

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION?

Two simple definitions of contemplation are “concentration on spiritual things as a form of personal devotion.” And “a state of mystical awareness of God’s Being” (Miriam Webster dictionary)

And a third: Contemplation is the way of love (as with Richard Rohr)

While we don’t need to focus on this, it may be helpful to know the traditional three stages of contemplation:

Purification (includes moving beyond distractions)

Illumination (becoming aware)

Union (becoming one, as with Christ)

We could at any time be in any of these stages; practice moves us from one to the other consecutively. Don’t be upset if you can’t “really get into it”! Just know that with time, you can and you will.

Some biblical passages relevant to contemplation

I Kings 19:11-13 the sound of sheer silence

Isaiah 50:10 walks in darkness yet trusts

Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know

Mark 10:47-52 wanting to see

Luke 19:13 be merciful to me, a sinner

Philippians 2:6-11 have the mind of Christ

About contemplation

Contemplation is the highest expression of our intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is, above all, awareness of the reality of an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source. It *knows* the source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith.

Excerpts from *New Seeds of Contmplatation*, page 1

Possibly the best book for us about contemplation is Thomas Merton’s “New Seeds of Contemplation” It is not that expensive and provides good reading and reflection in a number of short chapters. \$14.95

THE NEW ORTHODOXY

Told as a story

Before anything was, God, who is love, felt lonely. So to remedy that, he brought forth from himself a Son to accompany him, to bring forth in their love and their joy. But then it seemed that was something missing, so they both brought forth the Holy Spirit to complete the circle, sharing their love and their joy in one another, weaving in and out, getting and giving in a dance, just as we humans might be in such a dance where we also are three, yet in our dancing become one.

Now, this love could not be contained, but overflowed into another that, while not God, shared it this divine love and joy. And so it was that the Son brought forth creation and poured himself into it, holding all together in communion with the divine; and in it, humans, free to choose this love for their very own. Here, then, God's beloved community had its beginning. And God saw all that had been made, and Behold!, he called it *very good*.

Now the humans, incomplete, had chosen self-love, not God's; and so at the right time the Son, who we now call Christ, became incarnate in Mary's son Jesus, to lead them in the right way by his teachings and example and by showing them God's suffering love that not even death on a cross could end. And Jesus' followers, enlightened by this awareness and empowered by the Holy Spirit, became the church to share this light, this good news, with the world, living freely by faith, hope, and love as they became forerunners of the kingdom of God; something very good, where all would be joined in the divine dance and become one forever..

Commentary

From beginning to end, this orthodoxy is one of love. The imagery of "dance" is intentional because it helps explain how three become one, and also because it is an orthodox of joy.

The love is also suffering because it is of a self-giving, self-sacrificing kind such as we find in Jesus, and in fact also, Richard Rohr tells us, in most major religions.

This orthodoxy roots in the original goodness of creation, not in original sin; with redemption found in awareness of this along with the forgiveness of our sins

Also, this orthodoxy is creation related. It sees God relating with all beings and as "the first incarnation," "the first Bible."

Richard Rohr relates this orthodoxy with the Eastern half of the Christian church, but it also relates to the Franciscan, as the prayer attributed to Saint Francis, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace..." might suggest. (Book of Common Prayer, page 833)