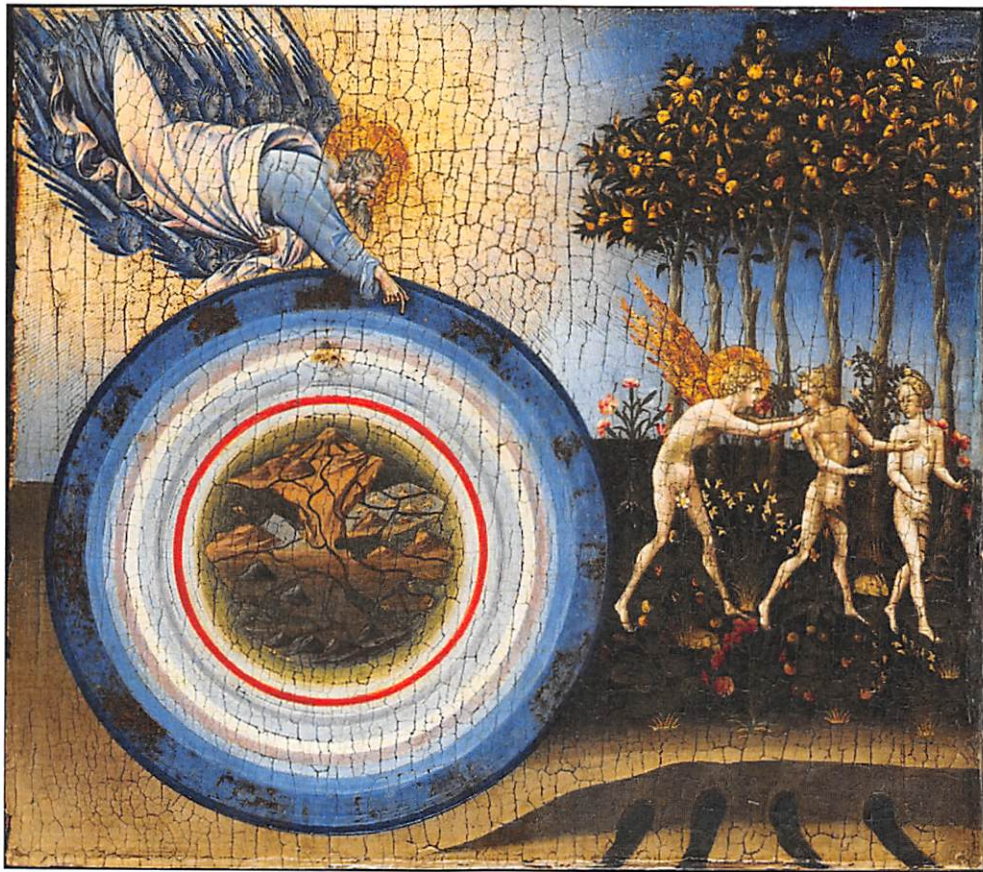


# The Silent Longing of Humility:

## A Meditation on the Care of the Soul

LCG Retreat, September 2017



**"The Creation and the Expulsion from the Paradise" (1445)**

Giovanni di Paolo [1403-1482]

# Cardenal

36 LOVE

the rhythm of the waves even though the sea is very far off.



The Father knows no rest until creation returns to him, like the prodigal son. He longs for us with infinite yearning and the Holy Spirit is the sigh of this longing.

The word of God was made man for love of us and for love of the Father, to love the Father in us and for God to love God in millions of souls and millions of lives.

We are love's invention and we were created to love. We are high-tension wires carrying the power of love. We should not therefore fall into self-love, because self-love cuts us off. We should love others as we love ourselves, because loving ourselves most interferes with love. We should surrender ourselves totally to love and let its power run through us. We should be transmitters of love.

Every created being is in communion with God's being, but in non-rational beings this communion is more imperfect and limited. We are the only creatures in the whole universe capable of love. We are born with aching hearts, as the heart of Jesus was also pierced. We are not a meaningless passion, as Sartre calls us, but a passion whose meaning is God.

## Me

Holiness is our true personality. No two leaves are the same and no two people. But sin levels us and makes us uniform. The saints however are all different. They have found the identity which each of us has but has lost through sin.

The more we identify with God, the more we become ourselves. The closer our identification with God, the clearer our own identity, not because our essence is God, but because our essence is to be the image of God, which is nearly the same thing.

The more like God we are, the more we are ourselves. Our destiny is to be a portrait—self-portrait—of God. We are not infinite but we are an image of the infinite, which is nearly the same thing.

We do not know how beautiful the human soul is because we have never seen it. But we have seen the absence of the soul, the corruption of the body when the soul has left it. The rotting body can give us an idea in reverse of what the soul is. The beauty of the living body, whose soul is in it, can give us an idea of what the beauty of the soul might be without the body. And great works of art reflect the soul of the artist. We glimpse something when we draw near the mystery of another human soul in friendship or in love.

God's love and beauty gives the soul its beauty and the

soul which mirrors God is glowing with love. An infinite beauty and an infinite love are reflected in it like the deep blue sky in Lake Nicaragua in May.

