

WHO IS RICHARD FOSTER?

By Rev. Ken Silva, Southern Baptist pastor-teacher, May 30, 2008

Due to the importance of the issues concerning the influx into apostatizing evangelicalism of corrupt Contemplative/Spirituality/Mysticism (CSM) and its so-called “Christian” meditation of Contemplative/Centering Prayer (CCP)—which flowered in the antibiblical monastic traditions of apostate Roman Catholicism, i.e. no longer Christian—Apprising Ministries is doing all we can to bring this to the attention of the Body of Christ. And one of the primary sources—if not the primary source—for this reimagined neo-Gnostic “Christian” mysticism infecting postevangelicalism and the Emerging Church is The Cult of Guru Richard Foster.

You need to know that this CSM has now also slithered into evangelicalism as well because right now Living Spiritual Teacher and Quaker mystic “Roshi” Richard Foster, with an able assist from ordained Southern Baptist minister Dallas Willard, is conditioning more and more mainstream evangelical pastors, leaders, and ministers (think frog in the kettle) through spurious Spiritual Formation (SF) courses in college and/or seminary to see this CSM as a viable approach to God. And AM reminds you that primary among the textbooks used in these SF classes, not only in SBC seminaries but in most evangelical schools, are works by Foster and Willard from which their so-called “spiritual disciplines” largely culled from heretical Roman Catholic and Quaker mystics is then taught.

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:11)

Richard Foster Comes Emerging From Quaker Shadows

Let’s begin now to acquaint you a bit with Richard Foster, who is arguably the leading proponent of this CSM, which is beyond question rooted in the mystics of myths of the Roman Catholic Church. Undoubtedly however, Foster is certainly CSMS most recognized

teacher. He is also very highly respected in the marred and mystical Emergent Church as evidenced in an article in Christianity Today called "The Emergent Mystique." None other than Brian McLaren himself, the most prominent theologian in "Emergent, the emerging church network that he and several other church planters and pastors lead," points to "Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, with their emphasis on spiritual disciplines, as key mentors for the emerging church."

As a matter of fact on McLaren's own website he provides a running commentary on that CT article. Following a quote from the section mentioning his friends Willard and Foster the Emergent Guru McLaren confirms that he considers these men as important theologians within this highly divisive postliberal group:

"He cites Dallas Willard and Richard Foster, with their emphasis on spiritual disciplines, as key mentors for the emerging church. None of these thinkers has any inclination to throw out the baby of truth with the bathwater of modernity."

I'm grateful to Andy for including the preceding, because many people doubt this. (Online source, emphasis mine)

Through the following answer to a reader's question on McLaren's website It also becomes evident that the Emergent spiritual director is actually quite appreciative for what Roshi Foster is doing in his promotion of this so-called "Christian mystical tradition." We note below that McLaren also recommends the book *The Sacred Way (SW)* by Emerging Church theologian Tony Jones as another good resource on the subject of "contemplative practices" as well. By the way, Jones just happens to be another friend of McLaren's, and we cover more about the flawed spirituality SW teaches in *Sacred Way of Tony Jones and the Emerging Church*:

In some of my readings, both of books authored by you and others, I have read about Christian mystics. Who are the predominant Christian mystic authors?

Answer: If you pick up Richard Foster's "Celebration of Discipline" and his other work via *Renovare*, you'll get a great exposure to the

Christian mystical tradition. “The Spiritual Formation Workbook” is a great resource too. Tony Jones’ “The Sacred Way” is also a sturdy introduction to contemplative practices. (Online source, emphasis mine)

Come Let Us Reimagine, i.e Reinvent...

