

*Growth in Prayer*

Anyone serious about prayer sees in his personal life and in the lives of others around him a great crisis in prayer. Activism seems to increase by the day; this peculiar disease which afflicts so many Americans, the itch to be always doing, must be one reason why we find it difficult to be silent and to listen to God speak within us. Our American culture seems to feed us with the principle that man can do anything he sets his mind to do. In the time of St. Augustine this principle was called Pelagianism. When we enter seriously upon an intense following of Jesus Christ, there is much zeal and enthusiasm, and activism dominates even our spiritual life. But we forget that only when we are crushed can God start working. We forget that sanctification is the work of the Spirit; that man can and must dispose himself; but it is God who has to crush us and then build a whole new world upon that dead self.

There is also a practical materialism at the root of our way of life, a pragmatism that measures real success by material values. I must see immediately in my work and prayer something concrete or otherwise the work is useless. All this fills me with a sense of great self-sufficiency. That which I undertake for the love of God and neighbor I soon treasure as something that feeds my own

importance. I rather like the idea of managing things for God and doing things; and so I move from a state of being before God to a condition of nervously doing things. This builds up an ego separated from God—and a person who is autonomous does not pray. That person may build up an idol of God which is the object of his conversation in prayer. There is a subtle type of pharaisaism that uses God as a static object to give me a feeling of a good conscience, but there is no longer the willingness to take the wild risks of the desert.

But there is also in our modern world a more positive value accounting for a real crisis in prayer. The individual is coming forth as a person. There is now a great need for an "I-Thou," a person-to-person confrontation in prayer that unfortunately did not always exist in our spiritual life. We engaged in a great deal of repetitious, formal prayer, especially in our liturgical and communal prayers. But today the person is important; he feels he must be free, free to say his "yes" to God. I must have a sense of identity if I am to meet God deeply. And so the modern person going to prayer feels the need to get down deeper into his intimate self, into that which the Eastern Christian calls the heart, that complexity which is not just our physical heart but is the totality of our being, standing before God who is the ground of our being, looking up into His face and saying, "yes." This is the type of total prayer that we are searching for today.

The following, familiar example is used to illustrate how we live on different levels of our being: A lake admits of different levels. There is the surface, the rock formation of the lake, the flora, the mud; all are parts of the lake, but these are not quite that which gives to the lake its "lake-ness." That spring bubbling new life into the lake is

the source of the lake's being. In man there are the various levels of the senses, emotions, affections, whose reactions often have been predetermined through heredity, education and social conditioning. All are parts of me, the existential I that I am; but still, somehow or other, it is not the real I. But I can go down deeper and deeper into the pit of my being until I hit the bottom. Here I am most free, away from the pre-determinisms of the senses and the emotions, free to have a real confrontation with God in which I say "yes" to Him with my very being and not just my sense life, not just words or pious sentiments flowing out of my emotional life. Even though the "cave" within me be in utter dryness and darkness, yet I call up the whole of my being to respond to God, not once in prayer, but as a continuous state of being. At this moment I become a contemplative, when I become habitually a person of prayer. Prayer is then not so much a thing I do or words I say; it is a state of being in communication with God as the ultimate ground of my total being.

#### CONSCIOUSNESS OF GOD'S LOVING PRESENCE

In discussing growth in prayer, I would like to avoid the traditional categories deduced from the writings of St. Teresa of Avila: discursive prayer, prayer of affection, of simplicity, of faith, of quiet, of recollection, of full union, of ecstasy and of spiritual marriage. I believe there is a need to treat growth in prayer in a different way, one which is linked with the psychology of self-identity in a conscious relationship with one who loves us. I am not interested in writing a treatise on how the Eastern Fathers conceived prayer. I am more interested in using their insights to present the life of prayer in terms of a process

of growth in the consciousness of the abiding presence of God and His ever-increasing activity of love assimilating ourselves into a union with Him that can be called divinization.

What then is contemplation? It is basically a look turned toward God. It is a human being standing, as it were, outside of the habitual idea that he has of himself, the person that he thinks he is. It is his getting down below that false everyday ego and getting into his deepest source where he stands before God, consciously turning toward his Source, his Origin. Here we can see we are not dealing with an exercise of piety alone. We are certainly not dealing with anything that is dependent upon perseverance in a certain method. But contemplation is something applicable to every human being, and therefore should be as natural as a baby looking on his father or mother's face.

This looking upon God is, therefore, the essential act of contemplation. It does not consist in having beautiful thoughts, nor in having any emotions, sentiments, or piety. It consists fundamentally in standing before God, not with one faculty perceiving some facet of God but with man's total being absorbed into the total being of God. It is the return of my whole being back to God as a gift that expresses the attitude which I call worship-prayer, the ultimate point of contemplation.

It cannot be found in the "give me, give me, Lord," of petition, nor even in thanksgiving nor even expiation or sorrow. But it must ultimately overwhelm us in our praise, because we understand from an experience of being created by God what it means to belong to God, where "God is more intimate to me than I to myself." This experience can come only in contemplation, and no one can reach contemplation with his natural powers alone,

because only God can reveal to a person that He is the Source of his being.

Thus contemplation is in the form of a dialogue, but a dialogue on the level of being. It is not just a banal conversation. We could spend long hours talking to God—"I say this and He says that—." This is not contemplation. And you know yourself how you can spend years in this sort of dialogue and it does not perceptibly change your personality. It does not give you an immersion, an assimilation into God where you truly understand that you live, no longer you yourself, but God lives in you. This immersion in God can come only from contemplation, not from a banal conversation with Jesus.

/ To understand what this kind of dialogue-in-being means, we must go to the dialogue that is taking place constantly, within us and in the world outside us, between the Father and the Son, the Word. God dialogues with His Word, because the Word is the outpouring of the mind of the Father. The Word, as spoken and produced by the Father, is the perfect replica who says everything exactly as the Father does. The Word mirrors forth the mind of God—it is the echo, the spoken thought of God.

So our dialogue with God must participate in some type of intimate ontological relationship that touches the core of our being, not just our intellect, not just emotions or good sentiments, as would a prayer that might be empty of involvement of being. Contemplation involves my *whole* being and changes my life ontologically, bringing about a continuous process of growth. The soul is just a created being that remains the same identical thing, but in the relationship between the creature and God as a Spirit the soul is always growing. Contemplation is the soul's pushing itself outward towards God as the totally Other. In such a

state of being the soul grows, and it admits of an infinity of growth. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard. . . nor has it entered into the mind of man to conceive what God has prepared for those who love Him. . ." (I Cor. 2,9).

One author says that we must look upon God with our 'entrails.' We have to get involved with our total being, otherwise it is not true prayer. We are what we are through a gift from God, but it is a gift that is an ongoing process. We have to understand that God's uncreated energies are within us and are continually creating us. Every time we breathe, God is giving forth His Word in us. And so we want to return this gift by that complete openness to God that looks into His face and says, "Yes, I am at Your service." Love must be proved by deeds and the deed is precisely this attitude of complete service towards the One who first has loved us.

Carl Jung has defined modern man in terms of the *animus* and *anima*--the male, the aggressor, the initiator, the one who begins the love process, and the feminine, the receptor, the one waiting and then returning. Thus the *anima* is not just passive, but it is first a passive waiting and then an active returning of love for Love. So it is also with God Himself. If He is Love, He is not only the aggressive Father who has first loved us, but He is also receptivity. He is also the *anima* who waits upon our return and then joyfully accepts our love. And it is we who create this latter relationship with God. If we do not say yes, the relationship is never realized for all eternity, but when we say yes, it goes on and on, as God wants it to, and it becomes the most intimate love relationship possible. He truly wants us, as St. John says, to be children of God. But that means He wants to create us more and more into His likeness, so that we may know no end of this assimilation

and greater growth into the likeness that is complete only in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Eternity will not mean the end of this process of growth but will offer further means of serving one another and thus of growing in loving service to the Father of us all. Our heaven depends upon the degree of contemplation, of worship, of true dying to self and rising with Christ in giving ourselves back in glory to God, that we have reached in this life.

Therefore contemplation is my total expression as a creature before my Creator to whom I owe my whole being. It is a gift of my whole being in a total act of surrender that grows daily moment by moment. Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J., put it pithily in a short poem:

Thee God I come from,  
To Thee go.  
All day long I like fountain flow,  
From Thy hand out,  
Swayed about  
Mote-like  
In Thy mighty glow.

This is the attitude I would think that Jesus had on the mountain when He prayed all night before the face of His Father. His prayer was the Word issuing forth from the Father and going back as an echo to the mind that uttered that Word.

#### THE LIFE OF MOSES

If you wish then to start out in search of God along the long, sinuous road of contemplation, you may feel that you are throwing yourself into the pursuit of the unknow-

able; that all you have in your favor is your great desire to pursue God up the mountain as Moses did. But even this desire has been given you by God. God hides this fact from you; you think at least you can give Him this desire, but even this has come from God.

The important thing now as you begin your journey is to desire to listen to God. You want to know Him deeply as a person, not as a concept. You want to destroy the idol that you have been living under and that you have been calling your God. You want to meet the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But He can only be met in the desert of your own being, in the depths where you encounter God in your dread of loss. So few of us have the courage to discipline ourselves, to cut ourselves off from all the attachments that build up our self-centeredness, to go out into the desert and be at the mercy of God.

Using the beautiful description of St. Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*, we set off on this search for God and begin ascending the great mountain. We prepare our bags, we saddle up the donkey and set off on the road. We set off at daybreak and it is a great departure. We are saying goodby. To whom? To what? In a way, to everything and yet, in a way, to nothing. To everything, because we must be pilgrims stripped of all things, and we must let God, the Ground of our being, expose Himself to us as He wishes. And yet we are not cutting ourselves off from anything, because on that donkey we are putting our past history, our intelligence, our imagination, all our weaknesses, our strengths. We are not throwing off this person that we existentially are for some ideal that we would like to be, for some rarified angel. God is going to meet us in the desert of our existential history. And so we take along with us on this road all that we are.

For this entrance into prayer we need solitude and silence, at least sometime during the day or night, in which we can enter deeply into ourselves and find God. And yet today, silence and solitude are rare commodities. Over-reacting in all of our great feverish activity, we behave as though God needs our activity. Surely we need to be involved in giving ourselves to those who need our service; a piety that is self-centered is worthless. But we are losing many of the real values that ought to be in our life, through the lack of some moments of deep solitude and silence each day. Over-absorption in activities makes silence and solitude most difficult and prayer almost impossible.

We are not concerned here with communal or liturgical prayer, but it can be said that if there is this continued, daily personal relationship, not in an egocentric way, but as a God-given encounter, then we will also be able to pray in a communal way and in a liturgical way.

The first step in any deep interior prayer is an act of faith. I cannot stress this too much. Many of us run into prayer, and there is no atmosphere, no composition of place, no *locus Dei*, the place where we are to meet God. Surely God is everywhere, and we enter prayer knowing that God fills all of His creation. We do not want to pin God down nor to reify Him into a concept or a picture. But on the other hand, we need to be localized. We need to gather all of our disparate forces into a point, a still point of concentration. And so when we enter into ourselves in the presence, the conscious presence of God. . .and that is an act of faith. We can be very relaxed. We can let this act of faith pass over our psychosomatic self by perhaps just repeating slowly the word, "God" or "Jesus" or "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on

me, a sinner.” We can coordinate this with our breathing by an intake and then an exhalation as we get deeper into ourselves. The rhythm that is basic to our physical life becomes the rhythm of our spiritual life; with each breath there is a thrust toward the transcendent God who is beyond us, and there is that desire to possess the unpossessable within us. Thus our breathing coordinates this basic thirst for God who is beyond us and yet the God who is also within us.

The beginning stage in prayer, as in the unfolding human friendship, is a prayer of simple reflection. When anyone in a friendship starts to know another extrinsically, one does not immediately plumb the depths of the other person until after years of coming to know the person with one’s mind and intellect, as well as with senses. Gradually, faith and trust are built up, so that one can admit that person into the inner sanctuary of the other’s being.

