



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

“From Contemplation to Action, Part 1”

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The Spiritual Journey Part 4, Contemplation: The Divine Therapy

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OUR PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

One of the most important Beatitudes to consider and reflect upon in our time is that which addresses the mythic membership level of developing human consciousness. That level corresponds to roughly four to seven, when as children we absorbed unquestioningly the values of our parents, peers, culture, television, and whatever influences were present when we didn't have a reason functioning to evaluate them. One of the most important facts of the human condition to keep up front in our time is the amount of cultural conditioning that each of us has absorbed and is subjected to and which prevents us from responding to the values of the Gospel. In other words, we bring unconsciously to human problems, to social problems, to our attitudes to family, world, church, nation, preconceived ideas, pre-packaged values that are very deeply laid up in us. And it's precisely this Beatitude that hungers and thirsts for justice that addresses that over-identification, that naive loyalty to our so-called traditions, and fails to take account of the living tradition of the Gospel, which is a call to personal response to Christ as a new form of world view, a new self-image in relation to Christ's Gospel values and the Beatitudes. And this is what frees us to take responsibility for our attitude to God, to other people, to the earth, and to the great social problems of our time.

THE MISSION

Let's take a few examples, please, that might be helpful. Not long ago there was a unique motion picture that appeared on the screen called "The Mission." And this dealt with a historical situation which existed in South America near the border of what is now Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil. In this place the Jesuit missionaries had created a kind of common life, an almost socialist, in the best sense of that word, regime in which the natives were being taught crafts to take care of themselves and had emerged out of the forest and had accepted the values of the Gospel. Well these indigenous people had been the subjects, or the prey, of higher political forces from Europe; namely, the Portuguese and the Spanish, who were the great world super- powers in those days. And they were battling over this territory and one or other of those nations were in the slave trade. So, this effort of the Jesuit missionaries to raise those people to a certain autonomy was threatening to their profits

and their extension of their nationalistic aspirations. The Spanish and the Portuguese ambassadors began putting pressure on the church authorities to end this mission so that the old slave trade could continue and their nationalistic aspirations be extended. And so, the governments threatened to close all the Jesuit institutions in their respective countries if the Holy See didn't close down this mission.

THE APOSTOLIC VISITOR

In this story there is the character of the Apostolic Visitor, who was formerly a Jesuit, who arrives in this missionary territory with preconceived or pre-packaged instructions to close the mission in order to save the Jesuit institutions in Europe which were threatened. And to understand what a dilemma it was for this man, you have to keep in mind that the Jesuits were doing an extraordinarily important work in bringing the reforms of the Council of Trent into activity. They had colleges, retreat houses, missions all over the world. So, to close that work down would have been an enormous disaster or loss for the work, both humanitarian and spiritual, that they were doing.

HORRENDOUS CONSEQUENCES

The visitor sees the remarkable work that the Jesuits had done there. He sees these wonderful people and these natives there, who had come out of the jungle and had started to humanize their attitudes and receive, in exchange for the primitive attitudes that they had, the new teaching of the Gospel. But because of this dilemma between saving the Jesuit institutions in Europe and the good of allowing this mission to continue, he gives orders to close it with consequences on all the people involved that were horrendous. And now the natives refuse to be closed down. And so, they decide to defend themselves and several of the Jesuit missionaries side with them. There's this armed, violent conflict, and there's a sub-plot, you might say, between the Jesuits who resort to violence to right this wrong, and the founder of the mission who simply refuses to use force to defend himself or the mission.

THIS IS THE WAY I MADE THE WORLD

Well, mercenaries are hired by these powers from abroad. And they bring their cannons and they destroy and massacre all the natives. And now, in the last scene, one sees the Apostolic Visitor, appalled by the disaster and the massacre. And he's being interviewed by the ambassadors who are kind of the villains in the plot, one of Portugal, one of Spain, who were reporting what happened. And the Visitor says, "Was this massacre necessary?"

The realization of what has happened is dawning upon this man, and one of the ambassadors says to him, "Oh, your Eminence, don't feel too badly. That's the way the world is!" And he walks over to the window, looks out and says, "NO. That's the way WE made the world!" And then, as you see this little tear in his eye emerging, he adds the crucial phrase: "This is the way I HAVE made the world."

THE GREAT QUESTION OF OUR TIME

Now this means that this man in that moment was awakened to what he had done. And the great thing about this movie and its plot is that it raises one of the great social issues of our time.