Since the Lord leads this work here at AM to also aim at exposing the severe spiritual errors of the Emerging Church movement as well, it’s critical here that we have now firmly established Guru Richard Foster is undoubtedly a “key” mentor and a primary source within the Emergent Church on CSM and this alleged “Christian” mystical tradition. In his fine book *A Time for Departing (ATfD)* research analyst Ray Yungen gives us some of the benefits of his own in-depth study of Foster’s teachings when he says:

I discovered he was the founder and head of an organization called *Renovare*, from the Latin word meaning renewal. The goal of this group, as stated in their material, is to provide the evangelical church with a “practical strategy” for growing spiritually. “An army without a plan will be defeated,” states one of *Renovare*’s promotional materials. *Renovare* provides that plan or as they refer to it: “practical training for transformed living.” (71)

We turn now to *Celebration of Discipline (CoD)*, Foster’s own classic book on the subject of CSM, also recommended above by Emergent “theologian” Brian McLaren. While discussing “imagination” in *CoD*, which Foster considers to be one of “The Inward Disciplines,” the Guru of Contemplation writes:

We can descend with the mind into the heart most easily through the imagination. In this regard the great Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte speaks of “the divine offices and the splendid services of the Christian imagination.” Perhaps some rare individuals experience God through abstract contemplation alone, but most of us need to be more deeply rooted in the senses. We must not despise this simpler, more humble route into God’s presence. (25, emphasis mine)

At this point in our discussion it becomes very important to stop and think something through: God indwells the Christian. However, as you

will be coming to see all true mystics believe that God is already in everything and everyone, which I cover further in *Understanding the New Spirituality: God Indwells Mankind*. For most it goes as far as what is known as panentheism, but for later I will show you that this idea of God even indwells unregenerate mankind is also the theology of Quakers like Richard Foster. In fact, one of the recommended “Christian Spiritual Classics” for further study in Tony Jones’ aforementioned SW is *Collected Works* by mystic Meister Eckhart. Jones tells us it is “a mystical treatise on the intersection between Greek philosophy and Christian theology with an emphasis on God’s indwelling of humanity (221).

Modern day mystic Matthew Fox discusses Eckhart’s theology in his 1983 book *The Coming Of The Cosmic Christ (CoCC)*. Fox explains that through mysticism we will come to understand what it is to “reach what Eckhart calls the ‘great underground river’ of divinity” within each of us (230). That we are dealing with blatant heresy here is crystal clear because earlier in CoCC Fox himself refers to all of humanity as “other Christs” (137). Another time we’ll return to this panentheistic world-view which emerges from all those who practice this spurious CSM long enough to plunge into that “great underground river” of deception. For now though, we do know from the Bible that God only indwells the believer baptized into Christ by God the Holy Spirit through God’s grace alone, by faith alone, in Jesus alone, and His sacrifice for sinners upon the Cross.

So, here’s the key issue: If God is already present in the Christian, and He is, then why do we need this CSM as the “route into God’s presence?” Answer: We don’t. O, but it gets even worse. A core doctrine in the Emerging Church of postevangelicalism is the erroneous idea that we will use this so-called “Christian” mysticism to find the “common ground” with other world religions. However, you must understand that the first thing which has to be done in order to attempt to attempt this foolish endeavor is to remake Jesus Christ of Nazareth Himself into a mystic. And this Foster begins to do in CoD as, without any Biblical basis for the supposed mysticism of our Lord and Master, the “Christian” Roshi simply states:

Jesus himself taught in this manner [of the mystic], making constant appeal to the imagination, and many of the devotional masters likewise

encourage us in this way. St. Teresa of Avila says, "...as I could not make reflection with my understanding I contrived to picture Christ within me." Many of us can identify with her words, for we too have tried a merely cerebral approach and found it too abstract, too detached. (ibid, emphasis added)

Richard Foster Has A Strong Background In Mysticism

I cover Teresa of Avila in more depth elsewhere, but here you can clearly see that her mystic musings have undoubtedly impacted Foster. In fact in CoD he includes this troubled Roman Catholic nun among "the great writers of the devotional life," which he says goes "from St. Augustine to St. Francis, from John Calvin to John Wesley, from Teresa of Avila to Juliana of Norwich" (5, emphasis mine). You might make note here that the highly ecumenical Foster is undoubtedly influenced in his own aberrant mystic views by the apostate Roman Catholic Church, and in direct opposition to the theology of the Reformers, the Guru of Contemplation obviously considers the Church of Rome a part of the true Body of Christ.