The disembodied soul is all smiles and emotion and love, trembling and passion and fire, pure tenderness and feeling, pure vitality and pure life. And when it is united to God, the more it gazes at him the better it knows him and the better it knows him the more it loves him, and the more it loves him the more it possesses and knows and loves him, and its whole life is giving and receiving, enjoying and loving more and more and trembling with love.

The soul is passive to God and feminine. It cannot take the initiative. It cannot visit God because it does not know how to get to him, or where he is. It must wait for him to come and if he does not come, it remains alone. It cannot move from where it is. God comes and goes, visits and leaves. Neither does the soul know how to caress. It only sometimes very timidly caresses God. But it knows how to let God caress it and this is all it knows. It does not know how to kiss God. He kisses it tenderly or passionately. The soul lets itself be kissed and faints with love.

The soul of an old woman is as tender and young and fresh as a child's, because it is the source of life and does not grow old as times passes. And the soul of the grossest of men is as full of light as the soul of Beethoven or Dante. And the souls of men are as feminine as the souls of women. The soul is the principle of life. It is pure innocence, pure light and joy and lightness and sweetness and grace. And that is why God is so in love with it. Everyone walking in the street has a soul like this. And it is so sad that this soul gives itself to such inferior loves and is enslaved by food and drink, games and money.

Occasionally we glimpse the beauty of the soul in pure eyes, through which the soul shines palely as through opaque material, as the sun sometimes shines through closed eyelids.

But soul and body are the same thing while the body is alive. The soul is the life and vitality of the body and prevents it becoming a corpse. 'If the body is not the soul, what is the soul?' Whitman asked. As Aristotle said, the soul is the substance which gives the body its form.

God's reflection in opaque matter dazzles us. His reflection is the splendour of all beautiful material things. How much more shall his beauty dazzle us when it is not reflected in opaque matter but in a pure spirit which is like God. The essence of all natural beauties, the common denominator of all the beautiful (in the blue sea and lakes and snowy mountains and deserts, women, flowers and stars) is also in the human soul but in a more concentrated way, as if it had evolved further, refined and transformed into a higher beauty which is pure spirit like God; as if many lovely smiles and beautiful landscapes were all combined; and yet more.

'We are not hollow inside, daughters,' says St Teresa.

# William

Life of

XXIV. 293. Yet God is to be attained by faith and, to the extent that the Holy Spirit helps our weakness,<sup>48</sup> by thought as Eternal Life living and bestowing life; the Unchangeable and immutably making all changeable things; the Intelligent and creating all understanding and every intellectual being; Wisdom that is the source of all wisdom; fixed Truth that stands fast without any swerving, the Source of all truth and containing from eternity the principles of all things that exist in time.

294. His life itself is his essence, his very nature. He is his own life by which he lives, and it is divinity, eternity, greatness, goodness and strength existing and subsisting in itself, transcending all place in the power of a nature not bounded by place, by its eternity rising above all time that can be conceived by reason or imagination. It exists in a manner that is far more true and excellent than can be grasped by any kind of perception. Yet humble and enlightened love attains to a more certain perception of it than any effort of the reason to grasp it by thought, and it is always better than it is thought to be. Yet it is better thought than spoken of.<sup>49</sup>

295. It is the supreme Essence, from which all being comes forth. It is the supreme Substance, not confined within the predicaments we formulate but the subsistent causal Principle of all things.<sup>50</sup> In it our being does not die, our understanding makes no mistake, our love meets with no offence. It is always sought in order that it may be found with greater pleasure and is found with utmost pleasure in order that it may be sought the more diligently.<sup>51</sup>

XXV. 296. Since this ineffable reality can be seen only in an ineffable way, the man who would see it must cleanse his heart, for it cannot be seen or apprehended by means of any bodily likeness in sleep, any bodily form in waking hours, any investigation of the mind, but only by humble love from a clean heart.<sup>52</sup>

48. Rom 8:26.  
49. St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 7:4; trans. McKenna, p. 229.  
50. Cf. MF 27.  
51. St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 13:2; trans. McKenna, p. 452.  
52. Mt 5:8.

So much! Where Spirit helps

for which one we sighs

297. For this is the face of God which no one can see and live in the world.<sup>53</sup> This is the Beauty for the contemplation of which everyone sighs who would love the Lord his God with his whole heart and his whole soul and his whole mind and his whole strength.<sup>54</sup> Neither does he cease to arouse his neighbor to the same if he loves him as himself.<sup>55</sup>

298. When eventually he is admitted to this vision he sees without any doubt in the light of truth the grace which forestalls him. When he is thrown back on himself he understands in his blindness that his uncleanness is out of keeping with its purity. And if he loves he takes pleasure in weeping, neither is it without much groaning that he is forced to return to himself.<sup>56</sup>

299. We are wholly unequal to the task of conceiving this reality, but he whom we love forgives us, he of whom we confess we can neither speak nor think worthily. And yet we are stimulated and drawn on by his love or the love of his love to speak and to think of him.

