

# Seminary Warning

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An Epidemic of Apostasy – Christian Seminaries Must Incorporate “Spiritual Formation” to Become Accredited

**Spiritual Formation:** A movement that has provided a platform and a channel through which contemplative prayer is entering the church. Find spiritual formation being used, and in nearly every case, you will find contemplative spirituality and its “pioneers” such as Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Henri Nouwen. Spiritual Formation is based on “spiritual disciplines” that can be practiced by people of any faith to make them more “Christ-like.” Rebirth through Jesus Christ and regeneration through the Holy Spirit are not essential. Rather it is a works-based “theology” that has strong roots in Roman Catholicism and ancient paganism.

**Contemplative Spirituality:** A belief system that uses ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (the silence) and is rooted in mysticism and the occult but often wrapped in Christian terminology. The premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheistic (God is all) and panentheistic (God is in all). Common terms used for this movement are “spiritual formation,” “the silence,” “the stillness,” “ancient-wisdom,” “spiritual disciplines,” and many others.

What do Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Biola Seminary, Fuller Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Urshan Graduate School of Theology, Briercrest College and Seminary, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Moody Theological Seminary & Graduate School and around 240 other seminaries throughout North America all have in common? They are all accredited through the Association of Theological Seminaries (ATS).

What do Cincinnati Christian University, Columbia International University, Eston College, Hope International University, Moody Bible Institute, Multnomah University, Nazarene Bible College, and Prairie Bible College and about 90 other colleges and seminaries throughout North America all have in common? They are all accredited through the Association for Biblical Higher Education.

What do the two accreditation organizations – Association of Theological Seminaries and Association for Biblical Higher Education - have in common? Both associations require schools that wish to be accredited to include Spiritual Formation within the school’s infrastructure. Just what exactly does that mean for these 350 some seminaries and Bible colleges? Well, it means that if they want to receive and maintain their accreditation, they are going to have to incorporate Spiritual Formation (i.e., contemplative spirituality) into the lives of their students.

This would certainly answer, in large part, a question that Lighthouse Trails has had – how is it that contemplative spirituality has become so widespread so quickly within Christian colleges and seminaries over the past decade?

We were told, when we contacted ATS, that “Each school and tradition approaches this [Spiritual Formation] in a different way.” In other words, how one school defines “Spiritual Formation” may differ from how another school defines it, they say. Yet, both accreditation associations have made it very clear that they are speaking of contemplative spirituality when they are speaking of Spiritual Formation. That’s easy to prove. A look around their websites and in their handbooks shows clear signs of the contemplative emphasis.

Take the Additional Resources for Seminary Presidents 18-page handbook, for instance, from ATS. It recommends books by mysticism advocates Jim Collins (Good to Great), Daniel Goleman (author of The Meditative Mind), Peter Drucker, Henri Nouwen, Buddhist sympathizer Peter Senge (recommending his book The Fifth Discipline (the 5th discipline meaning meditation)), contemplative advocate (and editor of the Practices of Faith series) Dorothy Bass, Catholic nun and Buddhist zen practitioner Rose Mary Dougherty(also part of the panentheistic Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation); and there are numerous other “Spiritual Formation/contemplative” advocates in the list of “Additional Resources for Seminary Presidents.”

In the ATS Handbook under Assessing Outcomes in the Master of Divinity Program, where it talks about assessing students progress, it states:

The Master of Divinity degree program standard requires that students be educated in four areas: (1) Religious Heritage, (2) Cultural Context, (3) Personal and Spiritual Formation, and (4) A Guide for Evaluating Theological Learning Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership . . . The MDiv standard requires each school to address the four areas. (page 4, Section 8)

The ATS is determined that Spiritual Formation is integrated through all four of these areas:

However, the standard indicates that achievement and formation in these four areas should be integrated: “Instruction in these areas shall be conducted so as to indicate their interdependence with each other and with other areas of the curriculum, and their significance for the exercise of pastoral leadership.” (A.3.1.1.3)

Integrated outcomes result from an integrated curriculum and instructional strategies. ( page 8, Section 8)

The Spiritual Formation/contemplative focus at the Association for Biblical Higher Education is as troubling as it is at ATS. In the ABHE Programmatic Standards handbook, it states under Curriculum - “Essential Elements: “[A]n accredited graduate program is characterized by... A learning environment that cultivates critical thinking, theological reflection, spiritual formation, and effective leadership/ministry practice” (p. 46). That might sound vague, but the recently held ABHE Leadership Development Conference helps clarify ABHE’s view of Spiritual Formation. Session 1 was titled: Student Spiritual Formation—Principles, Processes, Issues, Resources & Assessment. This session was presented by Todd Hall of Biola University, a

school that has clearly come out on the side of contemplative spirituality. Hall co-authored a book with contemplative advocate Dr. John Coe, who is the director of Biola's Institute of Spiritual Formation; Hall also teaches Spiritual Formation at the Institute, which turns to the ancient mystics for spiritual understanding. It is interesting to note the following: "Todd also developed the Spiritual Transformation [a contemplative term] Inventory (STI), a measure of Christian spirituality that is being used in national assessment projects conducted by the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE), and Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)." In other words, when it says "a measure of Christian spirituality that is being used" to assess students at Christian schools, it means that assessment is made under the lens of contemplative spirituality. Students are assessed to see if they are properly absorbing their spiritual disciplines ala Spiritual Formation.