Do the innocent have rights if these interfere with the nationalistic profits or extension of world powers? That's the great question of our time. The Mythic Membership level of consciousness says: "That's the way it is. That's the way the world is. Whoever has power wins. The innocent, if they get ground down in the battle between the powers, too bad, that's the way it is." The Gospel says, "HELL NO! This is unjust; it can't be allowed to happen!" And if you're moving from this childish attitude of dependency on your cultural conditioning, this mindless, unquestioning response to social issues, then you're inert, you do nothing, you go along with what is legal. But what is legal is often unjust.

NO GREATER INJUSTICE IN HUMAN HISTORY

What the Nazis did was legal. It was according to their laws, but there was no greater injustice in human history than the Holocaust. Even Abraham Lincoln, under the cultural conditioning of his time, hesitated about the Emancipation Proclamation. His idea was to maintain the Union in the first months of his administration. And since the Constitution provided for States' rights, and slavery was a States' right in the south, he was for allowing the south to maintain slavery but not allow it to extend anywhere else. It was only with time that he began to see that the evil of slavery was the great issue of the Civil War and not just what he originally thought it was because of his mind set and his legal training (he was a lawyer - remember). In that story of "The Mission," the plot has captured the crucial question of our time and it's addressed to each of us.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

If people are starving in the ghettos of South America and India, who is responsible? As globalization takes place around the world, which is absolutely inevitable given the mass media and the interconnectedness of nations on every level of human exchange, unfortunately except spirituality, which would be the catalyst that would provide a perspective to discuss, negotiate and resolve some of these world problems; we simply have this inevitable interaction and networking. And it's spotlighting and focusing the injustice of mass populations that are accustomed to one way of seeing reality and settling differences by violence. Nothing could be more inhuman than to try to settle or resolve problems by violence. It's ridiculous.

GET OUT OF MY SANDBOX

Here's an example. Here's a youngster about three or four in a sandbox playing with a friend. He suddenly gets the idea that he'd like to have the sandbox all to himself. And so, he says to the other guy: "Get out of my sandbox." And the other says: "I will not." "Yes, you will." "I will not." "Yes, you will." And finally, he shoves him out of the sandbox, punches him right in the nose, and exults in his possession of the sandbox. And this is so much fun, he then goes to all the other sandboxes in the neighborhood. And because he's got a strong right arm, punches everybody until they get out of the sandbox. Now he's got ten sandboxes, a domain! an empire! And he feels bigger, greater: "There's nobody like me!"

WAR HAS NO JUSTIFICATION

This is still the way nations solve their problems. It's absolutely insane in a situation where the weapons are especially destructive to the innocent. According to the statistics of our century, wars kill more innocent people than soldiers. In a Christian consciousness this is intolerable because the basic necessity of the old just war theory, which seems to be completely out of date in our time,

given the weaponry that's now available, this fundamental justification is not to injure the innocent or to kill any of the innocent. But that is the nature of mass bombing in our time. War, from the Christian perspective, has no justification.

AN OBLIGATION

One wonders what the duties of the world religions are in our time in this situation. Historically they have contributed mightily to violence, war, prejudice, bias, division. And so, they, perhaps, more than any other category of human institutions, have an obligation in our time to do something together to address these great world problems of hunger, but especially of peace, and to emphasize the great, common human values that they all share, and preach, and teach. And yet they have not yet a networking process or place where they could speak as one voice about the deepest human values and in which their collective conscience could challenge the nationalistic interests of powers of the world and perhaps make war socially unacceptable.

THIS IS THE ROLE OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

We can't expect the military to end war. That's their profession; that's their mind set. Defense, aggression, is the way they are trained. The only way that war can become a no-no is if it is socially unacceptable. And this is the role of the world religions: to speak as one voice about the common source of the human family, its common goal, and the potential of every human being to reach the transcendent opportunities that have been given by the Source of all that is.

MYTHIC MEMBERSHIP CONSCIOUSNESS

Now this is why this understanding of the mythic membership consciousness is so important to grasp those on the spiritual journey, because these people are becoming more and more responsible. They're becoming more and more capable of taking positive and creative action. These are the people who feel the new consciousness of personhood and personal responsibility that comes into focus with the mental egoic state of consciousness.

