

Weekly Readings 10/3/2013



An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, "Letter Eleven," WEB

OF SILENCE (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1996), pp. 116-118.

From time to time, by grace and faith and the simplicity of the mantra, we can be led into deep peace and equanimity.

Our conscious existence becomes harmonious, reflecting from deep in our being the calm and joy of Christ's risen life. Body and mind and spirit are married in peace, like a couple who after much arguing return to the basic goodness and love of their relationship. As far as it is concerned, the mind sees its interminable internal monologues and self-dramatizing anxieties suddenly drop away, wonderfully calmed. It becomes silent, amazed at its own capacity to be still (perhaps not aware that by thinking it is not yet wholly still!) and at its capacity to let go of its compulsive desires and fears. [. . .]

Then there are times--perhaps fleeting moments--when we are led entirely out of ourselves. We are not asleep. But neither are we awake in the usual sense. Indeed, compared with this, our usual waking state is more like a dream than waking. The clarity of consciousness we enjoy is because the I who wants to enjoy it has disappeared.

"I live no longer but Christ lives in me." Is St Paul who describes this trans-personal, ego-transcendent state a Buddhist or a pantheist? Who was the I who lived no longer? Who is the me in whom only Christ, the perfect image of the invisible God, lives? These are important, endless questions. But their importance only takes effect after the event. In the duration of the simple state of union these questions, like all thoughts, are consumed by the sheer presence of the "One who truly is." We return to the ordinary reality and remember the last thought we had before the experience happened--our thirst, our bank overdraft, the troubles our children are facing. Before long we are engrossed in our familiar thought-worlds. God becomes a goal we are trying to achieve or understand, or a memory we feel nostalgic for, rather than the I AM of love who floods our inmost being.

The early Christian monks well understood these passing states of the spiritual life. Cassian

wrote of the "lethal sleep" of prayer when the mind enjoys a lulled activity and dulled feelings. It is a form of the "Gethsemani sleep" of the apostles. Cassian also described the "pernicious peace," a strong phrase referring to the emotional and mental calm we try to cling to as soon as we become aware of it. None of these states, of ecstasy, sleep or consolation, are the goal of prayer. However attractive they may be, or painful their loss, there is another goal. A condition of complete simplicity requiring not less than everything, as Dame Julian put it.

Poverty of spirit, purity of heart. The combined state of the Beatitudes. Life in Christ. [I]t is the state where the mind is merged with the heart, not just for a few timeless moments but permanently and unwaveringly. Like a candle burning in a windless space. Like the man who built his house on the rock of the true Self rather than on the sands of the ego.

After meditation: W.S. Merwin, "To Myself," PRESENT COMPANY (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005) p. 132.

To Myself

*Even I forget you
I go on looking for you
I believe I would know you
I keep remembering you
sometimes long ago but then
other times I am sure you
were here a moment before
and the air is still alive
around where you were and I
think then I can recognize
you who are always the same
who pretend to be time but
you are not time and who speak
in the words but you are not
what they say you who are not
lost when I do not find you*

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