300. It is for one who entertains such thoughts to abase himself in everything and to glorify in himself the Lord his God, to become of no worth in his own eyes as he contemplates God, to subject himself to every human being for the love of his Creator, to offer up his body as a holy victim, living, pleasing to God, the worship due from him as a rational creature.<sup>57</sup> But before everything he should not think highly of himself, beyond his just estimation but have a sober esteem of himself, according to the measure of faith which God has apportioned to him.<sup>58</sup> He should not entrust his treasures to men's mouths but conceal them in his cell and hide them away in his conscience, so as to have this inscription always in the forefront of his conscience and on the front of his cell: "My secret is my own, my secret is my own."<sup>59</sup>

THE END OF DOM WILLIAM'S EPISTLE TO THE BROTHERN OF MONT DIEU

53. Ex 33:20. 54. Mk 12:30. 55. Mk 12:31; Lev 19:18.  
56. There are many parallels to this passage in the writings of William of St Thierry; see for example Exp 146.  
57. Rom 12:1. 58. Rom 12:3. 59. Is 24:16.

297 = my heart  
298/299 = "washed away"

★

1002  
1003  
1004  
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Beautiful

Christophe

## The Mission

Give me a drink:  
of You.

My mouth wide open,  
I breathe in.

What you say to me  
(to us) is:  
breath and life.

I receive the mission  
to be a wellspring:  
It's you in me,  
leaping up  
into Eternal life.

A mission

to breathe.

--Poetic adaptation of Christophe Lebreton's journal entry for January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1994 in  
*Born From the Gaze of God* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 2014, p. 38).

At Vigils: the God who fills me with courage. It's You, Father, who fill me with weakness and madness, with power: for the ordinariness of a simple existence.

Yesterday with Moussa, hoeing the onions. He says: "You see: Célestin has become like an Algerian and he wants to return to his country. But here there are others—Algerians—who want to destroy this country."

Jesus serene? Zeal for your house will consume me. Anguished to death . . . , your serenity is that of one who prays. Lifting your eyes to heaven, you say: the hour has come, FATHER.

In your Prayer, all human anguish is overcome: by the GIFT that wholly supports your freedom.

The home port is Your Body as the Beloved.

Do not hold me back, for I go up to my Father and your Father.

During the night of December 24-25, we passed over from the home to the BODY.

[03/07/1994] Monday.

Jesus, flee, my beloved  
you, my port of ultimate and unceasing detachment, launch my heart into the deep  
and keep a DEEP LIFE alive in me.

Journey to Algiers: to bring back the benches the White Sisters are giving us since they're moving. I celebrate the Eucharist on this feast of Felicity and Perpetua: that we also may receive the grace to live and die in the only LOVE.

The Gospel traces the only way [*tarîq*, in Arabic in the text]. The servant is not above his master: if they have persecuted me . . .

But: "When the Defender, the Breath of truth, comes, he will testify for me."

[03/12/1994] Saturday 12th.

Is it 'Eid, or the last day of Ramadan? It is love you desire

DEEP LIFE

Christian is back. I feel good about it, and am truly happy. This week in his place has let me feel my limits in trying to embrace each brother and myself. But Jesus leads me little by little, moves me toward the place of being loved. It's in my interest to let myself be led by the act of the Cross: his *I love you* with a mad love. Father Bernardo was speaking to me when he said to Christian (at Timadeuc<sup>18</sup>): "The Order needs monks more than martyrs!" To be taken as it was said: with humor and humility. ☺ ✓

The letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed to the papal nuncio, and the question of closing the house still up in the air, tell us again to be here as if ready to leave, in total detachment, the better and the more to offer Your Presence here.

We have sown tomatoes, eggplants, peppers and flowers for your GARDEN.

When will you come down, FRIEND, into your garden?

[03/13/1994] The 13th. Sunday

Your Day: for us and for our joy. Your joy in us, full.  
And the day of 'Eid al-Fitr.<sup>19</sup>

Ever since Vigils we have been plunged into the religion of the other. The loudspeaker is unavoidable (solemn call to prayer, then cassette player), and now the chanted and rhythmic repetition of the Name: God is greater, No Divinity but God [*Allah Akbar, la ilâha illa Allah*, in Arabic in the text]. Invoking God as always greater leads the believer to submission. But the image can take your place: an illusory greatness that is only the reflection of a will to power, to revenge also, for the crushed and the humiliated. It was while clamoring your Name that they slaughtered our Croatian brothers and so many others of their own Algerian and Muslim brothers and sisters.

Jesus teaches us to whisper, to sigh, to weep: "Abba, ever greater Papa," with LOVE. In Mary: the Name is pronounced.

18. Monastery of Trappist monks in Brittany.

19. "Festival of breaking of the fast," also called the Sugar Feast and the Lesser 'Eid. An important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide. It marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting.

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time  
oppression  
inflicted  
by US AS  
hypocrites  
the  
voice  
of  
hate &  
shadow  
life

Do not heap more suffering  
13

Makes of a Now = we see the invisible invisibly

Born from the Gaze of God

Last Thursday I read the following by Bernard, speaking to his monks on Psalm 90, verse 15:

"His glory is present invisibly, brothers, concealed from us in tribulation. In the momentary character of tribulation, eternity is invisibly present; in the lightness of tribulation is the weight of glory that is beyond all measure" (*Qui habitat* 17.3)

And Brother Pierre-Yves explains:

"The author wants us to understand that salvation will not come as an intrinsic future to remunerate the present, but that the future is already 'latent' in the present, the future that is in the process of being shaped by the very way we live the presence of God in tribulation." (note 5)

The Presence of "the one who is greater than our heart" is somewhere in me where you lead me it is to be loved and this makes me live infinitely.

