

A Brief Timeline of Centering

Desert Fathers, 3rd-5th Century, Lived in deserts of Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Arabia. First monastic life.

Evagrius The Solitary c. 345-399
Teacher of Cassian.

John Cassian, c 360-435, "...visited the solitaries most famous for holiness in Egypt." Wrote *Conferences of the Desert Fathers*. Founded the Abbey of St. Victor(Marseille) about 415.

Pseudo-Dionysius 6th Century. Wrote *Mystical Theology* and *Divine Names* Syrian monk who wrote in Greek. His "apostolic" standing was unquestioned until the 16th Century. "...influenced every page" of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. In the *Cloud*, Pseudo-Dionysius is referred to as St. Denis – legendary first Bishop of Paris. His basic teaching – "the incomprehensibility of God."

Richard of St. Victor (Paris), 12th Century – died 1179. Founder of medieval mysticism. His writings "... yielded words, paragraphs, ... chapters to *The Cloud of Unknowing* as well as its distinctive title." Victorines included Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Gallus.

Meister Eckhart 1260 – 1320. For reference only.

The Cloud of Unknowing written sometime 1349-1395. Author in his writings speaks of Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine, St. Bernard, Thomas Gallus, Thomas Aquinas
Chapter 70 "... whoever cares to examine the works of Denis, he will find that his words clearly corroborate all that I have said and am going to say..."

Gregory of Nyssa, c. 330-395, One of the Greek Fathers along with Origen. Trinity, universal salvation, experiential experience of God. In the *Life of Moses*, Gregory speaks of three stages of this spiritual growth: initial darkness of [ignorance](#), then spiritual [illumination](#), and finally a darkness of the mind in mystic [contemplation](#) of the God who cannot be comprehended.^[42]

Scetis colony in Egypt.

Council of Nicea 325 AD

St. Augustine, c 354 – 430, For reference only.

St. Benedict, c 480 – 550. Ordered selections of Cassian's *Conferences* be read to monks under his Rule.

John Scotus Erigena. Wrote *De Divisione Naturae*. Irishman who served in the court of Charles the Bald (Holy Roman Emperor) about 850. Translated to Latin the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*.

[Not John Duns Scotus c 1266]

St. Albert the Great. Gave university (Paris) lectures in Paris on Pseudo-Dionysius before 1250. Died 1280. Scholasticism.

St. Thomas Aquinas, 13th Century Scholasticism. Lectured on the *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius. Died 1274. Canonized 1323.

Julian of Norwich c 1342 – 1416.
For reference only.

Teresa of Avila 1515 – 1582

John of the Cross 1542 -- 1591

1. *Conference IX* – John **Cassian** -- Chapter 35 (Abbot Isaac) c 420

The ultimate way to pray is "wordless prayer"

“Before anything else, we must carefully observe the gospel command which says that we should go into our room and pray to our Father with the door shut. We shall fulfill this in the following way. We pray in our room when we withdraw our hearts completely from the clatter of every thought and concern and disclose our prayers to the Lord in secret and, as it were, intimately. We pray with the door shut when, with closed lips and in total silence, we pray to the searcher not of voices but of hearts. We pray in secret when, intent in heart and mind alone, we offer our petitions to God alone... prayer should be made frequently, but briefly...”

2. *Mystical Theology* -- **Pseudo-Dionysius** -- Chapter 1 Written before 532

Let this be my prayer; but do, dear Timothy, in the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and nonbeing, that you may arise by unknowing towards the union, as far as is attainable, with it that transcends all being and all knowledge. For by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of yourself and of all things you may be borne on high, through pure and entire self-abnegation, into the super essential Radiance of the Divine Darkness.

3. *The Cloud of Unknowing* – **Anonymous** c 1350

“Let thoughts go – seek God in love. “

“...lift your heart to God with humble love. ... [your prayer is] a naked intention directed to God and himself alone...”

“If you want this intention summed up in a word, to retain it more easily, take a short word, preferably of one syllable, to do so...”

“... you are to suppress these insidious thoughts and cover them up with a thick cloud of forgetting, ... “

Richard Rohr on 1-19-2017

Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy have a long but intermittent tradition of teaching contemplation. Catholics today may know the word *contemplation*, but that doesn't mean we know the actual *how* or the important *why*. Instead of teaching silent mindfulness, in recent centuries the church emphasized repetition of rote, wordy prayers, and “attendance” at social prayer. Even most of the great contemplative Orders (Cistercian, Carmelite, Poor Clare, etc.) now recognize that they stopped directly teaching the practice of silent prayer to their own members. **Contemplative prayer was largely lost after the dualistic, tribal fights of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. The utter vulnerability of silence did not allow us to “prove” anything and so was no longer attractive.** The Protestant tradition does not have a strong history of contemplation beyond a few isolated individuals who discovered it on their own. The Orthodox tradition had it well-documented on paper and in a few monasteries, but it was far too tribal to go where contemplation always leads—toward universal compassion, inclusivity, and nonviolence. <https://cac.org/contemplative-christianity-great-tradition-2017-01-19/>