

The Contemplative Mind

I. The Contemplative Tradition

A. Since Sept. of last year I have been a student at what is called the *Living School*, based at the Community for Contemplation and Action in Albuquerque, NM.

1. In my reflections today I would like to share some of the ways we have been learning in the school and relate that to our Christian insight into the Trinity, as Richard Rohr calls it, “the template of all reality” or as Cynthia Bourgeault calls it, the “*mandala*” in the mind of Jesus.

1. Our three teachers (RR, JF & CB) have briefly stated the purpose in the school as helping students develop a grasp of the Christian Contemplative Tradition.

a. Our learning is through theological study, but also integration of contemplative practice.

2. This tradition has deep roots in our Hebrew and early Christian origins at least up till the rise of Scholasticism in the 13th Century.

a. You can see it reflected in the first lesson today from Proverbs that speaks of the feminine figure of “*Wisdom*.”

b. This Wisdom tradition (as it has also been called) is found in various ways in the origins of all world religions.

(1. But in the past centuries it has been eclipsed, especially in the West, by various kinds of rationalisms. ----

3. Around 1970, the Trappist monk *Thomas Keating* was a leader in promoting a re-discovery of this contemplative spirituality within our Hebrew-Christian heritage.

a. That was the year I graduated from college and a time many American youth were traveling East (so to speak),

(1. not realizing that they could find the paths they were seeking in their native Christian heritage.

(2. There was a growing desire to have a spiritual relationship with the entire world,\ especially in its newly discovered dimensions in modern science,\ and all its diversity in a relational,\ non-objectifying kind of way.

- B. If you were to put this in a historical perspective, you could trace since the 13th C. a long development in our Western ways of being in the world (called our cosmology).
1. There has seemed to be unrivaled success in making the assumption that it is possible for the human subject to step onto a kind of disconnected platform and know the world *objectively* from the outside.
 2. This has given us the scientific and technological revolutions in the West that today are spreading a way of life to the rest of the world. –
 - a. On the surface that looks good at first.
 3. But looking at our human past on this planet from the large perspective of an evolutionary framework almost universally accepted today,
 - (1. you'll find a sense or intuition in more and more places that the human race is at a critical juncture in our evolution,\ that we are at a breaking point.
 - (2. In other words, humanity's way into the future must be different from our ways that have brought us to where we are now. --
 - (3. Sensing the crisis,\ it is easy to see how the diverse global powers that be,\ whether religious, political or financial are doing their best to be in the winners' seat,\ at the top of the struggle.
 - (4. In other words, doing the same things we've done before, but just more and more,\ harder and harder.
 4. Many might say that is being alarmist. --
 - a. Perhaps a better way to say it is that we are at a very creative moment in human history.
 - a. We are presented with possibilities (or necessities) to step up to new ways of living,
 - (1. in our relationship to God our creator, from a religious point of view,
 - (2. with one another in all races and nations, and religions,
 - (3. and with the environment we share with the whole of the natural world, or as we say in the PB, "*this Earth, our Island Home.*"

II. So what does all of this have to do with Trinity Sunday?

A. To approach that question I'll quote *Richard Rohr* in one of his daily meditations from last week (May 16, 2006).

1. This meditation is a thoughtful probing of the practical connection of Contemplative prayer or a contemplative mind to our relationship with God and the world, --

a. which is what the theology of the Trinity is all about.

2. Rohr begins, "*Many have said, and I totally agree, that true religion is not trying to make human beings spiritual. -- We're already spiritual beings.*

a. *Great religion is trying to make human beings human.*" --

3. Pointing out that this is not just a lightweight cliché,

a. Rohr tells how in 2012, *Pope Benedict XVI* invited then *Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams*, to address the Roman Synod of Bishops.

4. Williams makes the point that contemplation is to make us human.

a. He says, "*at the core of human personhood, we discover that what it means to be human - is also to be divine, the same journey I believe Jesus made on this earth.*"

b. Just as was Jesus, we also are constituted as persons - by the same relationships that constitute the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the abiding relationship of unconditional love. --

c. In fact, that is what the word '*person*' means both theologically and metaphysically.

(1. Literally the word '*person*' means, "*a sounding through*," like the '*mask*' or Gk. '*prosopon*,' worn by actors in the Greek theater, through which they would speak. ---

d. At our core and foundation, we are not just our own, as persons, God speaks through us.

(1. What makes us '*persons*' is that kind of relationship with God.

(2. Our identity is "*hidden with Christ in God*," (Colossians 3:3),

(3. with "*our unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord*." (2 Corinthians 3:18).

