

# THE CULT OF GURU RICHARD FOSTER

By Rev. Ken Silva, Southern Baptist Pastor-teacher, August 12, 2008

*You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ([Galatians 3:1-3, NASB](#))*

## **Spiritual Guru Richard Foster Restores What The Church Lost**

In his excellent series called [Mysticism](#) Gary Gilley, whom I'm pleased to call a friend, discusses [Living Spiritual Teacher](#) and "Christian" Roshi [Richard Foster](#). Foster, a [Quaker](#) mystic, is hands down the leading proponent of the spiritually corrupt [Contemplative Spirituality/Mysticism](#) movement—aka so-called "Christian" mysticism—currently crippling the evangelical community through the spurious [Spiritual Formation](#) as taught by Foster along with his spiritual twin [Dallas Willard](#).

Foster also happens to be author of *Celebration of Discipline* (CoD), which is the definitive textbook for the "spiritual disciplines," e.g. [Contemplative/Centering Prayer](#) (CCP), all of which flowered in the antibiblical monastic traditions of apostate [Roman Catholicism](#). As Gilley points out:

"classical mysticism was virtually unknown in Evangelical circles until 1978 when Quaker minister Richard J. Foster published *Celebration of Discipline, the Path to Spiritual Growth*. Hailed by *Christianity Today* as one of the ten best books of the twentieth century and voted by the readers of that magazine as the third most influential book after the Bible, *Celebration of Discipline* has blown the doors off evangelicals' understanding of spirituality."

"What Foster has done, in essence, is reintroduce to the church the so-called "masters of the interior life" as he likes to call the Medieval mystics. He declares that they alone have discovered the key to true spiritual life and slowly, over the last few years, convinced multitudes that he is right."

But [Apprising Ministries](#) is pleased to show you that Gilley has also already warned the Church:

“*Celebration of Discipline*, alone, not even referencing Foster’s other writings and teachings and ministries, is a virtual encyclopedia of theological error. We would be hard pressed to find in one so-called evangelical volume such a composite of false teaching. These include faulty views on the subjective leading of God (pp. 10, 16-17, 18, 50, 95, 98, 108-109, 128, 139-140, 149-150, 162, 167, 182); approval of New Age teachers (see Thomas Merton below); occultic use of imagination (pp. 25-26, 40-43, 163, 198); open theism (p. 35); misunderstanding of the will of God in prayer (p. 37); promotion of visions, revelations and charismatic gifts (pp. 108, 165, 168-169, 171, 193); endorsement of rosary and prayer wheel use (p. 64); misunderstanding of the Old Testament Law for today (pp. 82, 87); mystical journaling (p. 108); embracing pop-psychology (pp. 113-120); promoting Roman Catholic practices such as use of “spiritual directors,” confession and penance (pp. 146-150, 156, 185); and affirming of aberrant charismatic practices (pp. 158-174, 198).”

([Online source](#))

Even so, it is very likely that this travesty of a book is probably even on the shelf of your own pastor. Leaving this aside for now, I pray that this piece will at least alert you to keep your antenna up concerning the false doctrine spread by Guru Foster. As one who began in the ministry of evangelizing non-Christian cults I wanted to alert you of a cult currently growing around Richard Foster which is right now infecting the evangelical community. In large part through the postliberal cult of the [Emergent Church](#) where corrupt contemplative mysticism was a core doctrine from its inception.

And if you don’t think Guru Foster’s contemplative mystical mumbo jumbo is infiltrating evangelicalism, think again. In his excellent critique of *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Foster’s partner Dallas Willard, who is an ordained Southern Baptist minister as well as a popular “evangelical” philosopher and author, pastor Bob DeWaay informs us:

Dallas Willard is excited to tell us that finally, through the lead of people like Richard Foster, we are having a revival of the use of spiritual disciplines. Writes Willard: “Today, for the first time in our history as a nation, we are being presented with a characteristic range of human behaviors such as fasting, meditation, simple living, and submission to a

spiritual overseer, in an attractive light.” He claims that ordinary means such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism are inadequate and having failed, have left most Christians as failures. ([Online source](#))

