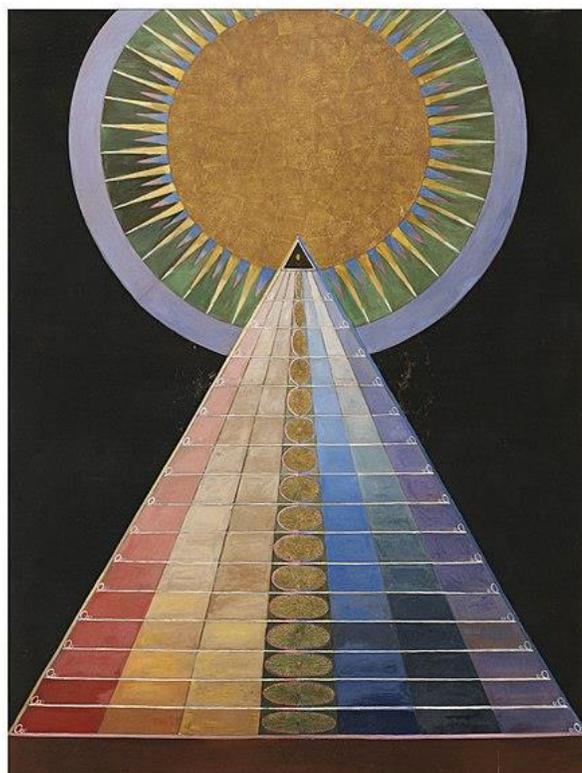




THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

41: The Human Condition: A Review



Hilma af Klint, *Altarpiece, No. 1, Group X*, 1907

*For I am about to do something new.
See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway through the wilderness.
I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.*

- Isaiah 43:19

In *Invitation to Love*, Fr. Thomas says the primary goal of this teaching on the human condition is "practical: to provide a solid conceptual background for the practice of contemplative prayer and the spiritual journey for our time. We are called to this journey not just for our own personal growth, but also for the sake of the whole human community."

The Evolutionary Model

The human condition can be presented as an evolutionary process unfolding from one level of consciousness to the next. Developmental psychology points to a similar process in the growth of each human being from infancy to the age of reason. Each level of consciousness is incorporated into the next level and, ideally, all that is good on one level is integrated into the next. However, it is also possible to become arrested at one level. The purpose of the spiritual journey is to heal the wounds of a lifetime that occurred on all levels.

The circumstances of our lives -- the unexpected, the trials, the crises, our relationships -- begin to uncover where we are in relation to God, ourselves, and others. We begin to uncover our hidden motivations and the influences that limit our freedom and our unfoldment into Christ. We learn that this is a healing journey, a journey of transformation.

The Existential Model

Fr. Thomas uses anthropology, biology, neuroscience and developmental psychology to shine a light on what he calls the human condition. He describes the stages of development of the human family (Uroboric, Typhonic, Mythic Membership, Mental Egoic and Intuitive) that are recapitulated in the stages of each person's development, from infancy to the age of reason. If the natural, human needs of security, affection and a sense of autonomy were met in early childhood, we would move from one stage of development to the next, integrating all that is good from previous levels and leaving behind what no longer serves us. The problem is when our preferences for meeting these needs turn into demands and expectations for the people, events and circumstances in our lives. The constant frustration of unmet needs and expectations forms our false-self system.

The Philosophical Model

The Philosophical Model develops our understanding of the human faculties – the senses, the intellect, and the will, and how each one functions according to its nature. Like the Evolutionary Model, this model is the ideal of how our powers and faculties work, while the Existential Model is the way human life is actually experienced.

In addition to the active intellect which gives us the ability to reason, we have a passive or intuitive intellect which perceives truth directly without the mediation of reason. This is the seat of our will to God, or our desire to seek that which can only be filled by God. The consistent practice of Centering Prayer helps us to "close the door" (Matthew. 6:6) on all our faculties except our intuitive level, which has the potential to lead us to divine union, awareness of the oneness of the human family and the oneness with all reality.

The Christian contemplative journey can restore the faculties to their proper place; resting in God allows the intuitive faculties to function at the deepest level, where we relate to God beyond thoughts, feelings and particular acts. With the emotions at rest we no longer resist the movement of

the Spirit. We begin to experience God in everything and everyone, in all of creation, which is another way of saying we are now living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel.

To Practice

- Review any narratives, video excerpts or transcripts you have found particularly helpful or you wish to take in again more deeply.

- Reflect on what you have been experiencing as you have studied the human condition teaching – and your own manifestation of the human condition -- while continuing your practice of Centering Prayer. This teaching, along with the prayer practice, has been transformative in the lives of many people. What do you notice has been changed in your thoughts and feelings? Where are you – in relation to God, others and yourself?

A Note: Though Fr. Thomas often refers to the human condition as the "false-self system," we recognize that it is not false because it is wrong, but because it is incomplete. It is not the fullness of what God created us to be—the evolution of the self, the integration of all the levels of consciousness and, finally the transcendence of self (no-self), wherein only Christ lives.

Notes and Reflections: