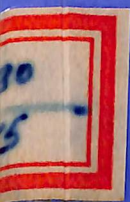


The background is a deep blue color. In the center, a single water droplet is captured in mid-fall, just above the surface of the water. The droplet is elongated and has a bright highlight on its top surface. Below the droplet, a series of concentric ripples spread outwards, creating a sense of movement and depth. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the water and the droplet.

V. F. Vineeth

**Contemplative Prayer
for All**



V. F. VINEETH, CMI

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER FOR ALL

Vidyavanam Publications

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Contemplative Prayer for All

by Fr. Francis Vineeth, cmi

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Cover Design:

“As a drop of water merges in the sea without losing its identity, so the soul, once purified, remains a stainless spirit absorbed into and surrounded by the unbounded waters of the Divine Spirit, which is by nature Being, Consciousness, and Bliss” (Chapter 1, §12)

PREFACE

A small handbook on Contemplative Prayer was my dream for several years. But I had postponed it. I waited till the day it spontaneously came in. Of course, I was taking notes and also inspiring texts from the writings of saints, especially from St. John of the Cross and from Indian texts on yoga and meditation.

Very often the Indian word *dhyana* is translated into English as meditation and in the West meditation is almost always understood as discursive meditation. This is not the Indian word *dhyana*, which is much more contemplative, because, according to Patanjali, the architect of yogic meditation, *dhyana* comes only after silencing the senses (*pratyahara*) and silencing the mind (*dharana*). What, then, is *dhyana*, if not a step towards contemplation? This study has already been published in my book *Yoga of Spirituality* (1995).

I thankfully remember my confreres and seekers who visit the ashram, many of whom were very much interested in contemplative prayer along with yoga and other spiritual

exercises. All of them have inspired me and were helpful in making this journey together.

In this context, I would like to thank in a special way Fr. Sebastian Painadath, SJ, who had recently sent me a list of texts on contemplative prayer and divinization of the soul by Christian authors from the very first century onwards. This has incidentally helped me saving my time in search of their works and texts. Because Fr. Painadath sent this book without my request, especially at a time when it was very helpful to me, I take it as a work of divine providence and joyfully acknowledge it in a word of thanks to God and Fr. Painadath.

Let the peace of the Lord to which contemplative prayer can lead each one of us be our wealth and health, in spirit and body. Let these waves of peace embrace us all.

08.09.2011

Nativity of Bl. V. Mary

Fr. Francis Vineeth, cmi

Vidyavanam Ashram

ABBREVIATIONS

Ascent	Ascent to Mount Carmel
BCE	Before Common Era
BG	Bagavadgita
CE	Common Era
Ch	Chapter
CW	Collected Works
DN	Dark Night of the Soul
PG	Patres Graecae: The Writings of the Greek Fathers
Sp. Ex.	Spiritual Exercises

“I loved the blessed silence,
I loved gazing without speech,
Wondering without words,
Understanding without the labour of the
mind,
And resting in the Lord,
Remaining fully awake” (Francis Vineeth)¹

¹ Francis Vineeth, “In Search of the Ineffable” in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living: A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Vadakethala Francis Vineeth CMI*, ed. Saju Chackalackal, 5-36, Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publications, 2009, 31-32.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

1. What Is Contemplative Prayer?

Contemplative prayer is a simple form of prayer. It is not so much of saying prayers, or a prayer of too much thinking. The word thinking here is understood as reasoning or argumentative thinking. We need argumentative thinking to prove a point. Here it is our mind that works whereas in contemplative prayer our mind and argumentative thinking are put to rest. The person in prayer seeks only God's will, and surrenders himself/herself to it from the very beginning of prayer. The surrender is normally an 'attitude of being' (*bhava*) in people practicing contemplative prayer.

2. Contemplative Prayer and the Surrendering Attitude

An attitude is a general disposition of mind. If we are well disposed to do the will of God, our attitude is that of surrendering to the will of God. The one who practices contemplative prayer desires to do only the will of God. So the

focus of attention is on what God wants me to do. Contemplative prayer leads our mind and heart always to the Lord's will and we are drawn to assimilate the Lord's attitude and nature into us. The distinction between God's will and my will gradually becomes thinner and thinner and slowly evaporates. Here our Indian dictum also becomes true: "You become what you meditate." Contemplative prayer is the surrender of your will to the will of your Lord, in order to become one with the will and desire of Jesus, who loved you, died for you, redeemed you, and after resurrection, breathed his Spirit into you.