And even Foster's denigration above of "a merely cerebral approach" (analytical) to Holy Scripture is also consistent with this same grave error of the mystic tradition as a whole. Let me stress here that I am not advocating a dead literal letterism as we approach the Bible; but leaving that aside, in CoCC Matthew Fox—one who is very well experienced in this CSM, which is transcendental meditation lightly sprayed in Christian terminology—explains that the:

first meaning of mysticism is experience itself. As Kabir, the great creation mystic of India, put it in the fifteenth century, "I say only what I have seen with my own eyes—and you keep quoting the Scriptures!" He goes on, "Experience, O seeker, is the essence of all things." The mystic is keen on the experience of the Divine and will not settle for theory alone or knowing about the Divine. (48, emphasis mine)

Men and women, you have just read where all of this CSM will always lead one who continues in it, and in words which are eerily similar to those coming from Foster and e.g. other quasi-universalists like Doug Pagitt and his friend Rob Bell, ad infinitum among the spiritually

deficient leadership of the Emergent Church today. Then as we recall above how Matthew Fox, one who feels he has reached what mystic Meister Eckhart called “the ‘great underground river’ of divinity” (CoCC, 230) within each of us, now refers to all of humanity as “other Christs” (ibid., 137), a very real source of serious concern for the spiritual direction of Foster’s Quaker “Christian” mysticism comes emerging.

And this makes the following information from Ray Yungen in ATfD all the more startling:

It is not surprising to find those in the contemplative prayer camp who also subscribe to this view. Contemplative author John R. Yungblut, former Dean of Studies at the Quaker Meditation Center at Pendle Hill in Pennsylvania, echoed a similar notion:

But we cannot confine the existence of the divine to this one man [Jesus] among men. Therefore we are not to worship the man Jesus, though we cannot refrain from worshipping the source of this Holy Spirit or Christ-life, which for many of us has been revealed primarily in this historical figure. (114, 115, emphasis mine)

Richard Foster Is Teaching Classic Quaker Mysticism

This now brings us to another critical issue that really has not been thoroughly explored in the study of this current invasion of counter-Reformation CSM into the evangelical camp under the guise of SF. The fact is that Roshie Foster is himself a Quaker, or a member of The Religious Society of Friends, as they are also known. Therefore if someone wants to better understand how Foster’s own teachings about this supposed “inward life” were themselves shaped then it becomes necessary to have a working background of the heretical theology inherent of this group within which he has been raised. As a matter of fact Quakerinfo.com enlightens us that Richard Foster is “[p]erhaps the best known Quaker in the world today.”

And not only that but we are also told:

He is clearly one of the leading contemporary writers and speakers on Christian spirituality. While maintaining his ties with Friends, Foster deliberately speaks to a much broader audience.

Richard Foster grew up among Evangelical Friends. In adult life, he has been a Friends pastor and a professor of theology at Friends University among the many positions he has held. In his books and speaking, he frequently makes reference to Quaker historical figures and his own Quakerism. (Online source)

Well then, it would appear that now would be a good point at which to examine the history of Quakerism a little closer. The New Encyclopedia Britannica brings out that the term “Quaker,” according to founder George Fox, came to be applied to this group “because we bid [people] tremble at the word of God.” In addition however, it is “likely that the name, originally derisive, was also used because many early Friends, like other religious enthusiasts, themselves trembled [i.e. quaked] in their religious meetings and showed other physical manifestations of religious emotion” (9/838). This is confirmed in *New Religions: A Guide* while Richard Hoskins is teaching about a sect of “healers and ‘spiritual’ leaders” from the Dominican Republic called “The Ngunzist movement.” Hoskins tells us the “Ngunzists are often called trembleurs because of their ecstatic shaking (rather like the origin of the term Quakers) (55, emphasis mine).

