



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"Divine Transformation"
excerpted from
Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ

Thomas Keating and Betty Sue Flowers

Flowers: Jesus talks about the inner room. I'd like to know, what goes on in that inner room?

Keating: In the inner room, two things are taking place. One is the affirmation of our basic goodness. In other words, God is affirming once again the fact that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. God affirms that fact, or brings it to our attention, by certain affirmative experiences, such as a sense of peace, or that everything is okay, or that God loves us.

On the other side, is the purification of the unconscious. This includes not only the unloading of the emotional material from early childhood that we repressed and that needs to be evacuated through coming to consciousness. But also, over-identification with our group, whether it's family, clan, tribe, country, city-state, religion, ethnic group, and perhaps someday, the global village.

The false self is capable of over-identifying with anything at all. To prevent it from doing that, the divine therapy invites us to accept the purification of the unconscious, including the depth of the unconscious that can't normally be reached by a simple unloading process but requires the special action of divine love that casts a penetrating light that magnifies like a laser beam the perspective of whatever is hidden in our unconscious. So, the residue of the false self may still be embedded in our unconscious even after the transforming effects of the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit. Whether it can be entirely corrected in this life is hard to say. But it keeps searching as long as one lives, as far as I can see.

These emotional programs become identified with who we think we are and who we must be in order to be happy. The purification of the unconscious heals the pride, aggressiveness, the self-centeredness of the false self at its roots.

In the Centering Prayer practice, it's not enough to do the practice itself, even if this is done twice a day, unless at the same time one carries into daily life the effects of the humility and trust in God that the prayer is initiating through the development of the unconscious and the free expression of those powers. There's

a balance between both sides of these activities in the inner room. One mustn't forget the other side and the hazard that remains if we don't allow daily life to challenge our attitudes and to bring to consciousness, through events, what is passively brought to consciousness in the purification of the unconscious. Life in community can bring to our attention many of the dark sides of our personality that solitude alone might not be able to do. Hence, we need a comprehensive therapy.

And, indeed, as time goes on, the Divine Therapist extends the walls of our office, so to speak, our inner room, to the whole of life so that everything becomes a process of purification, of healing and of releasing the empowerment in the unconscious, and in facing more and more the dark side of our personality in the form of self-centeredness, that tends to focus ultimately on over-identification with our roles, our thoughts, feelings, bodies and ultimately, identity. Hence, Jesus says, to be my disciple you must deny your inmost self.

Flowers: That makes it sound as if difficult other people are also helpful in our path by bringing us up against the things that need to be purified on the personal, unconscious level.

Keating: Yes. Our enemies or those who rub us the wrong way or something like that are telling us something about ourselves. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with them.

Flowers: Forgive them, for they know not how they're helping us.

Keating: Yes, we project onto others what we dislike in ourselves. Hence, this is why to bring our prayer life into confrontation with the reality of daily life with its people and unexpected happenings is really a very important part of the whole purification and sanctification process. It might be called the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

It's not others who we should look upon as the problem, but as an invitation to look into our own motivation. What is it that's making this person or this situation so aggravating?

And this is to work comprehensively on the therapy that we're receiving in the inner room. Bringing it to the point where we unload all the material that we had repressed and can then, if not concomitantly, move on to the purifications of love, which addresses our attachments to programs or groups, or ourselves and especially that invite us to move beyond our dependence on groups for our identity as well as our roles.

Prayer in secret is the forgetfulness of self, so that if thoughts of self-reflection arise, "How am I doing?" or, "Is this the prayer of what-not?" we can move on knowing this is just the ego. Any reflection on self in prayer is ego stuff. So, as that conviction deepens, it becomes easier to say goodbye to those movements of the false self.

This pervasive, non-possessive attitude towards ourselves is the entrance and establishment of the Kingdom of God in us, which is Christ-consciousness. So now, the purification and the development of the unconscious into cosmic consciousness coincide and transformation then occurs, as a gift of both processes, along with humility and perfect love, in the sense of pure love. The one is the

other and the other is the one. And there is no place to go since you're already there. But you didn't get there. And so, to be there without the getting there is the epitome of the transformative process.

The true Self is who we really are, that is, a manifestation of God, and is more or less unknown to us, or buried in the unconscious because of the development of our false self and our preoccupations with furthering that development that coincides with the development of the ego and our self-consciousness and reflective capacities. So, the true Self is beyond reflection concepts.

But beyond the true Self, is the ultimate Self or the deepest Self, which is God, or in the Christian terminology, which is Christ in us. As Paul puts it, "I live now not I, but Christ lives in me."

As Catherine of Genoa is known to have said, "There is no me but God." So, "me" is my identity, and although we can never totally get rid of the fact that we are created, whatever that means, but at least it means that there is a uniqueness that can never be repeated in my existence, however you characterize this. But that to be really real, I have to allow that identity to be changed, or left at the disposal of the Divine Will. So that my will, my spiritual will, my choice can be always and totally in union with God's will, and this is the ultimate effect of transformation. As John of the Cross understands it, transformation is the transformation of our intellect and will into the divine intellect and will. An extraordinary statement that suggests that there's no movement in us except under the influence of the Holy Spirit and that our actions are more and more emerging from that place of surrender, silence and receptivity that is the full development of the contemplative process moving through various stages, some of which are temporary, to the permanent stage of transforming union that corresponds to true Self.