

## SUMMARY

This dissertation looks at the *Centering Prayer* (CP), a new form of meditative prayer, that was developed in 1970s by three Trappist monks Frs. Thomas Keating, M. Basil Pennington and William Meninger. Its creators stress thought that it comes from a centuries long Christian contemplative tradition.

Since it is not well known in Poland, one goal of this dissertation is to present both the method and theology behind the *Centering Prayer*. Another one is to confirm its Christian origins by analyzing the works the founders claim as its basis. The *Centering Prayer* has become very popular and has spread from the US to many countries around the world, but has not gained universal supports. Critics of the *Centering Prayer* accuse it of being a Christianized version of Eastern meditation methods and that it is not a Christian prayer at all. That's why yet another goal of this project is to analyze the texts of the critics and compare them with the texts of its founders and its supporters. Finally, this project analyzes studies on meditation methods, including studies on CP, as well as their results suggesting that they are beneficial for health and well-being. Meditation methods are being used extensively in both stress management programs and treatment supportive therapies. Since the *Centering Prayer* has been proposed as an alternative to Eastern meditation methods for Christians, additional goal is to study this proposal.

The *Centering Prayer* is a simple form of prayer, one that helps to quiet the mind and prepare for the gift of contemplation. A person is asked to choose a prayer word that has meaning for him or her and which expresses his or her intention to consent to God's presence and His action within them. Then, sitting quietly with closed eyes, they start to gently repeat it, while letting go of their thoughts. The word does not have to be repeated continually. The prayer word is not supposed to remove thoughts from the mind, instead it helps people to separate from their thoughts, so that they can focus, in love and trust, on God that dwells in their heart.

The use of repetition of a word or phrase is not an idea that only exists withing Eastern meditation. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a book from the fourteenth century by an unknown author, showed similar advice to that of the Trappists. It recommends the repetition of short word with "the naked intent" to seek God and only God. A similar practice of repetition is also

found in the Hesychast tradition of the Desert Fathers, the Jesus Prayer, and in John Cassian's *Conferences*, as well as in Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy or litanies. This research confirms that *Centering Prayer* is rooted within the Christian tradition.

In analyzing and comparing Eastern methods of meditation to the *Centering Prayer* it can be seen that while some elements of the technique, such as frequency (twice a day) or length of prayer (20 min) might have been adopted by Trappists, no religious content was taken along with it. Even though there are some similarities between these meditation techniques, the *Centering Prayer* differs from Eastern methods in its essence. With its strong emphasis on the desire to love God and seek Him, it helps a person to surrender to God in trust and to grow in love, leading him or her to union with Christ. Still, the language that Keating uses is difficult and some elements of his theology, especially those concerning the mystical union with God, need to be studied in more detail.

Finally, analysis of more recent research publications confirmed that the practice of meditation methods positively influences human wellness and health, revealing a strong connection between the mind and the body. Meditation methods proved to be effective in stress management and as treatment supportive therapies. Beneficial changes were observed not only on the physiological level, improvement was reported in psychological and spiritual outcomes too. It has even been proposed that it is the spiritual growth within the individual that promotes psychological well-being. Although most of this research was done on Eastern methods, a few studies on the *Centering Prayer* suggest that similar beneficial changes occur also in those who practice CP. More studies are needed, but those already published show that there are health benefits, at the same time supporting Thomas Keating's teaching on Divine therapy that takes place during the practice of *Centering Prayer*. He explains that when a person opens up to God and let go of all the attachments to things, thoughts and desires, God heals and purifies his or her unconsciousness and bring them closer to Himself. It is important to remember however, that the Trappists stress that the *Centering Prayer* is a prayer, not a therapeutical tool.

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