Next, from his fine work *Christianity Through The Centuries* (CTTC) noted Church historian Dr. Earle Cairns tells us that:

The Quakers appeared on the English religious scene during the chaotic period of the Civil War and the Commonwealth. They set aside the doctrines of an organized church and the Bible as the sole and final revelation of God’s will in favor of the doctrine of the Inner Light, by which they meant that the Holy Spirit can give immediate and direct knowledge of God apart from the Bible (381, emphasis mine)

In *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present* we find out further that it was in the wake of “the struggle” within various religious sects following the Reformation where:

Quakerism was born. These “seekers,” [sound familiar?] as they called themselves, abandoned all traditional Christian outward forms – ministry, creeds, sacraments, liturgy, systems of theology – and waited in silence, meditating on the Bible until they felt the “inner light” of God dawning within them and the Holy Spirit to speak. In their small communities they stressed the comradely life of love and works or charity inspired by the mystical experience of Christ through the Spirit (445, emphasis mine)

Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical & Paranormal Experience also tells us that Quaker theology “stresses a personal, almost mystical knowledge of God and the workings of the Lord’s ‘inner light’ within all people.” And that George Fox himself taught:

faith is based solely on firsthand knowledge of Christ as a living, personal reality, not on logic, reasoning, historical reporting, or even Scripture. This empirical proof came to be called the Quaker Way: the idea that worshippers need not consult preachers or the Bible to receive knowledge of the Holy Spirit—the so-called “inner light of Christ” present in every human heart (556, emphasis mine).

This idea in Quaker theology that every man has this alleged “Inner Light” is further corroborated in GREAT RELIGIONS of the World which tells us that Fox “insisted that the ‘light of Christ’ glimmered in all men” (375, emphasis mine) We’ll be coming back to this “inner light” that is supposed to glimmer “in every human heart,” but first, in his classic two volume set A History Of Christianity (AHOC) the great Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette adds a bit more background information about the person through whom the Quakers originated:

Their founder was George Fox (1624-1691). Of humble birth, from boyhood he had heard Puritan preaching and had acquired an intimate familiarity with the text of the English Bible... For four years he suffered severe spiritual depression induced by the spectacle of human suffering,...and by the doctrine of predestination which he heard expounded from Puritan pulpits. By temperament a mystic, he was eager for direct and unhindered access to God...

Eventually (1647) the light broke. He came to feel Christ could speak to “his condition,” ... He believed that God is love and truth and that it is possible for all men so to open their lives to Him... [Fox] would follow and have others follow the Inner Light” (Vol. II, p. 822, emphasis mine)

The True Light Of Christ and Holy Scripture

All of these are extremely important concepts to understand regarding the spiritual excesses of The Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers). Now you should be able to see an aberrant view of mysticism is already rooted in the base theology of the Quakers from their inception. Their founder George Fox, who was himself a mystic, wished for a “personal” approach “to God” that ended up being “apart from the Bible.” As such Fox began with his theology already turned “inward,” i.e. backward, by believing that it is man who seeks after God. As a result the Scriptures were already forced to take a back seat to his own centered on the self way of approaching the Lord. Men and women, we need to carefully consider this above information. Fox was seeking a “direct” and “mystical experience” with God. Admirable; possibly, but it is the LORD God Almighty—the glorious and transcendent Creator of the universe—Who set the prescribed means of interacting with us through His Words in Holy Scripture and conscious prayer.