I met Bernard again this morning in his commentary on the Song of Songs: "My Beloved is for me a bouquet of myrrh lying between my breasts. Thus, the Spouse does not say that her beloved is a bunch of myrrh, but a simple bouquet, since out of love for him she is ready to find light all the sufferings that will be inflicted on her. It is really a small bouquet, since he is born as a little child among us and the sufferings of this life are as nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us one day" (Rom 8:18).

For us as well, what today is a small bouquet of myrrh will one day become infinite glory. Isn't it with reference to this bouquet that the yoke is sweet and the burden light? Not that it is light in itself—the throes of the passions and the sadness of death are not a slight thing—but a loving heart bears them without sorrow.

the distinction what I must be deeply

# Christophe (2)

Tibhirine Journal: 1994

Since I love, for me it's a bouquet! If she calls him her Beloved now, it's to show that the strength of love outweighs the greatest sufferings, for love is strong as death.

A beautiful Eucharist. On your word, Jesus, I have received the Gift, the Gift that gives you. I've received it the way one receives a kiss: the better part . . . by stealth. I have grasped it and will never let it go. No obey is to commune in the Gift.

"Do you know that I have the power of killing you?" says the executioner. And the martyr replies: "Do you know that I have the power of being killed?" Christian reminded us of these words of Ety, stressing also the fact that, in Arabic, "to choose" and "good" have the same root—this when the leader affirmed: "You have no choice."

What's at stake here is your freedom.

The important thing, Ety used to say, is not to survive no matter what, but what meaning we give our life.

Gustave Ihibon, whom I read this afternoon, guides me to the Man of Sorrows . . . "death by being torn apart"

And to hear the voice of Simone Weil? "Soon there will be a distance between us. Let us love this distance, wholly woven by friendship, for those who love each other are not separated. For we have the happiness of having been thrown by birth at the very foot of the Cross." where we sigh!

I have taken the cup. I have drunk the Unknown of Your ETERNAL LIFE.

[03/14/1994] Monday.

After Vigils, I read and embrace the Gospel: John 9. "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (a name that means 'sent')." And obey-

20 Gustave Thibon (1903-2001), French Catholic philosopher.

21 Simone Weil (1909-1942), well-known French Jewish social activist, anarchist, philosopher, and mystic, in deep communion with the Catholic faith even though she never converted.

the truth, but which I love. That is why St. John of the Cross calls faith a night. With those who have received a Christian education, the lower parts of the soul become attached to these mysteries when they have no right at all to do so. That is why such people need a purification of which St. John of the Cross describes the stages. Atheism and incredulity constitute an equivalent of such a purification.

We should not seize upon these mysteries as truths, for that is impossible, but recognize the subordination to these mysteries which we love of all that we seize upon as truths. The intelligence can recognize this subordination by feeling that the love of these mysteries is the source of conceptions which it can seize upon as truths. Such would seem to be the relationship between faith and love.

In the sphere of the relationship between man and the supernatural we must seek a more than mathematical precision, something even more precise than science. Such is also one of the uses to which science should be put.

The mysteries of the faith cannot be either affirmed or denied; they must be placed above that which we affirm or deny.

Since we are, in fact, in an age of incredulity, why neglect the purificatory use of incredulity? I have had experimental knowledge of its use.

Necessity enters into contact with the intelligence through knowledge of the second kind and with the sensibility through affliction. There is only purification if we recognize it as being identical under these two forms.

Affliction degrades when it abolishes knowledge of the second kind. Nothing is more difficult than to preserve the latter in affliction (for that it is necessary to pass to the third kind?).

The will of God. Composition upon several planes. A plurality of distinct and convergent motives places the will in contact with what is above the sphere of particular motives.

Μεταξύ.

It is always a question of rising above perspectives through the composition of perspectives, of placing oneself in the third dimension.

'The breadth and depth of the love of Christ.'

Not to take one step, even in the direction of good, beyond that

(1) Simone Weil

From vol I of  
The Notebooks (1956)  
(pp 233-242) 419

" CONTEMPLATION OF THE DIVINE

to which one is irresistibly impelled by God, this applying to action, word and thought. But to be willing to go anywhere under his impulsion, to the extreme limit, if there is one. (The Cross . . .) To be willing to go to the maximum length is to pray to be impelled, but without knowing whither.

Humility; believing oneself to be beneath others. This in itself does not make any sense. It is an operation similar to that by which Descartes denies in order to bring himself round to the point where he doubts. One must believe oneself to be beneath others in order to bring oneself round to the point where one regards oneself as their equal and does not prefer oneself. Since it is impossible to prevent oneself from imagining a hierarchical order, a ladder amongst human beings (and perfection consists in not imagining it), one must place oneself on the lowest rung so as to avoid being situated above any other human being in one's own estimation. By dint of maintaining oneself on the lowest rung, the ladder disappears.

Contact with human creatures is given to us through the sense of presence. Contact with God is given to us through the sense of absence. Compared with this absence, presence becomes more absent than absence.