#### PRAYER AS REFLECTION

In Christian prayer there is always a need for ordering the truths of faith. We begin with a method of “meditation” that enables us to reflect, ponder, measure, compare, and organize. Here the basic activity revolves around the use of our own intellect and reasoning process on the matters of faith. This movement moves one to affections, towards the union to feel, to touch the spiritual reality about which one is meditating. In a discursive manner, we meditate on the Trinity, but always each mental activity is a preparatory step towards a living experience of the Trinity, not as a concept, but as the Living God abiding within us and communicating Himself to us.

We start with the great mysteries of Scripture—the Prophetic Word. The Bible is the only place to begin, because here we meet the Living Word that has come down from the Father to teach us about Him. “God so loved the world as to give His only Begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). There is no other way to know God than through the Way, the Truth and the Life that is Jesus Christ. Thus we start with Scripture: a page, a scene from the New or Old Testament. We run through it, reading it, simply stopping where we find some point of reflection. But gradually we move away, even from a construction of this historical moment, to an encounter, a subject-to-subject relationship. The text becomes a sign of the presence of God and the Divine action of God towards us. The things that Jesus Christ said and did, because they are the theandric actions of the God-Man, enter into the area of the *kairos*, the timeless time of God Himself. The important element in our prayer life is that we are encountering God. The where and the when are not as important as *who* it is.

We soon get away from the details, just as the Evangelists did. They really were not too much concerned with the details of when and where, but rather with the great Christ-event. And so our act of faith brings us to the presence of Christ. Here the power of God, the power of Christ’s resurrectional presence, begins to work upon us. The same Christ who is alive today begins to work upon us, as we move away from the details of the historical event to the actual event of this Person, Jesus Christ, meeting us now, and the event of our opening ourselves to His activity.

Gradually we find that, as we move into this simple presence of Jesus Christ, there is a great peace and quietude. We find that we are no longer doing things; we

are in a state of just being in His presence. We find also that there might be long periods of dryness, where we seem to be getting nowhere. We have nothing with which to measure our progress. But as we did not start from a position of not having to a level of now having, but rather we started from a stage of being to a stage of greater being, we realize that we cannot measure progress in being in the presence of the Lord except by moving out into the world. In contact with God's creation, especially with other intellectual, loving beings, we can test how deeply our being has been "rooted" in the Ultimate.

#### GROWTH IN SYNTHESIS

We find, as we move out into the world, that the Divine Word becomes a presence surrounding everything and everyone, a power that is acting in all. Everything in a way continues as before. It is the same world that we saw before; but now we seem to be on a new dimension in relation to God and to the world. We begin to see more clearly now, as though we were blind before. Now we have stepped onto a new plateau. Always there is this one single thought that gives us great peace and joy, namely, we find that we are growing in friendship with Christ.

Our prayer has become one of passively resisting any activity that is our own, while at the same time transforming all our activity into the receiving of God's activity. Our thoughts in prayer become very simplified and unified, to the point that God is no longer an object we attain through our activity, but now God is so intimately present to us that in silence and waiting, we *are* in His holy presence. I open myself to God's presence. It is God's activity that I am able to perceive, and, always in the light

of a deepening faith, I know that this Person truly loves me, and I trust more deeply in His love. There comes over me a greater peace and assurance, a sense of growing unity with God and with the world. There is no anxiety; only childlike abandonment to the sacrament of the present moment.

A global sense of God's presence develops in us. We know God is guiding us. He is our Father. Christ is our Brother, our Spouse. After months, perhaps even years, the contemplator has a breakthrough in consciousness. It might be looking at a scene of nature, or in prayer, in the midst of doing one's daily work, wherever the person is, he perceives in himself and outside of him, in nature, a presence that becomes like a strong, gentle voice, attracting, drawing him with deep love into a greater union. There is a desire to be even more docile, more silent; an inkling comes over us, a holding of the breath almost, the suspending of all the intellectual powers. To think, reflect becomes almost repugnant, a waste of time. There is only the desire to wait, to breathe in the presence of God that is now so vividly felt everywhere.

Then we know that our prayer has changed and likewise our lives. Joy is the ultimate criterion of the degree of faith since, if we believe that God is present in all events and is loving us and that nothing is impossible to the Lord, then we must be always joyful even in the throes of excruciating purification.