According to Foster and Willard the Church lost these “disciplines” until Foster “found” them, although those of us who know the history of the Christian Church can tell you that these neo-Gnostic practices were alive and well within the Church of Rome and specifically the mystic monastic traditions. Gilley then points out that Eugene Peterson, of the *Message* fame and author of *The Contemplative Pastor*, says of spiritual Guru Foster:

“in the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Celebration of Discipline*, “Like a child exploring the attic of an old house on a rainy day, discovering a trunk full of treasure and then calling all his brothers and sisters to share the find, Richard J. Foster has ‘found’ the spiritual disciplines that the modern world stored away and forgot, and has excitedly called us to celebrate them. For they are, as he shows us, the instruments of joy, the way into mature Christian spirituality and abundant life” (p. 206). ([Online source](#))

### **Heading Right Back Home To The Bondage Of Rome**

Not good enough for you? We also have [James Emery White Teaching Contemplative Mysticism](#) where I show you just how deep within the veins of the American Christian Church this spiritual venom has traveled. Here one needs to keep in mind that White was one of the speakers at [The National Conference on Preaching](#) along with Purpose Driven Pope [Rick Warren](#).

In [James Emery White Promotes Contemplative Mysticism](#) I link to White’s article at the [Rick Warren’s Ministry Toolbox](#) website, which is actually an excerpt from chapter 4 of White’s book *Serious Times* (ST). This chapter entitled “Deepening Our Souls” extols the virtues of the contemplative life discussing practices that flowered in the antibiblical monastic traditions of the Church of Rome such as “Silence and Solitude” (85), “Spiritual Direction” (88) and “St. Benedict’s Rule” (90).

At this point I want you to keep in mind that James Emery White is a former president of “Protestant” evangelical Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and is still a professor there. And yet in ST here we find professor White quoting from all of the usual suspects of heretical mysticism—Foster,

Thomas R. Kelly— who was another spiritually corrupt Quaker mystic—as well as apostate Roman Catholics [Henri Nouwen](#), [Thomas Merton](#), and [Teresa of Avila](#).

In fact, White tells us of Foster:

There are many protests to the demands of living under a rule [of spiritual order/direction], but in the end practices themselves are not the issue. The goal is to seek the face of God in such a way that Christ is formed in us. By themselves spiritual disciplines can do nothing. Richard Foster wisely reminds us, “They can only get us to the place where something can be done.” (93)

But what White is actually describing is a return to the very Romish spiritual bondage that we were delivered from at the Reformation. The question we need to be asking here is why are evangelical pastors and leaders getting their spiritual teaching from a Quaker mystic who very likely is not even regenerate. Consider the following from Phil Johnson of the well known website [Pyromaniacs](#).

He has kindly given me permission to share the following:

“I met Foster almost 25 years ago when we were both slated to teach seminars at a couple of writers’ conferences. At the time, he was teaching at Friends University in Wichita, which is a small college founded by Quakers and happens to be where my Mom got her degree in the early 1960s. So we had some things in common and spent quite a bit of time talking. He is a capable writer and a very likable person.”

“But in my opinion, he is not an evangelical. He does not seem to have any clear understanding of the gospel or the atonement. That’s why his emphasis is all about “spirituality” and “spiritual disciplines” and various things the worshiper must do, with virtually no emphasis on what Christ has done for sinners. I’ve read several of Foster’s books and have never even seen him mention the cross as a propitiation for sins.”

“Moreover, he blends all kinds of works-based approaches to spirituality, which he borrows from diverse “Christian” traditions and even from other religions’ mystical and superstitious practices. In my estimation, all of that puts him far outside the pale of orthodoxy. Although he occasionally makes

quotable remarks and valid observations, he is by no means a trustworthy teacher.”

