



The World Community for Christian Meditation

Published on *The World Community for Christian Meditation* (<http://www.wccm.org>)

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Weekly Readings 25/9/2011



An excerpt from L. Freeman, **FIRST SIGHT: The Experience of Faith** (London: Continuum, 2011) pp. 7-8.

Christianity today has embarked on a radicalizing project: of recovering and updating the contemplative dimension in all aspects of life--dialogue with the secular and scientific worlds and with other religions, and also, at home, in its theology, morality, prayer, worship and social action.

If the church fails in this spiritualizing endeavor or yields to the temptation to regress into a nostalgic world of supposed certainties, as some would like, it will be impossible for it to adjust to a secular world and be what it is meant to be. Today Christian identity itself--the reception and communication of what comes to humanity through Jesus--is at stake. A corollary of this identity is its relationship to other religious identities and its need to be a team-player with other forms of faith in responding to the global crisis.

Unless it is contemplative, the church fails to be contemporary. Its "catholicity"--that is, its universality--contracts. As it contracts to near-extinction, it shrivels into being a mere cult. It is not, however, the size of its congregations that matters but the quality of mind awakened in those who go to church or don't go to church conventionally at all but live the Christian faith in other ways. Numbers go up and down. Mind is trans-numerical. It is either open or closed or it tends in one of these directions. The world needs contemplatives with courageously open minds of whatever form of faith--Buddhists, Hindus, Jews or Muslims. Every religion faces its particular challenge to recover and reconnect with its spiritual core. Christianity needs contemplative Christians, coming from their experience of this center and carrying the word of a unifying gospel into a wounded world bent on self-destruction. Mission is an element of Christian discipleship--to go forth and speak of the experience of faith. Where faith is strong, conversion is not the goal of mission. That is the work of the Spirit not a human project. So the mission of the contemporary Christian is essentially contemplative and will lead into dialogue rather than sheep-stealing. Contemplatives are made from experience that runs on pure faith. This is why we need to understand what faith means. This may require many Christians to undergo a deprogramming of their earlier religious training. They must first allow themselves to be converted.

After Meditation, ?Swan,? Mary Oliver, SWAN: Poems and Prose Poems (Boston: Beacon, 2010), p. 15.

Did you too see it, drifting, all night on the black river?
Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery air,
an armful of white blossoms,
a perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned
into the bondage of its wings: a snowbank, a bank of lilies,
biting the air with its black beak:
Did you hear it, fluting and whistling
a shrill dark music, like the rain pelting the trees,
like a waterfall
knifing down the black ledges?
And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds?
a white cross streaming across the sky, its feet
like black leaves, its wings like the stretching light
of the river?
And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything?
And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?
And have you changed your life?

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Source URL: <http://www.wccm.org/content/weekly-readings-2592011>