We know now that we have entered into a whole new mode of thinking and feeling. Before, there was knowledge by our own acquisition. Now we understand that it is a whole new way of knowing—by not knowing with our own powers in our human, habitual way, but knowing through

receiving God's presence, of allowing His loving activities to operate upon us.

It is not an ordinary repose of the human faculties as such, but we feel that we are emptied of inordinate passions, of our own self-orientation, desires, ambitions, and thoughts.

In this state of growth in prayer, one must avoid conceptualizing this Presence in order to possess it, to carry it wherever one wants and to do with whatever one wishes. This is idolatry and constitutes one of the greatest dangers of contemplatives. To reach this point and then to want to cling to it selfishly, not to be indifferent but to want this state of union for itself: this is to create an idol of God; it is to stifle further growth and to remain on a narcissistic level.

#### THE DARK NIGHT

In this illumination that can become very intense, there suddenly or gradually appears great darkness. The light now reveals itself in a new modality, appearing as darkness itself. In this light, the more that a soul comprehends God, the more it discovers God is far away. One begins to cry out in the darkness of the night for God. If it were not so dark, if we had not lost our way and had not that feeling of utter alienation from God, we would have settled down to a secured possession of God. We would have said, "How good it is to pitch our tents here." But it is dark and we have to be on our way, seeking the Lord. Thus God leads us further into the dark desert.

As we descend more deeply within ourselves, God reveals our own abyss of nothingness before the Mountain of God that fills us with dread. The more one advances,

the more the names of God have no sense; images of Him disappear; nothing satisfies. The very presence of God that once flooded the soul in deep prayer and in contact with the world now seems to be absent. The soul has gone into the full night, the dark desert. Only a person who has felt this friendship, this intimacy with God, knows what the absence of God means. Only the person who has loved knows what absence of the loved one means.

God develops this necessary pruning, this dying of the seed, in order that more fruit can be brought forth. This is a necessary dying to our self-reliance unto a deepening of faith that only can come when we are in this darkness, standing before a wall that is impermeable. We cry out for God to show Himself in the night of the desert where we understand our own absolute nothingness before God. There is a silencing of our own powers like the silence of steel in the black night. Now one has to stand firm and cry out in deep, dark, stark faith for the mercy of God to reveal Himself. "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

The sinner moves into that area of dread that Thomas Merton writes about in his book on "The Climate of Monastic Prayer":

Following Gabriel Marcel, dread divests itself of the sense of possession, of having our being and our power to live, in order that we may simply be in perfect openness, turned inside out, of the defenselessness that is utter simplicity, and total gift. This is at once the heart of meditation and of liturgical sacrifice. It is the sign of the Spirit upon the chosen people of God, not the ones who 'have an inner life' and deserve respect in the gatherings of an institution notorious for piety but have simply surrendered to God in the desert of emptiness where He reveals His unutterable mercy, without condition and without explanation, in the mystery of love. Now we can

understand that full maturity of spiritual life cannot be reached unless we first pass through dread, anguish, trouble, and fear that necessarily accompany the inner crises of spiritual death in which we finally abandon our attachment to our exterior self and surrender ourselves completely to Christ. But when this surrender has been truly made there is no longer place for fear and dread, no doubt or hesitation in the mind of one who is completely and finally resolved to seek nothing and do nothing but what is willed by Him, by God's love.<sup>1</sup>

The night seems very dense and dark, the desert seems very dry and empty. One feels that he will never find God again; and yet there is no true panic or disquietude. There is only a deep abiding trust that God will come; that in a way He is present in His absence. The soul is being called to experience God in a new modality, no longer experiencing Him through one's own concepts or feelings with assuring repercussions in one's physical life, but now nakedly through faith. Faith grows as we come to know God in the unknowable. The soul feels immobile, blocked at the bottom of the mountain, completely alone, crying out to God for His infinite mercy. God is so much the Other. We begin to experience our creatureliness, our poverty, and our utter dependence upon God.