These are the ones who are beginning to perceive the necessity to be a human being of harmony, negotiation, forgiveness, compassion. Those dispositions will become more clarified, more urgent, more powerful as humanity moves to the intuitive level, or as more and more individual people through the spiritual journey access the energy that we call the intuitive level of consciousness, and at that level we perceive intuitively the oneness of the human family. We feel the sufferings of other people. This is the level that Jesus was speaking to in the Sermon on the Mount when he speaks of showing mercy as the greatest wisdom. Or, again, in his parable about who will receive the reward of the kingdom at the Last Judgment, he speaks of those who visited the sick, helped the poor, fed the hungry, visited those in prison. All of those acts of mercy he identified as being done to himself. As the universal human being he represents then the deep self, the true self of everyone. And it is Christ who is suffering in everyone. And insofar as we have or experience union with Christ, we too experience that poignancy, that identification with the sufferings of others, that reaches out, and must reach out to do something, to help, however modest, according to our state of life and our possibilities.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE FALSE SELF

The mythic membership level is really a subhuman level of consciousness. Reason is active and has begun, but it hasn't evolved into its own unique set of characteristics that belong to that level of consciousness. It's still, as we've seen in our presentations, under the influence of the false self, with its biases and with its programs for happiness that won't let go. And it's also under the influence of the cultural conditioning, our peer group, our early relationships. What is necessary for people to grasp in our time is the limitations of that kind of consciousness.

APARTHEID

Here are a couple of more examples. Take the idea of apartheid, which is so up front in global concern today. This is the doctrine that whites are better than blacks. It is a color differentiation that has gathered all kinds of other accessory, but superficial and illusory arguments to back up what is blatantly an injustice and an insult to human dignity. Now if you're brought up in one of these places one has absorbed this mentality unconsciously.

EXTREME FORM OF RACISM

And don't think it's limited to South Africa. The whole tone or movement of colonialism reflects the mind set of Europe and the West, which is, to be blunt, whites are better than blacks. And it goes sometimes to extreme forms of racism in which all black people are regarded as not intelligent, dangerous, disagreeable or whatever the propaganda has been.

IT WE JUSTIFY OUR FALSE SELF SYSTEM

Once consent has been given to the basic unjust view of the situation, then reason is co-opted to bring forth arguments to back up what are basically unjust situations. This is typical of the way we justify our false-self system. Remember we saw that we even glorify our programs for security, power or pleasure by making them or drawing on the heroic archetypes that are peculiar to each of those levels of developing consciousness.

Our attitudes or efforts to dominate others is looked upon as a virtue, and we boast of how we push other people around. This movement out of the mythical membership is an essential growth to become fully human. And, although humanity as a whole has accessed this level of consciousness since one or two thousand BC, it still remains one that has to be interiorized by each of us. If we take personal responsibility, make our judgments about the injustices that are perpetrated all over the world, then we might be excluded from our group. Hence the Beatitude corresponds to the virtue of fortitude, because it takes courage to walk away from our preconceived ideas and our group, if that group is a hindrance to our following the values of the Gospel.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR A SITUATION

This is exactly the situation that we find ourselves in when we refuse the inspirations of the Spirit to take personal responsibility for a situation: our family, community, church, nation, world, the human race. That is the great question that was put in that movie. It's the great question of our time, so much so that Pope John Paul II has said in one of his discourses that you cannot in our day preach the Gospel without at the same time preaching social justice. The two are totally intertwined. You cannot be a Christian without this social concern. It is not possible to relax or to be happy in this

world while half of it, or a third of it are undernourished or starving. And you know, as is now clear from statistics, that there is no reason, from the aspect of the goods of the earth, why anyone should go hungry on any day of the year. The resources are there.

THE ANSWER IS GREED

Why doesn't this happen? The answer is greed, but it's an unconscious greed. It's a greed that comes from a mindset that doesn't ask the right questions; that is still living in a world view that is totally out of date, and unhistorical, antiquated, and is totally incapable of dealing with the problems of our time, which have to be dealt with creatively and from the inner freedom to rethink things anew. Even the world religions must rethink their ethical principles in the light of the new consciousness that is coming into the world, with its sense of personal responsibility made acute by the intuitive vision of Christ suffering in the oppressed and the hungry. And that vision of Christ is the fruit of a still higher consciousness. This intuitive level which simply increases or brings to full bloom the seeds that have been sown in the mental egoic period of personal responsibility. And the sense of concern, harmony, negotiation, compassion and forgiveness, which is the human way of handling conflict.

VIOLENCE IS SUBHUMAN

Violence is subhuman. All that motivation is ritually and actually destroyed on the cross of Christ when, in his body, he submitted to death all motivation which begins at this level and works down. Only we are working from the lowest up, and we haven't graduated yet as an average human consciousness into the maturity of a full human being. Now this is a concern of a person of prayer, of contemplative prayer, whose journey, of its very nature is evolving into personal responsibility and a sensitivity not only to act in a human way, but under the higher gifts of the Spirit which give the energy to work, not just to accept what is, but to change what is unjust.