(4. In other words, we are invited to give up the illusion that we are a self-contained isolated unit who owns ourselves.

B. Rohr quotes *Archbishop Williams* further:

1. "To be fully human is to be recreated in the image of Christ's humanity;
 - a. and that humanity is the perfect human "*translation*" of the relationship of the eternal Son to the eternal Father,
 - (1. a relationship of loving and adoring self-giving,
 - (2. a pouring out of life towards the Other. ---
 - b. Thus the humanity we are growing into in the Spirit,\
 - (1. the humanity that we seek to share with the world as the fruit of Christ's redeeming work,\
 - (2. is a contemplative humanity."

[Archbishop Rowan Williams' Address to the Synod of Bishops, rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org, paragraph 5.] ---
2. *Williams* then explains how *contemplation* prepares us for *action*:
 - a. "We seek [a contemplative mind] ... not because we are in search of some private "religious experience" that will make us feel secure or holy.
 - b. We seek it because *in this self-forgetting gazing towards the light of God in Christ, we learn how to look at one another and at the whole of God's creation. . .*
 - c. [This] allows us to see created reality for what it truly is in the sight of God -- rather than what it is in terms of how we might use it - or dominate it. [Ibid., paragraph 7.]
3. "*Such seeing with the eyes of God is seeing with the eyes of Love, for 'God loves all that God has made'* (Wisdom 11:24).
 - a. Contemplation, then teaches us how to see. ---
 - b. When we see that the world is enchanted, -- we see the revelation of God in each individual person and creature.
 - c. Our first job is to see correctly who we are,\ and then to act on it.
 - (1. All I can give back to God is what God has given to me -
- no more and no less.
4. The most courageous thing we will ever do is to *bear humbly the full mystery of our own humanity and divinity*--operating as one.

C. In my view, *Archbishop Williams* speaks out of his experience, not only as one of the deepest scholars of the last generation from his position as the Archbishop of Canterbury,

1. but especially out of the very difficult personal time of his tenure. He stood as a reconciling force, standing in the breach between opposing sides of the Anglican Communion with polar agendas on the verge of a historic split some years back.
2. I believe that his experience confirms how the practice and development of the Contemplative mind is not something done out of leisure, but out of necessity in times of real duress.
 - a. Or, as *Richard Rohr* likes to say,
 - (1. “*We learn this usually out of either great suffering or great love.*”
3. Williams concludes his brief survey of the Contemplative mind:
 - a. [Contemplation] “is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do: --
 - b. it is the key to prayer,\ liturgy,\ art,\ and ethics,\
 - c. the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom —
 - (1. freedom from self-oriented,\ acquisitive habits,\ and the distorted understanding that comes from them.
 - d. To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit.
 - e. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly.
 - f. *It is a deeply revolutionary matter.*” [Archbishop Rowan Williams' Address to the Synod of Bishops,rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org, paragraph 8]

III. Christ before me....

- A. A beautiful rendition of the contemplative mind and its place as an essential relationship both to God and the world comes in the hymn we sang at the opening of our worship.
 1. It is called St. Patrick's Breastplate, attributed to St. Patrick, the patron Saint of Ireland in his missionary work in the 5th century among the Celts.
 - a. It is an early Christian expression of the vision of God and the world that seemed to be almost natural to the indigenous people who intuited the sacredness of the world and the inter-relationship of all things.

2. I think it is fascinating that another indigenous people, the American Indians had a hymn saying something similar but with slightly different words.
- a. It is a Navajo Prayer used as a way to integrate Navajo warriors back into a different consciousness with their society following the violence they experienced in battle.

*With beauty before me, I walk.
 With beauty behind me, I walk.
 With beauty below me, I walk.
 With beauty above me, I walk.
 With beauty all around me, I walk.
 It is finished in beauty,
 It is finished in beauty,
 It is finished in beauty,
 It is finished in beauty.*

- b. One of the hymns in WLP integrates these with the verses:
 (1. *“Peace before me,\ peace beside me,\ peace under my feet,\
 peace with in us,\ peace over us,\ let all around us be
 peace.”*
- c. The succeeding verses are the same except replacing the first word with, *Love,\ Light,* and then as St. Patrick wrote it, *Christ*.
3. Two indigenous cultures, Native Americans and the Celts, both expressing the powerful experience of being surrounded by beauty,\ love,\ Christ.
- a. It shows, I believe, the deep natural roots of our Trinitarian heritage from the earliest times.