To become a true contemplative, to let God do with us what He wants, demands the greatest suffering. This is the common doctrine of Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Eckhart, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross. These mystics were not neurotic people who took particular delight in suffering for love of God. They had entered into their deepest self where they began to lose the most precious possession that a human being has before he learns to surrender himself in love to the Other, the control of his own little world of reality. When you lose this, you either have to be insane or you are

a mystic, completely trusting by faith that God will do whatever He wishes with you. When *He* becomes the center of all reality, then you have moved into true wisdom. And this is contemplation.

“WINTER IS PAST”

God has been preparing for a great meeting through this dryness. Perhaps, suddenly He makes Himself felt in a flashing light that illumines the desert, and all the sweetness that was felt before suddenly is very empty in comparison to the presence of God that is felt now. The desert springs into new life, full of flowers in full bloom.

“Come then, my love, my lovely one, come.  
For see, winter is past, the rains are over and gone.  
The flowers appear on the earth.  
The season of glad sons has come.  
The cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land. . .  
Come then, my love, my lovely one, come.  
My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock,  
In the coverts of the cliff, show me your face.  
Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet  
And your face is beautiful (The Song of Songs: 2;10-14).

One enters into a new world. Solitude is no longer solitude. God appears everywhere in everything. He shows Himself in corners that were before very obscure. Now everything is impregnated by His holy presence. Everything that touches us calls us to God. The mind plunges into the inner, intimate depths of things and finds God always as the immanent principle that sustains all creatures in being.

No longer is there a sacred and a secular world. Instead, one now moves, not as an angel by-passing or

ignoring this world, but rather seeing the world in all its uniqueness, and yet seeing it in the finality of God's creative love. Such a person has entered into true freedom. No longer does such a person see only in the light of his own petty world or of his own desires, so inordinate at times, but now he has died to self and lives to Christ. Surely this is the dimension that Paul had experienced when he repeated these words in his epistles: to put on Christ, to live in Christ, to be with Christ. One hundred and sixty-four times Paul uses this phrase, "in Christ." When we move through the purification of self, we open ourselves totally to God's presence, and we begin to see Christ in all things and all things in Christ.

You start with a stone, a little flower—God is there, totally. One does not have to run over the whole world and to exhaust the gamut of human experiences in order to find God. In the beginning, contemplative souls need beautiful trees and flowers. As they become more and more advanced in contemplation, they follow the instruction of Evagrius, desert Father of the fourth century: "Go into your cell—go into your cell and don't come out. It will teach you everything." If you have God, you have everything, because you are touching the core of reality.

In this stage of prayer, there is a great experience of unity in finding God in all things. The dichotomy between action and contemplation does not exist any more. Whatever the person is doing—opening or closing his eyes, he finds the Divine Presence everywhere in the unity of all things, and this forces the person out of himself in a spirit of worship and service.

This, it seems to me, is the only real celibate. This is celibacy ultimately, not so much physically, but theolog-

ically—the celibacy of one who is now totally open to the presence of God and in love with the whole world, because the person has already participated in an experience similar to the Beatific Vision of God in all things and all things in God. This person of prayer cannot for a moment love another human being for himself alone. Yet he does not love another person only as a *means* to God. The process is more intuitive, and this he cannot explain. It is an experience of God at the heart of all matter. He loves this being, this person, this tree, this stone, and God at the same time. There is no moving from this to that, but in his vision he sees at one and the same time the created being and the infinite love of God Who creates this being and gives it to him as a gift. He finds the gift and Giver in the same look.

The actual graces in which God manifests Himself are very numerous and variable for each contemplative. There are likes, tastes, intuitions, attractions that draw the soul to an understanding of God working in all types, in all manners of persons and events. In one moment, suddenly the person realizes that God is there, that God exists—“My God! He loves me!”—a tremendous grace, a breakthrough in consciousness. But normally, besides these great moments of illumination that follow upon this new plateau of “seeing” God in all things, day after day, moment after moment there is a continued evolution of the soul in an imperceptible presence of God in solitude that leads to even greater and greater unity. There are great moments that come like flashes, but normally there is a steady growth that leads to a higher degree still to come, the step that makes the soul die to itself in a complete love of others.

“LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU”

This degree ultimately is where the vision of unity is leading us. The more one is raised to the intimate presence of God, the experience of the knowledge and love of God, the more he begins to enter into communion with other human beings. There develops within us a genuine sense of being one with the whole world, of being open and ready to give ourselves to the world and more specifically to the community in which we find ourselves.

