerful tradition of Christian meditation . . . I was ready.²⁰

She wrote that quote in a book titled *God’s Joyful Surprise: a spiritual biography*. Just to illustrate how subtle this spirituality can be, listen to some of the endorsements she received for that book by traditional Christian organizations:

“[A] joy to read from beginning to end.” *Virtue Magazine* (back cover);
A *Virtue Magazine* best book of the year

“[T]he message and challenge of the book is profound.” *Today’s Christian Woman* (back cover)

“[Kidd] suggests some disciplines for cultivating an interior ‘quietness’ and a richer, personal experience of God’s love.” *Moody Monthly* (back cover)

We don’t believe that the people who wrote these endorsements really understood what they were endorsing.

III. But back to our point here to show the “fruit” of contemplative prayer. Where is Sue Monk Kidd today, spiritually speaking? Listen to these quotes written by her a number of years after *God’s Joyful Surprise* to see where it took her:

We also need Goddess consciousness to reveal earth’s holiness... Matter becomes inspirited; it breathes divinity. Earth becomes alive and sacred... Goddess offers us the holiness of everything. . . . As I grounded myself in feminine spiritual experience, that fall, I was initiated into my body in a deeper way. I came to know myself as an embodiment of Goddess.²¹

Mystical awakening in all the great religious traditions, including Christianity, involves arriving at an experience of unity or nondualism. In Zen it’s known as samadhi . . . The day of my awakening was the day I saw, and knew I saw, all things in God, and God in all things. ²²

Today, after going down the contemplative path, Sue Monk Kidd worships the goddess within and not the God of the Bible. That is what practicing contemplative prayer got her. And it is what it got Thomas Merton. He came to believe, as well, that God was inside every human being (panentheism):

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race . . . now I realize what we all are . . . 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. 23

And Henri Nouwen:

The God who dwells in our inner sanctuary is also the God who dwells in the inner sanctuary of each human being.24

What we are saying here is vital. God does not work in the contemplative silence—but rather demons do. Moreover, what makes it so dangerous is that they are very clever. One well-known New Ager revealed what his guiding (familiar) spirit candidly disclosed:

We work with all who are vibrationally sympathetic; simple and sincere people who feel our spirit moving, but for the most part, only *within the context of their current belief system*.25

The term “vibrationally sympathetic” here means those who suspend thought through word repetition or breath focus—inward mental silence. That is what attracts them. That is their opening. That is why Tilden Edwards called this the “bridge to far Eastern spirituality,” and this is what is being injected into the evangelical church!

WHERE IS THIS ALL LEADING?

In Sue Monk Kidd’s book, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, she makes a revealing comment:

Deity means that divinity will no longer be only heavenly . . . It will also be right here, right now, in me, in the earth, in this river, in excrement and roses alike.26

Monk Kidd has come to believe that God is in everything, literally. She rejects the belief that God is holy and man is a sinner needing a Savior and redemption.

We do not believe that Dr. George Wood or Dr. Detrick would deny the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, nor do we believe they would say that they agree with the words of Thomas Merton or Sue Monk Kidd. But by their willingness to embrace the teachings of Ruth Haley Barton (or any contemplative, for that matter) they are directly exposing themselves and potentially the two-and-a-half million in their denomination to the beliefs of Merton and Monk Kidd.

Alice Bailey predicted that there would be a global awakening where mankind would finally realize the divinity within. She called it the “regeneration of the churches.” Her rationale for this was obvious:

The Christian church in its *many branches* can serve as a St. John the Baptist, as a voice crying in the wilderness, and as a nucleus through which world illumination may be accomplished.27 (emphasis added)

Satan is very good at deceiving people, often in very subtle ways. The Bible talks about a day that is coming when Christians will fall into great deception. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1). These seducing spirits are just that – seducing.

In Acts 16, there is a good example of this. The spirit in the woman endorsed Paul and Silas, but that spirit was not for them but rather against them. It was a demon. In Matthew 24, Jesus talks about great deception coming upon the earth prior to His return. False christs, false prophets, great signs and wonders, and many coming in His name. Could it be that this mystical spirituality, which leads man to say he is divine, is part of this great falling away? We believe it is.

Nothing is being twisted here. The aforementioned evidence is based on facts, not speculations. The leaders of the Assemblies of God (and every other denomination, actually) must decide if they really want to take their denomination in this direction. If they decide to go forward, they must explain away the evidence we have given.