We should examine very closely the notion of possibility, for it is the key to a great number of mysteries which surround the human condition.

What is not truth can be above or below truth. It is above when it is a source of truths.

Faith is the experience that the intelligence is lighted up by love. Truth as the light coming from good—the good which lies above essences. The organ in us through which we see truth is the intelligence; the organ in us through which we see God is love.

'The eyes of the soul—these are the demonstrations themselves.' In the case of truths. But the eye of the soul for the contemplation of the divine is love.

Only the intelligence must recognize by those means which are proper to it, namely, verification and demonstration, the preeminence of love. It must only submit itself when it knows in a perfectly clear

Seeing where you are  
to begin with!





USE YOUR FACULTIES UP! WEAR THEM OUT!

The will and the discursive intelligence which makes plans are adult faculties. We must use them up. We must destroy them by wearing them out. It is of little importance whether we possess a large or small share of those faculties. What matters is that we should persevere to the end and use them up completely.

The discursive intelligence can be destroyed by the contemplation of clear and inescapable contradictions. Koan. The Mysteries.

The will can be destroyed in the accomplishment of impossible tasks. Superhuman trials in folk tales.

It makes little difference what task I choose, so long as it is just beyond the strength of my will. Suppose my will is so weak (and in my case it is very weak) that it is more than I can do to sweep out my room every day. Then in that case all I can do to do is to will to sweep my room every day. There will be days when I shall succumb and leave it unswept. The next day I shall continue, with a renewed effort of will. Then I shall succumb again. And so on.

The important thing is that if one perseveres without pride, and in spite of failures, the will is gradually worn out and finally disappears. Once it has gone, one has passed beyond will into obedience.

It is also possible, of course, to let both the will and discursive intelligence atrophy through lack of exercise. But in that case one is still on this side of the barrier. Tamas. And sometimes they are exercised so as to develop them. But this is pride. Raja. The right way is to exercise them so as to use them up. Sattva. Once they have been completely destroyed, one has passed beyond the gunas.

Nevertheless, when constrained by obedience, one will still be able, by means of it to be as effective as other men are by means of will and discursive intelligence.

We dislike to see affliction because it compels us to see what it is we love when we love ourselves. It is against nature to love someone who is afflicted. But affliction compels us to do so; because when one is in affliction one is obliged to love an afflicted person or else to stop loving oneself.

True compassion is a voluntary, consented equivalent of affliction. (we all have each of these tendencies)

Hinduism - "Samkhya Philosophy" - 1 of the 6 orthodox schools of Hindu thought (incl. Yoga, Vedanta)
Tamas = imbalance, disorder, chaos, anxiety, inertia, &
Rajas = passion + activity, moving, dynamic, often ego
Sattva = purity + goodness, balance, peace, virtues

two amazing pages! - Simone

Natural pity consists in helping someone in misfortune so as not to be obliged to think about him any more, or for the pleasure of feeling the distance between him and oneself. It is a form of cruelty which is contrary only in its outward effects to cruelty in the ordinary sense. Such, no doubt, was the clemency of Caesar.

Compassion consists in paying attention to an afflicted man and identifying oneself with him in thought. It then follows that one feeds him automatically if he is hungry, just as one feeds oneself. Bread given in this way is the effect and the sign of compassion. This is what Christ thanks us for.

Because, just as the gift of bread is simply the effect and sign of compassion, so compassion itself is the effect and sign of being united to God by love. The sight of an afflicted man frightens away every kind of attention except that which has made contact with God.

It is only God who can pay attention to an afflicted man.

The book of Job is a miracle because it expresses in a perfect form things which a human mind can only think and conceive under the torment of intolerable suffering, but which are formless at the time and which fade away and are irrecoverable when the suffering abates.

The composition of the book of Job is a particular instance of the miracle of attention being paid to affliction.

The same is true of the Iliad.

The attention runs away from affliction as it runs away from the true God, and by the same instinct of self-preservation; because both the one and the other oblige the soul to feel its nothingness and to die while the body is still alive.

The only soul that can fix its attention upon affliction is one that has been killed by a true contact with the true God (if it makes no difference if, through an error of language, it believes itself to be atheist).

Nor can an afflicted man pay attention to affliction; if his condition prevents him from attending to anything else, he pays attention to nothing at all. In cases of extreme social degradation (prostitutes, redivivists) there is a total incapacity for concentration and perseverance. This incapacity is both a cause and an effect of their degradation.

Revel chapters of Merzani's "Thought revisits" from contemplative prayer - The Living

Simone  
(3)

philosophy  
and  
humility

where  
oppressive  
reign

The proper method of philosophy consists in clearly conceiving the insoluble problems in all their insolubility and then in simply contemplating them, fixedly and tirelessly, year after year, without any hope, patiently waiting.

By this standard, there are few philosophers. And one can hardly even say a few.

There is no entry into the transcendent until the human faculties—intelligence, will, human love—have come up against a limit, and the human being waits at this threshold, which he can make no move to cross, without turning away and without knowing what he wants, in fixed, unwavering attention.

It is a state of extreme humiliation, and it is impossible for anyone who cannot accept humiliation.

Genius is the supernatural virtue of humility in the domain of thought. That is demonstrable.