3. Contemplative Prayer Is a Prayer Guided by the Spirit

Jesus, before his departure to heaven, breathed his Spirit on his disciples. He said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22). Holy Spirit is the breath of the Father and the Son, proceeding as a living breath (Spirit) into us, humans, making his abode in our hearts. We have to understand the Holy Spirit as God abiding in each one of us in the deepest level of our soul. Spirit is the breath of God, and breath here means the inner life of God. Our bodily life is entirely dependent on the breathing of air, whereas our Spiritual life is

entirely dependent on breathing the Holy Spirit which the Lord breathes into our own souls. The Lord breathed this Spirit on his disciples, who in turn became the apostles. The Lord breathed His Spirit on each one of us on the day of baptism, and more specially on the day of confirmation. Confirmation is the strengthening of our souls in the power of the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit should guide our soul and through the soul our entire being. This is the Spirit of Jesus abiding in us, enlightening us, empowering us and divinizing or transforming us. All this, all the more happens during the moments of contemplative prayer.

4. Mind and Contemplative Prayer

Contemplative prayer is an advanced state of meditation. Usually all adults or even grown-ups, start meditation using mind. This is perfectly all right. Even in contemplative prayer we use our mind in the beginning; but as we advance in contemplative prayer the role of the mind becomes less and less, and the role of the Holy Spirit becomes more and more. That is why we said earlier (No. 3), the Holy Spirit guides our contemplative prayer. The realm of the mind is reasoning. Mind thinks very logically. It is a

very important faculty God has given us. With mind we think, we discern, and take decisions. But mind has only what the senses bring to it (Thomas Aquinas). Mind is a processor of all what senses bring. Left to itself, there is nothing divine in it.

5. The Difference between the Roles of Mind and Intellect

	Mind: <i>Manas</i>	Intellect: <i>Buddhi</i>
1	(from the root <i>man</i> : to think, ponder)	(from the root <i>budh-bodh</i> : to be awakened)
2	Body bound	Soul bound
3	Responding to sensations	Responding to Sp. inspirations
4	Rational	Mystical
5	Calculative	Contemplative
6	Outward	Inward
7	Search for details	Search for depth
8	Argumentative	Assimilative
9	Prone to work	Prone to rest
10	Reading outside	Reading inside
11	Academic/Objective knowledge	Contemplative wisdom of faith
12	Dominant	Surrendering

Explanation

5.1. *Manas, Buddhi*

In Sanskrit, we have three words related to meditation and contemplation. They are, (1) *man*, to think from which we have the word *mananam*, often translated as meditation. (2) *Buddh - bodh*, to be awakened. From this root we have the word *buddhi*, the faculty of a profounder consciousness or an awakened consciousness. (3) *Dhi*, also means to think or ponder over, but more related to *buddhi* than to *manas* or mind. From the root *dhi* we have the word *dhyana*, a profounder thinking with a sense of wonder. Thus, in *Gayatri-mantra*, the hymn chanted during sunrise meditation, the verse, "*bhargo devasya dhimahi: whose divine rays I contemplate,*" is a deeper look at the sunrise, internally seeing the rise of consciousness in one's own soul, which is expressed in the next line of the *Gayatri Mantra*: "*dhiyo yo nahi prajodayat*": that he may awaken our consciousness. Our meditation may begin with mind as *mananam*, but slowly moves to *dhyana*, a contemplative look with a sense of surrender, that this, what I think or meditate may be realized in me. In this charter, we are

dealing with only two words, mind (*manas*) and intellect or will (*buddi*).

5.2. Body-Bound, Soul-Bound

Mind has nothing in itself, except what the senses bring. Mind (*manas*) is, therefore, very much attached to body (brain) and to all the sense faculties. Mind is a very good computer who processes all what the senses bring (the sense-data), and keep them in appropriate files of memory. Mind can also spontaneously bring them to actual memory at will.

On the contrary, *buddhi* represents the reflection of God's consciousness or the image of God in us, and is capable of 'reading into' (Latin: *intus-legere* = intellect), accept or reject in the light of profounder consciousness. It is a faculty of the soul (i.e., a combination of intellect and will). *Buddhi* evaluates in the light of divine awareness it has received as the 'image of God' (Gen. 1:27) along with further graces and revelations. A conflict between two value systems is possible in the human beings when mind associated with body, sense faculties and the objects of the sense faculties in the world can raise its own preferred values in contrast to that of *buddhi*, deeper awareness of the soul

devoted to God's image and corresponding values it received from God, Jesus, and sources of revelations, e.g., gospel values. But the soul, endowed with intellect and will can train the mind slowly. *Buddhi* needs the cooperation of the mind to put the divine consciousness of the soul into action, because senses always wait for the command from the mind.