I’ll show you a little more about this “Inner Light” below, but notice that Fox was “eager” long enough while waiting “in silence” until “the light broke.” And then he finally received his mystic delusion that “it is possible for all men” to “open their lives” to God. As I said, the “experience” of George Fox rudely shoved the Truth of the Bible into a secondary place in favor of the classic view of mysticism that it is possible for “all men” to open themselves to seek God. Clearly this would appear to be a reaction on his part to the strong Biblical “Puritan preaching” which assisted him in acquiring “an intimate familiarity with the text of the Bible.” For you see Fox has absolutely no excuse for missing the following critical Truth from God’s Word:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand,

any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.(Psalm 14:1-3)

And it's not as if this is merely some obscure passage of Scripture that the Puritans latched onto, but is then open to various interpretations, because it appears again in Psalm 51 below almost verbatim:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (vv.1-3).

And we aren't able to escape this absolute Truth concerning the actual nature of mankind in the New Testament either. O, the sappy sentimentality of the Emerging Church and postevangelicalism just loves to focus on the goodness of God. They'll tell us that He sent Jesus to teach us "the way of God," to "change" our lives, and to meet our every need. However, as I will continue to say, Christ Jesus of Nazareth is the Creator—the dreadful and awful—holy and majestic LORD God Almighty standing upon His planet. And concerning the fallen nature of humankind the Master unequivocally tells his Own disciples — "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11)

And then Jesus even clarified what He meant by "though you are evil" as He says – "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" (Mark 7:21-23). Why you'd almost have to think our Creator is trying to get a point across to self-centered and arrogant mankind when later the inspired Apostle Paul is led by God the Holy Spirit to pick up those very same passages in the Psalms mentioned earlier:

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12)

And no, you won't hear all of this preached in The Ecumenical Church of Deceit, but the bottom line in all of this simply couldn't be any clearer than Ecclesiastes 7:20 – There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Ah, that is except — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). So tragically, because George Fox denied this clear teaching from God's Word, two major and spiritually fatal flaws came emerging into his theology. Out went the Pastoral Epistles for God's prescribed method of spiritual leadership within His local churches; and instead of objectively judging all experience by Holy Scripture, "the Quaker way" became proper understanding of the Bible would be determined by their personal and highly subjective mystical experience in some alleged "Inner Light."

You must understand that it is this very same mortal theological wound of interpreting the text of the Bible by the spiritual experiences a given person may have which is also central to the postmodern approach of the Emergent Church, of which Quaker mystic Richard Foster is unquestionably "a key mentor." I've already pointed out here that Foster considers mystic Teresa of Avila as one of "the great writers of the devotional life." You will be coming to see that even this is also consistent with his Quaker theology and interestingly enough, on the page prior to the coverage of the Quakers by Dr. Cairns in his textbook CTTC is a short piece about a mystic movement within "the Roman Catholic Church during the seventeenth century" that would come to be known as "Quietism." And it is from this rotten root that so many supposed "Christian" mystics like Richard Foster have flowed.

The Inner Light Now Reveals The Coming Global Family

I now draw your attention to the fact that "the Inner Light" also just happened to be a core teaching of this Quietism. Dr. Cairns informs us that this theological view within the Roman Catholic Church:

emphasized an immediate intuitional approach to God by the passive soul opening itself to the influence of the inner light. It was a reaction to the emphasis on the rationalization of dogma. [Sound familiar?] Forerunners of the Quietists were Ignatius Loyola; the godly Charles Borromeo (1538-84), cardinal and archbishop of Milan; Teresa of Avila

(1515-82); and Francis de Sales (1567-1622) of France... These mystics of the Counter-Reformation were succeeded by the Quietists of the seventeenth century. (ibid., 380, emphasis mine)

You can see that Teresa of Avila was quite prominent among those who influenced what would itself become a “quiet” reformation within the Church of Rome and this Quietism would end up bringing it further and further away from Biblical doctrine in favor of the mythical superstitions of mysticism. George Fox and the Quakers would end up somewhat parallel this quiet descent into the mystical silence of demonic deception. And it’s really a trap as old as the Garden of Eden where the Devil promises good will come to men who follow him in opposition to what God has said in the Bible. There have always been mystical approaches to God virtually since the time of the Fall and the LORD God Almighty has already told us that rather than “emptying” our minds of all thought we are instead to — “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