In her books, Ruth Haley Barton quotes a number of people who could legitimately be called New Agers. Bear in mind that she quotes these figures in the context of the practices they share. In her book *Sacred Rhythms*, she quotes Basil Pennington from his book *Finding Grace at the Center*. This means she must have read that book, which is a primer in contemplative mysticism. Listen to what Pennington says:

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 [Transcendental Meditation] and similar practices, especially where they have been initiated by reliable teachers and have a solidly developed Christian faith to find inner form and meaning to the resulting experiences.²⁸

Basil Pennington is one of the prominent figures of the contemplative prayer movement.

We stated in this report that contemplative prayer stands on the same ground as occultism. With that in mind, it is worth mentioning that both Thomas Keating (who, according to Barton, shaped her thinking) and Basil Pennington enthusiastically endorsed a book titled *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey in Christian Hermeticism*. Fortune-telling Tarot cards are one of the major tools for divination in occultism. And Hermeticism is a set of ancient esoteric beliefs based on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the one who coined the term “as above, so below” (the maxim for the New Age movement). Keating said the book was “the greatest contribution to date toward the rediscovery and renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition,”²⁹ and Pennington said, “It is without doubt the most extraordinary work I have ever read.”³⁰ We’re talking about outright occultism here – there’s no room for doubt.

We are not asking anyone reading this to take our word for it. Look these authors up and see for yourself what they are saying. Compare this report we have written with [our earlier article](#) showing how

Ruth Haley Barton is directly promoting the practice of contemplative prayer. We think, after true prayer and deliberation, you will come to the same conclusion we have—that contemplative prayer has no place in the biblical Christian faith.

Dr. Detrick claims that “[c]ountless AG people, and credentialed leaders, have testified to drawing much closer to the Lord as a result of Ruth’s books and teachings.” If it is true that “countless AG people” have been influenced by Ruth Haley Barton, then this report should motivate those in the Assemblies of God to get to the bottom of this controversy that is unfolding here.

Endnotes:

1. Alice Bailey, *From Intellect to Intuition* (New York, NY: Lucis Publishing Co., 1987, 13th printing), p. 193.
2. Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 18.
3. Ibid., pp. 162-163.
4. Philip St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), foreword written by Thomas Keating.
5. Ibid, p. 7.
6. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* (Downer Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2004), p. 160.
7. Thomas Ryan, *Disciplines for Christian Living* (Disciplines for Christian Living), pp. 2-3, from Henri Nouwen in the foreword.
8. The publisher’s description of *American Veda* on both the publisher’s website and Amazon.com.
9. Philip Goldberg, *American Veda* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), p. 310.
10. Carl McColman, *The Big Book of Mysticism* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2010), pp. 63-64.
11. Brian C. Taylor, *Setting the Gospel Free* (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing , 1996), p. 62.
12. Michael Leach (*America Magazine*, May 2, 1992), p. 385.
13. Ken Kaisch, *Finding God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), p. 191.
14. Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind* (Los Angeles, CA: Tarcher/Putnam Inc., 1988), p. 53.
15. Frank X. Tuoti, *The Dawn of the Mystical Age* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1997), p. 137.
16. Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: 2004), p. 198.
17. Rob Baker and Gray Henry, Editors, *Merton and Sufism* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), p. 69.
18. William Shannon, *Silent Lamp* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), p. 276.
19. Ibid, p. 281.
20. Sue Monk Kidd, *God’s Joyful Surprise* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), pg. 187.
21. Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 162-163, 161.
22. Ibid, p. 161.
23. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1989 edition), pp. 157-158.
24. Henri Nouwen, *Here and Now* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997 edition), p. 22.
25. Ken Carey, *The Starseed Transmissions* (A Uni-Sun Book, 1985 4th printing), p. 33.
26. Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, op. cit., p. 160.
27. Alice Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York, NY: Lucis Publishing, 1976), p. 510.
28. M. Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating, Thomas E. Clarke, *Finding Grace at the Center* (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Pub., 1978), pp. 5-6.
29. Endorsement on jacket of book

30. Ibid.

Note: Ray Yungen has been researching the New Age and contemplative spirituality for over 20 years. He is the author of *A Time of Departing* and *For Many Shall Come in My Name*. You may find more information, including contact information, about Ray Yungen and Lighthouse Trails at www.lighthouse Trails.com and www.lighthouse Trailsresearch.com.