So long as a man's thought still moves in the sphere inhabited by the most refined and subtle human minds it is susceptible to human control and limited by human judgements.

When once it passes above this sphere it can no longer look to any human control or limit.

At this moment the temptation of pride is stronger than it was before.

Whoever finds himself in this situation can only avoid aberration, illusion, or falsehood, by the grace of God, if he implores God with all his heart and with total faith and humility.

Falling that, he must either go down again a little, into the realm where his friends' thoughts can meet his, or else let himself be caught by the devil.

In either case he may produce the illusion of genius, so that his name will be glorious for centuries.

Nevertheless it is blasphemy to give the name of genius to what is incapable of truth.

The connection between humility and true philosophy was known in antiquity. Among the Socratic, Cynic, and Stoic philosophers it was considered part of their professional duty to put up with insults, blows, and even slaps in the face without the slightest instinctive reaction of offended dignity.

Since Christian apostleship was a similar or identical

\*this "demonstrable" is what

she means by knowing

## DECREATION

that one is God. . . . The curtain is human misery: there was a curtain even for Christ.

Job. Satan to God: 'Doth he love Thee for thyself alone?' It is a question of the level of love. Is love situated on the level of sheep, fields of corn, numerous children? Or is it situated further off, in the third dimension, behind? However deep this love may be there is a breaking-point when it succumbs, and it is this moment which transforms, which wrenches us away from the finite towards the infinite, which makes the soul's love for God *transcendent in the soul*. It is the death of the soul. Woe to him for whom the death of the body precedes that of the soul. The soul which is not full of love dies a bad death. Why is it necessary that such a death should happen without distinction. It must indeed be so. It is necessary that everything should happen without distinction.

Appearance clings to being, and pain alone can tear them from each other.

For whoever is in possession of being there can be no appearance. Appearance chains being down.

Time in its course tears appearance from being and being from appearance by violence. Time makes it manifest that it is not eternity.

It is necessary to uproot oneself. To cut down the tree and make of it a cross, and then to carry it every day.

It is necessary not to be 'myself', still less to be 'ourselves'.

The city gives us the feeling of being at home.

We must take the feeling of being at home into exile.

We must be rooted in the absence of a place.

To uproot oneself socially and vegetatively.

To exile oneself from every earthly country.

To do all that to others, from the outside, is a substitute (*ersatz*) for decreation. It results in unreality.

But by uprooting oneself one seeks greater reality.

Simone  
4

Gravity + Grace

## SELF-EFFACEMENT

God gave me being in order that I should give it back to him. It is like one of those traps whereby the characters are tested in fairy stories and tales on initiation. If I accept this gift it is bad and fatal; its virtue becomes apparent through my refusal of it. God allows me to exist outside himself. It is for me to refuse this authorization.

Humility is the refusal to exist outside God. It is the queen of virtues. ★

The self is only the shadow which sin and error cast by stopping the light of God, and I take this shadow for a being.

Even if we could be like God it would be better to be mud which obeys God.

To be what the pencil is for me when, blindfold, I feel the table by means of its point—to be that for Christ. It is possible for us to be mediators between God and the part of creation which is confided to us. Our consent is necessary in order that he may perceive his own creation through us. With our consent he performs this marvel. If I knew how to withdraw from my own soul it would be enough to enable this table in front of me to have the incomparable good fortune of being seen by God. God can love in us only this consent to withdraw in order to make way for him, just as he himself, our creator, withdrew in order that we might come into being. This double operation has no other meaning than love, it is like a father giving his child something which will

the (in) the

Letter 89



Merton

MARCH 15, 1968

Dear Ernesto:

Many thanks for your letter of the 5th. I think there must be something wrong with the mail. I am sure I sent you those two books. However, I will send other copies, and the new one also, *Cables to the Ace*. I am also running a magazine [*Monks Pond*] temporarily—four or five issues only. A copy will be on the way to you. I want to translate some of your “Psalms.” I can’t find a copy here, though I know there must be one around. Do you have an extra one? Please send me one if you have one available. I will use a few “Psalms” in the magazine before it closes down. [None of Cardenal’s “Psalms” appeared in *Monks Pond*.]

Yes, we have a new Abbot [Flavian Burns]. But if you mean by Gethsemani-Nicaragua project a new foundation, I think that is completely out of the question. I do not think there will be any more Gethsemani foundations. As you know we took over the Spencer foundation in Chile. I asked to be sent there in order to be in Latin America, but the permission was refused. However, I do think it will be possible for Fr. Flavian to let me come to visit you for a time and to study the situation. Not right away, because since Dom James is still living here, as a hermit, Fr. Flavian has to take him into account and is a little afraid of him. Please write and tell me what is the best time to come. When is the dry season? If possible, I might come at the end of this year and spend at least a few weeks with you. There are very many reasons why I want to leave this country, and yet for those same reasons I think I ought to stay. It seems wrong to escape the immense rottenness, the evil, the judgment,

that are inevitable here. Do you know that some fanatical Catholics in Louisville have burned my books, declaring me an atheist because I am opposed to the Vietnam War? It is completely incredible. This country is mad with hatred, frustration, stupidity, confusion. That there should be such ignorance and stupidity in a civilized land is just incomprehensible.