In AHOC Latourette also supplies another key piece of information in understanding the deadly flaw which has come emerging from the theology of Fox when he brings out that “Fox and other Quakers insisted that every man who comes into the world is illuminated by an inner light which is Christ” (ibid., p. 981, emphasis mine). Men and women, here we glean some very critical insight into why we are seeing the reemergence of interest in CCP within postevangelicalism. This above view by “Fox and other Quakers” is also highly indicative of the inevitable result of the practice of this “Christian” mysticism as well. Can you see it: If this alleged Inner Light is already within every man then we don’t have to risk persecution by standing for the absolute exclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because now we will have opened the door to a universalism which then negates any real need for anyone to have to be regenerated or “born again.”

And here we have uncovered the reason why so many professing Christians today can believe that all religions should now put away our “differences” (i.e. doctrine) and instead seek our common ground as we then work together in peace while we usher in “the kingdom” of God’s Global Family. Take an honest look at the warped and toxic theology of

men like Richard Foster, Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, Alan Jones, Steve Chalke and even Purpose Driven Pope Rick Warren—all men involved to one degree or another in the practice of Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism. You see them attempting to reverse the Reformation but you will see no bold stance on their part that the only way any human being anywhere upon God's planet can ever be saved from an eternity of conscious torment in a literal place our Creator called Hell is personal faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth and His vicarious penal substitutionary atonement on the Cross. In fact, oftentimes in the ECoD you will see quite the contrary.

O yes, you will hear the occasional mild (at best) statement that, "I believe Jesus is the way," but the end result of this neo-pagan mysticism of Contemplative/Centering Prayer (TM-lite for the Christian) is a "discovery" through this alleged Inner Light (supposedly God) of what the mystic Meister Eckhart called "the 'great underground river' of divinity" within all of mankind. At the very least this would mean that if "every man" already is "illuminated by an inner light which is Christ," then there is no real need to preach the Cross for conversion. Take a moment to read Colossians 2:15 and I believe it will dawn on you just who it is that came up with this twisted idea. And the sad truth remains that those who believe this corrupt theology of repainted Gnostic mysticism are then free to talk about the various "stories" we all supposedly have as we "journey" back to God together. This is because in their mind all of us are actually immersed in that great underground river of divinity and are already indwelt by God.

You should also know that Richard Foster is currently associated with that group known as the Living Spiritual Teachers Project (LSTP) who are actively involved in teaching that exact thing. Three things: 1) It is highly doubtful Foster personally asked to be included with these dubious dreamers; but 2) how far off must Foster's "evangelical" message be that LSTP even could include him, and 3) in Living Spiritual Teacher Richard Foster you'll see that AM was among those who have made Foster aware of his being placed in the LSTP. As of this writing Guru of Contemplation is still another "living spiritual teacher" yoked with heretics like Marcus Borg, Thomas Keating and Matthew Fox as well as to New Age Priestess Marianne Williamson and Guru Ram Dass in violation of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18:

“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.’ “

So here’s an interesting question: Shouldn’t the Body of Christ have a problem with all of this concerning Roshie wannabe Richard Foster? But an even greater question now comes emerging in this convoluted and confused conversation going on within the visible church of our Lord today: Are you personally willing to tell these people the Truth:

Let it be known and understood by all of you, and by the whole house of Israel, that in the name and through the power and authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, [but] Whom God raised from the dead, in Him and by means of Him this man is standing here before you well and sound in body.

This [Jesus] is the Stone which was despised and rejected by you, the builders, but which has become the Head of the corner [the Cornerstone]. And there is salvation in and through no one else, for there is no other Name under Heaven given among men by and in which we must be saved.