

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH TEACHINGS TO EASTERN TRADITIONS

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Centering Prayer, as taught by Contemplative Outreach, was developed by three Christian monks, Fr. William Menninger, O.C.S.O., Fr. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O. and Fr. Thomas Keating O.C.S.O., from St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Mass., in the early 1970's at the request of the Pope Paul VI. He had asked all of the abbots of monasteries to develop a method of contemplative prayer that would make the Christian contemplative tradition more understandable to today's lay people.

At that time, many Christians were exploring Eastern Traditions without realizing that contemplative prayer was an honored Christian path to follow the Gospel teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:6, "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you" (NAB). It also follows the beautiful scripture in Psalm 46:10 in which God reminds us to, "Be still and know that I am God" (NIV).

Centering Prayer is a method of prayer created to nurture our love relationship with our Lord by offering the greatest gift that we can give of ourselves – the gift of our consent. We simply come with open minds and open hearts to sit in love with our Beloved. We come without agenda for personal gain except to grow in understanding of God's Presence and action within our hearts. This gift of our consent in contemplative prayer helps us to grow in the ability to live contemplative lives – lives in which our motives and actions are in harmony with the Will of God and are led by the Holy Spirit. We seek to grow toward a transformation in Christ where we have the heart knowledge to say with St. Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians, 2:20, NIV).

Our Christian teaching and Christian beliefs do not prevent us from reaching the hand of friendship and respect to eastern traditions. Fr. Thomas Keating has been active in interspiritual dialogue over the years. Following are some of the relevant vision statements of Contemplative Outreach that were created by teams of Centering Prayer leaders:

9. While formed by our respective denominations, we are united in our common search for God and our experience of Christ through Centering Prayer.

10. We identify with the Christian contemplative heritage in which Centering Prayer is rooted. We recognize this heritage as the common ground for Christian unity.

11. We affirm our solidarity with the contemplative dimension of other religions and sacred traditions.

16. We acknowledge that any good accomplished by Contemplative Outreach is the work of the Holy Spirit.

For a complete reading of the Vision Statement of Contemplative Outreach, please see our website at:
contemplativeoutreach.org

Father Thomas Keating encourages Centering Prayer leaders, if they feel so led, to participate in interspiritual and/or interreligious dialogue, but to make it clear that we are not trying to develop a new religion based on the Wisdom of both Christian and Eastern traditions. We are a Christian organization with the unshakeable belief that the Divine Wonder of the Trinity is present in our hearts and lives and in our world.