5.3. Responding to Sensation, Responding to the Spirit

In the light of what is said above, it is clear that mind has a natural tendency to follow what sense want, at least until proper awakening takes place, and *buddhi* has a tendency to follow what God wants. When *buddhi* is distorted by what we call sin, prompted by *ahamkara*, ego-centredness, instead of God-centredness, a real conflict takes place in the heart of the human being.

5.4. Rational-Mystical

Mind is an automatic computer, a processor always true to the sense data. There can be error in the processing if there is error in what is communicated by the senses, i.e., if senses feed wrongly (e.g., a false name or number) that will be reflected in the result. When mind follows

mental logic and natural reasoning, *buddhi*, as the soul-power, evaluates everything from the point of view of faith, which accepts reason, but quite often demands to transcend reason's logic in favour of Gospel logic, such as in the case of forgiveness to a real offender, sacrifice of one's own comforts in favour of other poorer people, etc. In these or similar cases, the holy people give up the mental logic, not because it is totally wrong, but knowingly opt the mystery in the light of faith, in the light of what Jesus did and demands from us. This is the way the saints have followed.

5.5. Calculative, Contemplative

Now, our thinking becomes more contemplative and less calculative. Retaliation is not the answer to offences; but sacrifice and unconditional love. We are already invited to walk through the night of darkness.

5.6. Outward, Inward

Mind looks at the senses and their objects. This is an outward orientation, whereas the *buddhi* (intellect/will) which reflects God's consciousness naturally turns to God who abides within, because 'reflection' will never be happy

unless it falls back on (to) the original. "You have created us for you, O Lord, and we will never be happy unless we embrace you" (St. Augustine).

5.7. Search for Details or Depth

Since mind is body-bound and sense-bound, and each sense has its own specific objects in the world, there are a lot of details to be examined, analysed, and processed. This is what science does. Intellect, on the other hand, as it reflects God, turns to God, who abides deep down in the innermost centre of the soul as pure consciousness, as an abode of light and peace. Through the soul, the mind should come in touch with this divine centre within us. Mind can also use the insights of the intellect for its own search into the unknown mysteries in the cosmos.

5.8. Argumentative, Assimilative

This is only a follow up of what has been said. Mental logic is argumentative, less inclined to leave anything in mystery; but the soul knows that God is more a mystery than what it understands with its limited intelligence. So, what is required is that the soul gets charged with the light and delight of the Infinite.

5.9. Prone to Work, Prone to Rest in Faith

Mind always calls us to come out and do some work for wealth, happiness, and other amenities of life. Of course, this is needed. But this is only one aspect of our life. What is more important and more lasting is the soul's union with God. Therefore, the soul longs to be with the Lord, and peacefully rests in Him, whenever possible. This rest is not inaction, but a surrender of the soul to be transformed into God's likeness through the working of the Spirit.

5.10. Reading Inside, Reading Outside

This is already explained in the above statements. The mind reads outside; the soul reads what is written inside or in the heart of Jesus.

5.11. Objective Knowledge, Contemplative Wisdom

For academic or objective knowledge we need the critical attitude of the mind, which should be objectively true and verifiable. This is very much needed for progress in science and associated areas of life. But our Mother Mary never did such a work; but her life was a walk

in contemplative wisdom of faith. Faith is a dark light.

5.12. Dominant, Surrendering

Mind naturally tends to insist on its logical conclusions. This is ok; however, *buddhi* also wants to transcend mind's logic in order to serve God and others in a spirit of self-sacrifice, where no injustice is done to anyone. *Buddhi* joyfully accepts everything and surrenders everything back to God as Jesus accepted everything from His Father and surrendered everything back to his Father, in a spirit of perfect sacrifice. *Buddhi* is led more by trust in God, than trust in reason's logic.

6. Contemplative Prayer Begins When Mind Is Silenced

We should remember one thing: mind's logic is not our Lord's Gospel logic. Mind, though admirable, is a natural faculty of correct and logical reasoning. Though there are good values, as far as reason understands, these are not our ultimate values, when our consciousness moves from mind (reason) level to faith level. Faith values are Gospel values. All these values are based on our love for Jesus and our unalterable

surrender and commitment to Him. Gospel values are accepted by faith. Logical values of mind, though correct in themselves, are often transcended by faith. Contemplative prayer is this penetrating look through the eye of faith.