ABHE's Council of Reference members list also indicates a contemplative agenda. Members include J.P. Moreland (whom Lighthouse Trails has critiqued for his contemplative advocacy) and contemplative musician Michael Card. And if one looks through the names on the Board of Directors, Senior Fellows, and the Advisory Board, other contemplative/Spiritual Formation proponents show up as well.

Students who oppose or resist contemplative spirituality aren't going to find success in these 350 theological Spiritual Formation-driven schools. According to the ATS Handbook, "direct evidence of students reaching stated goals is needed" (page 9, Section 8). In a section titled Quality Assurance Expectations, it explains again that students will be expected to "provide evidence" that they are being transformed into their view of spirituality:

[T]heological schools are required to provide evidence that students in general reach stated learning outcomes. ( A Guide for Evaluating Theological Learning)

In the summer of 2010, Moody Bible Institute, accredited through ABHE, took part in ABHE's Assessment and Accountability Project. A report on this project explains in depth the criteria for assessing the outcomes of student success. The four areas are Biblical, Transformational, General/Experiential, and Missional (Transformational, Experiential, and Missional are terms used frequently by contemplative/emerging pioneers). The "suggested assessments" include ABHE Spiritual Formation Assessment (p. 7). On page 17, it explains that students will need to "demonstrate the knowledge of specific spiritual disciplines."

Incidentally, the ABHE Spiritual Formation Assessment is given every year whereas some other programs at ABHE are only assessed every three years. Clearly, ABHE intends to see Spiritual Formation thriving at these accredited member schools. One of the ways they will do this is through the influence of Henri Nouwen. In the Winter 2010 ABHE Journal is an article titled: "Hospitable Teaching, Redemptive Formation, and Learning Mobility: A Spirituality of Teaching Based upon the Writings of Henri J.M. Nouwen" by Neal Windham. Nouwen's idea of hospitality and redemption incorporated mystical practices, universalism, and an interfaith reconciliation.

Anyone who thinks that Moody Bible Institute is not going to succumb to the pressure from ABHE to implement a full Spiritual Formation program at Moody is not looking at the obvious here. Already Moody has a Master of Arts in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship. By the way,

the report we mentioned – ABHE’s Assessment and Accountability Project – is on Moody’s website. In the past, Moody has condemned Lighthouse Trails for our efforts to warn them because they were veering toward contemplative/emerging figures. What shall they say now? They HAVE incorporated Spiritual Formation (that is, contemplative spirituality).

One other case in point, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School has been accredited by ATS since the 70s. It went through its latest assessment by ATS in 2010 and passed. That is partly because Trinity now has a Spiritual Formation “pillar.” Some may argue that just because a school uses the term doesn’t mean they are going contemplative. But in virtually every case we have ever examined, if a school is using that term, they are using the writings of the contemplative mystics. As for Trinity, so are they. In their 2011-2012 catalog (p. 197), they list some recommended authors for incoming seminary students. Among those authors is Henri Nouwen and Brother Lawrence. This means that incoming students are being introduced, before they even get started, to contemplative writers. Trinity also has on this recommended reading list Lesslie Newbigin, a Scottish writer and Bishop who is looked to for insights by emerging church figures because of his sympathetic and embracing views of postmodernism (i.e., emerging). Trinity has at least one course, DE 5740, that is called Spiritual Formation. And in a student chapel service in October 2010, contemplative pioneer Dallas Willard was the guest speaker. Willard is aligned with Richard Foster, and both men have had a major influence in bringing contemplative spirituality into the evangelical church.

The future of Christian theological schools is bleak. In many cases, they are the most dangerous places for Christians to be, from a biblical point of view. Already scores of them are implementing contemplative spirituality, via Spiritual Formation programs, into the lives of their students. And remember, these students are the evangelical/Protestant church’s future pastors, youth pastors, Sunday school teachers, professors, and leaders. Thanks to ATS and ABHE, there’s little doubt that a growing number of Christian seminaries and colleges will join the ranks of contemplative-promoting schools. Consider the following by some of the people who are recommended on the resource list at ATS. This will illustrate the severity of this epidemic of apostasy.

Henri Nouwen: “Today I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.” (Sabbatical Journey, Nouwen, p. 51, 1998 Hardcover Edition)

Rose Mary Dougherty: A Catholic nun who teaches zen and contemplative prayer says that her Zen Buddhist meditation does not conflict with her Catholic faith. ([http://www.religionnews.com/index.php?/rnstext/can\\_a\\_bishop\\_also\\_be\\_a\\_buddhist/](http://www.religionnews.com/index.php?/rnstext/can_a_bishop_also_be_a_buddhist/))

Daniel Goleman: “The meditation practices and rules for living of these earliest Christian monks [the Desert Fathers] 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.” Daniel Goleman, *The Meditative Mind* (Los Angeles, CA: Tarcher/Putnam Inc., 1988), p.53; (taken from

chapter 2 of A Time of Departing) Note: Goleman's book advocates Tantric sex, Kundalini, T.M. and other deep occultic meditative practices.

We realize our article could raise some questions. In a future article, we hope to address questions such as "Can a Christian seminary wishing to have accreditation for their Masters of Divinity (and such) degrees be accredited through another accreditation organization?" and "Are there any seminary accreditation organizations that do not require Spiritual Formation?" In the meantime, if you know someone who is attending a seminary or Christian college that is accredited by ATS or ABHE, the quotes above are a representation of what that person may be getting rather than the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.