But is this still not good enough for you? Then how about the *Radio Bible Class*, you can't get more mainstream evangelical than that. In [Emergent Interfaith Compromise](#) I brought out that even RBC has been influenced by this spiritual discipline foolishness as they have a few times turned to contemplative universalist Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) for his supposed “spiritual” wisdom. The end result of his practice of messed up mysticism summed up in his warped “wisdom” as he writes:

“Today I personally believe that 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 way to God**. (Sabbatical Journey, 51)”

### **Richard Foster And Quaker Mysticism**

The egregious influence of Richard Foster’s neo-Gnosticism has spread much further than you might think. This now brings us to another critical issue which has not been thoroughly explored in the study of this invasion of contemplative spirituality/mysticism into the evangelical camp. As I have already mentioned Guru 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 understanding about this supposed “inward life” developed by these spiritual disciplines was itself shaped then it becomes necessary to have a working background of the theology of this group within which Foster 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.**

Well then, it would appear this 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 also 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 it was in the wake of “the struggle” within various religious sects following the Reformation that:

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* 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 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) I cover this “inner light” that is supposed to glimmer “in every human heart” in great depth in *Contemplating the Inner Light of the Quakers* [Part One](#) and [Part Two](#).

And then in his classic two volume set *A History Of Christianity* (AHOC) the great 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 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 that the heretical view of mysticism is already rooted in the base theology of the Quakers. Their founder George Fox, who was himself prone to mysticism, wished for a “personal” approach “to God” that ended up being “apart from the Bible.”

Now this should come as no surprise when Gilley points out this is the exact same approach Foster used to “discover” his extrabiblical spiritual disciplines:

Having come to the conclusion that there must be “more spiritual resources than I was experiencing,” he prayed, “Lord, is there more you want to bring into my life? I want to be conquered and ruled by you. If there is anything blocking the flow of your power, reveal it to me.” God seemed to answer this prayer through a growing impression that something in his past was impeding the flow of life so he set aside blocks of time on three consecutive days to listen to God in absolute silence, through the use of journaling, a process whereby God is supposed to reveal His mind to the silent participant. After the third day Foster took his lists to a friend, who volunteered to serve as his confessor, who prayed for healing for all the sorrows and hurts of Foster’s past as presumably revealed by God.

It was following this experience of journaling, an experience not taught in the Bible but common in the occultic world, that it seemed to him that he “was released to explore what were for me new and uncharted regions of the Spirit. Following that event, I began to move into several of the Disciplines described in this book that I had never experienced before.” It is most disturbing that Foster’s magnum opus stems from a questionable Divine encounter of a dubious nature. But it is also significant to realize that Foster’s system for spiritual formation is not drawn from the Scriptures but from subjective experiences involving unbiblical methodologies and reinforced by Roman Catholic mystical practices. ([Online source](#))

So now you should be able to see that both Foster and Fox began with their theology already turned backward by believing that it is man who seeks after God and as a result the Scriptures were forced to take a back seat to his own way of approaching the Lord. We need to carefully consider the above information. Both Quakers were seeking a “direct” and “mystical experience” with God. Admirable yes; 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.

In the case of Foster and Fox consider how they was “eager” long enough while waiting “in silence” until “the light broke” and they finally received their mystic delusion that “it is possible for all men” to “open their lives” to God. As I said, the “experience” of George Fox, a mentor to for Foster, shoved the Truth of the Bible into a secondary place in favor of this mystical view that it is possible that “all men” are capable of opening themselves up 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.”

As such you see Fox has absolutely no excuse for missing this 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 like this is some obscure passage the Puritans latched onto but is 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)*

We aren’t able to escape this absolute Truth concerning the actual nature of mankind in the New Testament either—repeated as it is by the Holy Spirit in [Romans 3:10-12](#). O sure, the sappy sentimentality of postevangelicalism just loves to focus on the goodness of God and to tell us that He sent Jesus to solve all of our problems and postliberalism sees Jesus as the radical social reformer instituting a kind Christian Marxism ala [Rob Bell](#) and [Shane Claibourne](#).

However, in addition to being fully Man, 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 unregenerate humankind, in contradistinction to God, the Master tells his Own disciples—as well as us—in terms which are unmistakable:

*“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!”*

[\(Matthew 7:11\)](#)