7. Contemplative Prayer Leads Us through Faith

Faith is our answer to Divine light. Jesus often asked the person whom He was willing to heal: "Do you believe." If mind is devoid of Ego and is humble, mind can easily surrender to the divine light, which God is willing to give us and is always giving us. Because this light is not the conclusion of our own thinking, we need a very humble heart to receive it. It is received by the soul which is spirit by nature and participates in the nature of God through its faculties of intellect and will. God communicates to the soul and the humble soul understands and surrenders. Intellect and will, is not exactly our 'mind', but the deepest level of the soul's consciousness, where Holy Spirit abides. The soul can accept or reject anything in the light of faith, namely in accordance with the light of the Holy Spirit, abiding within the soul.

8. Faith Is Always Surrender

If there is no surrendering attitude there is no faith. Who surrenders? The whole person guided by the soul, along with the intellect, mind and senses surrenders. In the beginning mind may oppose. For example suppose I got ill. I prayed for my health. I was not cured immediately. I am still on my sick bed. Now the mind thinks, quite logically, I should get well soon. My prayer should be heard soon because I have to be in my office. But again, suppose the sickness continued for a few days more. If we can accept this serenely as God's will, without grumbling, we are led by faith rather than by reason. I still desire to get well and to report in the office, as soon as possible. This is all right and also a needed mind set. Mind does its job well in reminding you about it. But since the sickness continues, we have no other way, but to be guided by faith which is a gift of God, a light from God which we accept and surrenders. This is faith, a contemplative look into the heart of Jesus. Then, what about healing? By worrying about healing, we do not bring about healing. A peaceful mind surrendered to the will of God, communicated to us through the inner light from Jesus, our Lord, is a better disposition

even for physical healing. (I am not advocating the so-called 'faith-healing', without taking any medicine). Do what is possible in my power and situation, and leave the rest to God's will and guidance. There is a spirit of contemplative prayer in this attitude which is ultimately guided by the Holy Spirit. There is more peace, more serenity, more surrender to the will of God.

9. Mother Mary's Contemplative Prayer

Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them (Lk. 2:19). Our Mother Mary is a perfect example of contemplative prayer. The angel Gabriel's words during annunciation were wonderful and high-sounding.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:30-33).

But then comes her ordeal of life. It is now time to give birth to this miraculous child. Because of the well calculated plan of God, at that time the Emperor in Rome, the colonial ruler of Palestine, decides 'a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire' (Lk. 2:1). Mary and Joseph had to leave their home in Nazareth and go to Judea, their original Fatherland. It is a distance of about 100 kilometres and Mary was pregnant. They reached Jerusalem, probably by a caravan, and it was time for Mary to give birth to this heavenly baby. All are heading for Jerusalem from all parts of Palestine and naturally there was no room in any guest house. Finally they (Mary and Joseph) walk up to Bethlehem, a small village, not too far from Jerusalem, and Mary gives birth to this future King, "whose kingdom will not have any end" in a cattle shed. How Mary's faith and reason go hand in hand. Of course the same should be said about St. Joseph who also is passing through this divine ordeal and was a protection for Mary as designed by God. There is not a single word of complaint from either of them. Everything is accepted in faith and in a spirit of contemplative prayer. Remembering the happy, but deeply poignant incidents one after another, and prayerfully pondering over

them with a surrendering attitude, is the essence of contemplative prayer. Silence is its beauty. It is a prayer of the heart, where mind, intellect and will are deeply surrendered to the will of the Lord. Absolute silence, silence of God and silence of Mary and Joseph, speaks a lot. Everything is integrated and held in the depth of heart absorbed in contemplative prayer and profound faith. Does this make sense to you? This is a glimpse into contemplative prayer.

10. Faith Is a Dark Light

We experience faith as a 'dark light', because it is not the light mind is so far accustomed to. When we were babies we easily accepted many things in faith, because our mind had not yet been fully developed. This faith of the child is a natural faith or trust in their parents. It is very good and slowly the baby learns to extend this trust to God who is our heavenly Father. Our faith and trust grow together with regard to our earthly parents and heavenly Father and Mary our Mother in heaven. This natural extension of faith to God is good and welcome; yet, strictly speaking that is not the essence of Christian faith. Mature faith is a fully developed, adult's conscious submission to the light of revelation, or to the ideals Gospel of Jesus places before us.

This is a total and sincere surrender of our mind; heart and will to the Lord and to live according to what his mind, heart and will (wisdom) have planned for us. Thus Faith is simply a surrendering love, to the Lord who loved us first unconditionally. Faith, trust and love, the three theological virtues unite us with Jesus intimately that we slowly become one with Christ and could say with St. Paul: "Now it is not I who live, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20).