It would be very superficial to think that a person, having found God, would then turn to the world in the sense of mere pity or condescending compassion. On the contrary, in discovering God he discovers the most intimate bond of all creation, and so in his relationship to God he moves out into a community where God is found as the creative force. That person is he who makes the synthesis between the first and second commandments and finds that there are not two commandments but really only one: we must love the Lord our God with our whole mind and our whole soul. The love of God cannot kill our love for other human beings. True love of God will always be a true love for other human beings. There is only one love.

Let us love one another since love comes from God  
 And everyone who loves is begotten by God  
 and knows God.  
 Anyone who fails to love can never have known God.  
 —as long as we love one another God will live in us  
 And his love will be complete in us. . .  
 God is love and anyone who lives in love  
 lives in God,  
 And God lives in him (I Jn. 4;7-16).

If we, then, by experiencing this love of God within us, yield to this love, it is the nature of God's love to communicate itself to others. Thus the very community of the Trinity loving within us pushes outside of us and through us to bring about, in the immediate world around us, a similar Trinitarian community of Godly loving persons. It happens often, when a soul is drawn to God in this period of greater silence and solitude, that there is a period when a person cannot go out, cannot feel this warm rapport with others. One's interior is so totally fixed upon God that such a person feels "out of it"; human commerce seems useless and banal. That is, I suppose, one of the trials of the spiritual life, this sense of impotence to witness sufficiently to the love of God that we have experienced so abundantly within us. Here we must keep in mind the need to be humble and open to serve all who come into our little world, even though we should bungle and not succeed in doing much.

God does give an attraction to a deep contemplative life that often means a forced cutting off of oneself from the usual contacts with other human beings beyond the immediate and closed circle of members of a chosen religious community. Such a person is called to witness to that eschatological total immersion in God that will be our life to come. But this does not mean that such a contemplative can be indifferent to the world. Evagrius of the desert said: "I leave men in order to find them." In our pragmatic life, ruled by worldly standards, this type of life, to be totally absorbed in God, to be at the total disposition of God, asking to do only what He wants and never seeking self, seems absurd and impractical. The world needs this type of absurdity and impracticality. Such absurdity will make sense only in the life to come or

to persons of faith who can appreciate the value of such prophetic signs.

If one thinks being a contemplative in such a hidden life is egotistic and easy, then he has not lived such a life to its fullest. We read in the lives of the early Fathers of the desert, about those who anticipated the cosmic redemption of the world by entering deeply into themselves; in their hidden life they became re-concilers with Christ in order to effect the redemption of one particle of this universe and thus in some small way extend that redemption into the world without ever going out into the world. But most of us God is not calling to this absolute immediacy as a sign to the world of the *eschaton* to come. But He is calling all of us to be contemplatives in this sense: to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, our whole strength—this is to be a contemplative, to look at God as the root of our being and to love Him in all things.

God calls us to love, and now on earth as later in heaven, we are to spend our eternity growing in the love of God as mirrored in other beings. Heaven is going to be this whole wonderful world transfigured by the presence of God through an ever-increasing degree of consciousness of His presence and love. We can test whether God has really brought us to a true experience in contemplation of the indwelling Trinity, by our ability to go out and love others as God has loved us. The contemplative sees himself as a person loved by God very much, and in this grace he discovers himself more centered upon God, more one with God, and yet more one with all other beings. There is no longer fear or a sense of insecurity. He is rooted in God and he can go forth and love the world as God loves it. So the presence of God in all things evolves into an habitual

experience that allows the contemplative to move always from light to light, "from glory to glory." Every day is a new romance of discovery.

This is contemplation. It is not just turning aside to be alone with God for an hour. It is the gift of God's loving presence within us so strongly felt that we can find God everywhere and praise Him in union with all the living and the dead. We realize that the dead who passed beyond this worldly existence are really not dead but are more alive than we. We learn to communicate with them, for they see reality in its fullness. By our faith we can join them and praise God continually. This is what a contemplative is, and it seems to me that it is also a very good description of what it means to be a human being.