

CONTEMPLATION

The etymological root of the word contemplation is derived from '*contemplatio*', which signifies, gazing with rapt attention. The word 'contemplation' etymologically is derived from the Latin *templum*, a derivative of *tempus*, generally translated as "time". *Tempus* literally signifies "a division or section of time". In the Roman tradition *templum* was assigned to a particular space in the sky or on the earth to read the omens and dreams. Thus, the development of this term finally ended up in a coined word "temple" signifying a sacred place where mysterious rituals were held to discover the divine meaning and purpose. Hence, the word "con - templum" actually signified not so much referring to a place or space, but to the actual "looking" at the inside of reality to grasp its real meaning. The "looking at the inside of reality" is nothing else than penetrating the very essence and grasping the whole instead of the parts. The Greek word for this "grasping of the whole" is *theoria*, approximates the Latin *contemplatio*. The word *theoria* is derived from *theorin*, signifying "look at something intently and with a purpose". Some Greek fathers held that the word *theoria* signified "natural contemplation" which is 'intently finding the traces of God in created things'. They would rather use another word "*theologia*" for the highest form of contemplation, which is 'immediate, direct and total awareness of God' that leads one to oneness with Him. In the Christian tradition the word 'contemplation' is used for non-discursive mental prayer, as distinguished from reflective meditation. In so far as this stage of prayer is to be reached through the normal development of the natural faculties, it is termed 'acquired contemplation'. When considered as the fruit of supernatural grace, directly acting on the soul, it is known as 'infused contemplation'.

Natural Contemplation

This type of contemplation can be achieved through personal efforts. It is a process by which we become one with the object of observation. We can enter into contemplation within no

time with a beautiful flower, tree, scenery, a bird etc. Even if you watch a flower you will die in the flower. You will forget yourself. You will experience a merging, a melting. Suddenly you will feel you are not, only the flower is. Jesus used to say to his disciples, not only once but many times “If you have eyes – look! If you have ears, hear me!” Those who were around Jesus had eyes just like ours and ears just like ours, but they failed to see and hear. What a truth! Nietzsche declared ‘God is dead’. In fact when we are dead, how can God be alive to us? When we see, we see God, when we hear, we hear Him. When we do not see, do not hear, do not touch and do not speak we are dead to ourselves and equally dead to God. We can find God if we want. When I say ‘I do not see’ certainly that object does not exist for me. This is what natural contemplation is. We become one with creation and with the presence of God. We forget ourselves and we are fully aware of the other. This can happen naturally to us through our own cooperation.

Supernatural Contemplation

It is in supernatural contemplation that prayer reaches the experience of the all-embracing and all encompassing. The object of contemplation is the infinity of the divine life, the marvel of divine creativity, the inexhaustible meaning of the divine self-manifestation. Contemplation means participation in that which transcends the subject-object scheme and therefore the ambiguity of contemplative language is comprehensible.

Here are a few signs to discern if we are on the path to supernatural contemplation¹. The *first* is the realisation that one cannot make discursive meditation nor receive satisfaction from it as before. The *second* sign is an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties upon other particular objects, exterior or interior. The *third* and surest sign is that a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace, quiet and repose, and without the acts and exercises (at least discursive, those in

1 Cf. R. V. D’Souza, *Meeting in God Experience*, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand 1999, p. 20.

which one progresses from point to point) of the intellect, memory and will, and that he prefers to remain only in the general, loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, without any particular knowledge or understanding (*Ascent* II,13,ii-iii-iv).

A contemplative literally means one who is into something or into someone. It could also mean 'one has to be clay in the hand of the potter, a clay which is molded through prayer itself, content not to know in advance where it is going, only sensing it, as the process is actually taking place, from the disposition of the potter's shaping hands, confident that it is a good and loving work taking place', says Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Contemplative Prayer is the normal development of the grace of baptism and the regular practice of *Lectio Divina*. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative Prayer is a process of interior purification leading, if we consent, to divine union.

Contemplative prayer, in its simplest form, is prayer in which you still your thoughts and emotions and focus on God Himself. This puts you in a better state to be aware of God's presence, and it makes you better able to hear God's voice correcting, guiding, and directing you.... The fundamental idea is simply to enjoy the companionship of God, stilling your own thoughts so you can listen should God choose to speak. For this reason, contemplative prayer is sometimes Contemplative prayer (also referred to as centering prayer, breath prayer, meditation or listening prayer) is one of referred to as 'the prayer of silence'

Practitioners and teachers of contemplative prayer often maintain that inside all humans there is a "spark of the divine." Hence, the purpose of contemplative prayer is to become aware of – and connect with – this inner divinity.

Although God lives in the souls of men who are unconscious of Him, how can I say that I have found Him and found myself in Him if I never know Him or think of Him, never take any interest in Him or seek Him or desire His presence in my soul?

Contemplative prayer is a process of inner transformation, a conversation initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union. One's way of seeing reality changes in the process. A restructuring of consciousness takes place which empowers one to perceive, relate and respond with increasing sensitivity to the divine presence in, through, and beyond everything that exists.

Contemplative prayer is a conversation in which God's word has the initiative and we, for the moment, can be nothing more than listeners.

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