On the other hand, I would be ashamed to be in a Latin American country and to be known as a North American.

But in any case, apart from all these ideas one way or the other, it is necessary to see whether or not God really wants me there. In so many ways this seems to be the place for me, here. But I want to come to Solentiname and see what it is like, see if it seems to be where God wants me, though I rather doubt it. For one thing, I believe I would be a kind of tourist attraction, and would have to be seeing people all the time. It is bad enough here. But there is some protection.

If I were to leave here, I would want to disappear completely and go where I was not known at all, and cease to have any kind of public existence whatever.

I think the idea of William Agudelo [Colombian poet] living there with his wife is just tremendous. I think that the whole future of monasticism depends on some broadening of perspectives like this.

I often pray for you and think about Solentiname. I don’t believe, however, that it will be the right place for F. Romanus [Father Romano]. The best, always, in Christ,

T. M.



July 21, 1968

Dear Ernesto:

I have been meaning for a long time to write you a decent letter. There are several reasons for the delay. The chief of these is that much is happening here and I have many plans for the end of the year. But nothing is fully certain yet. I am going to Japan and then to Thailand, where there is a meeting of Asian Catholic Abbots. I also have to preach a retreat at the Cistercian monastery in Java. After that I am not sure what I will be able to do. If I can get the money and the contacts I hope by some miracle to get to Nepal in the Himalayas—and then see what happens. Burma also is another possibility—but again a quasi miracle will be required.

If these do not work out it is possible that I may get to Nicaragua for a few weeks with you. In any case, wherever I go, I want to have a hidden and quiet time of retreat after the traveling. One thing is certain, that I need real solitude and I need to get away from the constant pressure of visitors and more or less superficial demands in the matter of work; articles, commentary, prefaces, etc. Where I am here at Gethsemani, I am too well known and too accessible.

Fr. Flavian our new abbot is very fine. He has spontaneously suggested that I form a small hermit colony in California or somewhere hidden (it would be in an isolated part of the Northern California coast). Much depends on his finding the place, and on it remaining really hidden!! I wonder if Northern California is really likely to fill the requirements. But I also wonder about Nicaragua: I am too well known there also. But in any case, if I do not go further into Asia I think I will spend a few weeks

at least with you, if God grants it. But I make no firm promise. I do hope very much to go to Nepal. It would be marvelous.

But also in any event I hope to come to Solentname. I will keep in touch with you and let you know. I should go to Japan early in November and if I do not go to Nepal or Burma, should fly back early in January. Though something else might happen to delay me—I might stay longer in Indonesia. In any case I do not have to be back at Gethsemani too soon, and my plans are flexible. Please pray that God may guide me.

I have a very definite feeling that a new horizon is opening up and I do not quite know what it is. If it is something in Asia then I will need very special grace. My secret hope is to go to the Himalayas. But I do not insist on any desire of my own. If it is clearly God's will for me to settle in Nicaragua or in California, I ask only to see it clearly and to do it faithfully.

Since my Abbot of his own volition is planning a hermitage in California and wants to entrust it to me, this does take first priority, I think. But we'll see what comes of it. In any event I hope to see you either in January 1969 or the following year.

Your *Magnifican* [long poem] is fine. I am doing some things like that now in a poem. I'll send you bits when they are published. William's latest poems in *El Comio* are magnificent, strong, rugged, impressive, clean.

I very much want to see you all again. I want to get out of this country. The atmosphere is stifling and very sick. Perhaps by a miracle [Eugene] McCarthy might get elected—the people are for him, vested interests and established power against him. If he is not elected I will find it difficult to return here!! This will become a police state in all reality.

I promise faithfully this time to send you some books. Sorry to have been so negligent about that.

Blessings, peace, and love in the Lord,  
T. M.

# Ordine

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## THE USEFULNESS OF THE USELESS

aid of a few revealing examples, I have re-interpreted some classics that, over the centuries, have shown the illusory impact of possession and its devastating effects on people's dignity, on love, and on truth.

I have added to my brief reflections an excellent (and, alas, little known) essay written by Abraham Flexner in 1937 and republished in 1939 with some additions. Among the authoritative founders of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton—established with the precise aim of encouraging inquiry free of any utilitarian constraints and inspired exclusively by the curiosity of its illustrious members, among whom I should mention at least Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer—Flexner, a celebrated American scientist and pedagogue, presents us with a fascinating account of the story of some great discoveries to show how theoretical scientific research considered to be absolutely useless, because devoid of any practical purpose, unexpectedly favored applications, from telecommunications to electricity, which were later revealed to be of fundamental importance to humanity.

Flexner's point of view struck me as being very efficacious in clearing the field of all confusion: creating contrapositions between classical and scientific learning—as has happened several times since the 1950s, after the renowned essay by C. P. Snow—would have inevitably caused the debate to slide into the quicksands of sterile polemic. And, above all, it would have confirmed a total disinterest in the necessary unity of knowledge—in that indispensable *nouvelle alliance*, about which the Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine has

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written some illuminating pages—unfortunately today ever more threatened by the parceling out and ultra-specialization of knowledge. Flexner shows us brilliantly how science has much to teach us about the usefulness of the useless. And how, together with humanists, scientists have also played, and still do, a most important role in the battle against the dictatorship of profit, to defend the liberty and the gratuitousness of knowledge and research.

