



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

“The Present Moment and All That Is” Excerpted from That We May Be One: Christian Non-Duality

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One advantage that Centering Prayer offers is that it establishes the letting go of self, the total sacrifice of ourselves, at least as the orientation and direction that grows along with our relationship with God. But, sacrifice in this world is not like it is in heaven. It can be very difficult, very painful, unbearable at times. All kinds of difficulties can arise, both socially and in our emotional or spiritual life, but faith says that whatever happens in the present moment is God's will and the only thing God can will is what is for our best good from his perspective. Maybe not from ours. So, by letting go of our own experience and turning it over to God, the presence of God begins to grow, even in the midst of activity.

Contemplation and action are not separate, but express themselves according to circumstances and the more broadminded one is, the more extended one is in openness to God and to other people and to mean well and to change, then the more of God's freedom one experiences and the more one can bear the sufferings of daily life, even horrendous disasters, because the presence of God relativizes all human experience in a way that transcends them, without necessarily delivering you from the particular aches and pains or violence that you're suffering. But, from this deep source within us of the Divine Indwelling, the Spirit gives us the courage and the humility and the trust to let it happen. So, the present moment, you might say, is God's way of communicating to us. It's God's computer, you might say.

Just as an aside, it might be fun if you just review sometime the levels of communication in human history, especially in the last hundred and fifty years. Just to give you a few: face-to-face communication is the basic one. Then comes writing letters, reading books, the telegram, the telephone, the TV, the DVDs, the Facebook, the Twitter, the cell phone, the text. So that we're experiencing this blast of all kinds of communication in a way that no generation ever had to face. It's a marvelous metaphor for our relationship with God which is not static. It's dynamic, and the Spirit is suggesting what to do in every present moment. So, that's why we haven't time to think of the past or the future, unless God brings it to our attention, because everything that we want is NOW. Our capacity is there. God is prepared to fill it, and we just have to go through the experience of development on each level of our humanity, culminating in living just to manifest God in whatever way we're supposed to.

In the Body of Christ, as Paul says, there's no good, better, and best. Everything is important. You can't say you don't need some part of it. Everything human is God texting us. And the senses, you might say, every one of them, are means in which God is communicating new truths, new aspects, showing his love and so on. Or, inviting us to transcend some of our limitations, and so he's very much ... has not only his fingers, but his whole being, you might say, focused on us, as if we were the only creature there was, love is infinite.

So, the present moment then, you might say, is the computer that God is always texting us. So, if we think we're alone, we're mistaken. As long as you have your cell phone on, you're in touch with all the world—it's a good symbol of relationship, because in relating to God, you're relate to everything that he made and everything that he made is good. This is the kind of conviction or conceptual background that we need to insist upon over and over again. It's being in the presence of God and being able to stay there and love being there, while submitting to the difficulties and duties or what happens at the same time. There is everything that's happening at the present moment, and there is this presence that doesn't change, that is always there, and which you contact in some degree when contemplative prayer begins to be firmly established. The experience of God just as a presence—and that presence can be so varied. It's varied according to all the senses and with progress all the physical senses become spiritual senses.

The sense of smell becomes an attraction towards interior silence and peace, and hearing you melt into a sound, or in seeing you melt into the tree, or in touching God sometimes embraces us or kisses us or whatever, you feel embraced. And finally, in tasting you experience the inner presence of God, which is nourishing and delicious and sustaining and all the other things. So, it's that kind of experience that enables the difficulties on the spiritual journey to be overcome and the overwhelming negativity of society, which is going in the opposite direction, faster and faster.

I think those scientific gadgets are marvelous metaphors of how many ways God is actually communicating to us at every moment. It's not just a statue or a picture we're thinking of. It's all of reality contained in its Creator here and now in a single instant. And I'm sure you've noticed questions being raised nowadays ... "What is time? What is eternity?" If it's time at all, it's totally different from our time. And so, time basically is the measure of motion. So, if there's no motion, there's no time. So, it's that experience that occurs if you're in very deep prayer or meditation at times where you're not thinking of anything, but you're thoroughly aware of the presence in whatever form it happens to take in this particular moment; but which can change. And so, you have to be open and adapting as whatever happens as an embrace from God or whatever your favorite sense image is.

The Buddhist recognize a sixth sense and they call that thinking. So, this is our chief problem. It's this faculty that needs to be controlled, and hence Scripture itself as well as all mystical teachers constantly say let all thoughts go, let God act. Let go and let God, is a saying from AA. But it's very insightful, because that's what we all have to do. We're going to continue to have thoughts, and we need them to function and to plan, but without attachment, without relying on them, and without just thinking any old thing but to have a certain discipline of being able to let go of thoughts that are harmful or unkind or unforgiving, or all the things that are possible in the myriad faculties of a human being.

The awakened state or the non-dual is not to even think about right and wrong, because you're always doing what is right, because you're under the influence of the Spirit. So, there's no need to think of self or the past or to worry about the future. It's now. Now, now, now, now.

That means a dual consciousness so that non-duality is really dual consciousness in which you are able to give your whole attention to the duties or expectations or [what] the senses are telling us with all the distractions of life, while at the same time never leaving this conviction – which is not so much an experience – as something beyond experience, a certain certitude that you're always in the presence of God and then you can see God in different things, whatever the Spirit may suggest.

The last thought is we stop making effort and just take everything as it comes. And then you're in the present moment. That's the only place God is. So, if you're there too, then all you have to do is accept what's happening; or do what God wants you to do about what's happening, which will be infused, and you believe that you'll be guided there, regardless of how many faults you have. And in fact, you rather like your faults, because they help to keep you humble and to realize there's more reason for staying in this world if you have to be here anyway.

So, what's the point of living? As far as I can see, it's only a day at a time to give God a chance to take over our very complicated human situation completely, or more completely. And whatever we do is in the service of that project, so we don't have to think about it if you're in the present moment.