In addition, awareness of the difference between purely speculative, disinterested science and applied science was widespread among the ancients, as is borne out by Aristotle's reflections and also by some anecdotes attributed to great scientists of the caliber of Euclid and Archimedes.

But such fascinating matters might lead us too far from the point. Now it is important for me to underline the vital importance of those values that we cannot weigh and measure with instruments calibrated to assess *quantitas* and not *qualitas*. And, at the same time, I wish to make a claim for the fundamental nature of those investments that do not produce immediate returns and cannot be turned into cash.

In itself, knowledge acts as a hindrance to the delusion of omnipotence of money and utilitarianism. True, everything can be bought. From legislators to judges, from power to success: everything has its price. But not knowledge: the price to be paid for knowing is of a completely different kind. Not even a blank check would allow us to acquire mechanically what is the exclusive fruit of an individual effort and an inexhaustible pas-

sion. No one, in short, can tread the laborious path to learning in our stead. Without great inner motivation, the most prestigious degree bought with money will bring no real knowledge and will not favor any genuine metamorphosis of the spirit.

Socrates once explained this to Agathon, when in the *Symposium* he challenges the idea that knowledge can be transmitted mechanically from one human being to the other like water that runs along a thread from a full container to an empty one:

It would be really fine, Agathon, if knowledge were able to flow from the fullest to the emptiest among us and all we had to do was to be in contact one with the other, like the water that flows along a woolen thread from the fuller goblet to the emptier one.

But there's more. Only knowledge is still able to challenge the laws of the market. I can share my knowledge with others without impoverishing myself. I can teach a student the theory of relativity or read together with her a page of Montaigne thereby giving rise to a miraculous virtuous circle in which both the giver and the receiver are enriched at the same time.

Of course it is not easy to understand, in our world dominated by *homo economicus*, the usefulness of the useless and, above all, the uselessness of the useful (how many unnecessary consumer goods are sold to us as indispensable?). It hurts to see human beings, unaware of the growing desertification that smothers the spirit, devoted exclusively to amassing money and power. It hurts to see the triumph on television and in the media

of new portrayals of success, in the form of the entrepreneur who manages to create an empire through fraud, or of the rogue politician who humiliates parliament by voting for *ad personam* legislation. It hurts to see men and women in a mad dash toward the promised land of gain, where all that surrounds them—nature, objects, other human beings—arouses no interest. The gaze fixed on the objective to be attained makes it impossible to grasp the joy of little everyday gestures and to discover the beauty that pulses through our lives: in a sunset, in a starry sky, in the tenderness of a kiss, in a flower that blooms, in the flight of a butterfly, and in a child's smile. Because, often, greatness is perceived better in the simplest things.

"If one cannot understand the usefulness of the useless, and the uselessness of the useful, one cannot understand art," Eugène Ionesco justly observed. And it is no accident that, many years before Ionesco, Kakuzo Okakura, in describing the tea ritual, identified the pleasure of picking a flower to give to a lady friend as the precise moment in which the human species rose above the animals. Man "entered the realm of art," the Japanese writer said in *The Book of Tea*, "when he perceived the subtle use of the useless." At one and the same time, a double luxury: the flower (the object) and the act of plucking it (the gesture) both represent the useless, thus calling into question both the necessary and profit.

True poets know well that only far from calculation and haste is it possible to cultivate poetry: "Being an artist," says Rainer Maria Rilke in a passage from *Let-*



**"Madonna of Humility" (1435)**  
Giovanni di Paolo [1403-1482]



## **“The Silent Longing of Humility”**

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# The Silent Longing of Humility

## A Meditation on the Care of the Soul

### I. Care of the Soul: Introduction

A. LCG 2017 Retreats: June to September / Silence to Humility

B. Silence, humility and taking care of our soul's *deep long love*

1. **Jan Patočka**: Care of the soul is a lifelong inquiry... a practical form of our discovery of the Whole and our explicit and essential spiritual relation to it (p. 82).
2. **Ernesto Cardenal**: "He longs for us with infinite yearning and the Holy Spirit is the sigh of this longing" (p. 36).

### II. Shadow of the Soul: Precaution

A. According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (e.g. ch. 7), there are three qualities, faculties or states—three *gunas*—of our human condition or soul:

1. peaceful light: goodness, purity, light (*sattva*)
2. restless life: ego, fire, passion, activity (*rajas*)
3. lifeless darkness: darkness, dullness, sloth (*tamas*)

### III. Sigh of the Soul

"This is the Beauty for the contemplation of which everyone sighs."

Source: **William of St. Thierry**, *The Golden Epistle* (p. 105)

### IV. Life of the Soul

"Launch my heart into the deep and keep a DEEP LIFE alive in me."

Source: **Christophe Lebreton**, *Born From the Gaze of God* (p. 60).

### V. Eye of the Soul

"The eye of the soul for the contemplation of the divine is love."

Source: **Simone Weil**, *The Simone Weil Reader* (p. 419).

### VI. Art for the Soul: *The Madonna of Humility*

LCG Retreat, September 2017  
Presented by Gray Matthews  
matthews@memphis.edu