11. The Use of *Mantra* in Contemplative Prayer

Once the mind is silenced, and senses are at rest, the soul's awareness is well focused on the Lord. This can be on any form of the Lord, e.g. the Lord praying in Gethsemane or the Lord's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, or the Risen Lord appearing to his disciples, or to Mary of Magdalena, or the Lord crucified or the Lord in Most Blessed Sacrament. This preferred form of our Lord or of any theme, e.g. the words of our Lord, is known as *ista-devata* i.e., the divine form or word I choose for my meditation. Fixing our attention on what is chosen for meditation, the soul remains in silence, namely the silences of all senses (they all are resting) and also of the mind

(mind also is resting). The awareness is kept on the Lord in the form of a simple look. *This look is contemplative and absorbing.* What is meditated upon, enters deeply into the soul of the one who meditates, to the extent he or she surrenders to the Lord whom he/she meditates. The two become one. This is the beginning of the divine transformation of the soul. This prayer of simple look is contemplative in nature. To keep this awareness steady, one who meditates may use a *mantra*, a word or a small ejaculatory prayer of very minimum words, such as, Jesus; or Jesus, I love you; or my God, my all, etc.

You can always have your preferred form of God or Lord and your preferred form of a *mantra*. *Mantra* is defined in Sanskrit as follows: *Mananena trayati iti mantra* which means the meditation of that which brings about your salvation, that word or verse is your *mantra*. It is the first syllables of the two words *mananam* = meditation and *trananam* = salvation. *Mananam* and *tra-nanam*: *man+tra* = *mantra*. You can either choose any existing *mantra*, such as "my God, my all" (Francis Assisi), "All for the greater glory of God" (St. Ignatius Loyola), or your own *mantra* e.g., 'Jesus, I love you' or what you compose. After the set time for contemplative

prayer, let the *mantra* remain in your heart and keep repeating or reciting it often during the day, that the spirit of contemplative prayer may continue all through the day.

12. Contemplative Prayer and Divine Transformation

The ultimate goal of our prayer life is Divine Transformation. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. God's likeness can be established in us only by God, because nobody can give what he does not have. In contemplative prayer, the senses and mind being silenced, the soul which is spirit, i.e., consciousness can get fused with the divine Consciousness abiding within us as the Holy Spirit. As a drop of water merges in the sea without losing its identity, so the soul, once purified, remains a stainless spirit absorbed into and surrounded by the unbounded waters of the Divine Spirit, which is by nature Being, Consciousness and Bliss. It is certainly blissful; but demands purification in all its forms of existence. Since soul is embodied, purification of both body and spirit is necessary, before the door of the perfect blissful union is opened to the soul or the person in contemplative prayer.

Let the soul and body remain always in the serenity of the Lord, even when they are engaged in action. Serenity or peace of the Lord is the result of contemplative prayer remaining in your heart and soul.

Inspiring Texts for Contemplative Prayer

1. St. John of the Cross: *Ascent to Mount Carmel and Dark Night of the Soul*, Stanza 1.

One dark night,
Fired with love's urgent longings
Ah sheer grace!
I went out unseen,
My house now all stilled.

N.B. St. John is using the same poem for both his books mentioned above. But commentaries are different.

Tips to Interpretation:

Line 1: Dark night: night of faith, night of purification

Line 2: Love's longing: the soul is already wounded by love for her beloved. She is not happy with the comforts the world brings, if she misses the Lord there.

Line 3: Sheer grace: the journey of purification is simply a grace she received from God

Line 4: I went out unseen: unseen by world and devil (away from all possible temptations)

Line 5: My house, now all stilled: my house of senses along with mind and later my house of the spirit (intellect, memory and will) are put to rest. See Ch. II.

2. From the Gospel according to Mathew

He went a little further on, threw himself face downwards, and prayed: 'My father, if it is possible take the cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will' (26:30).

Jesus was in a critical moment of terrible agony and aloneness, abandoned by all. Jesus kept on praying using the same *mantra*: not my will, but Thy will. This could be expressed in Sanskrit, in *mantra* form, if you understand: *thavakam na mamakam* i.e., *thine, not mine*. This is a small *mantra* we can use, when we see ourselves placed in a difficult situation, but we have very little option to get out of it. You can use your own *mantra* in your own language. Such a prayer will give peace to our heart and bring the spirit of reconciliation to our mind-set. Contemplative prayer, focusing on the will or heart of Jesus,

will give you power to transcend your mind and mind's dynamism of thinking.

3. From the Gospel according to Luke

What has been said about Jesus is true with regard to Mary's answer to the message of the angel Gabriel, who spoke to her the following words:

Fear not, Mary, you have found favour with God, and behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus (Lk. 1:30-31)..

This is what the angel from heaven said to a very innocent girl living in a small village called Nazareth. Do you understand anything (apart from your faith)? This was exactly the situation of Mary. Since we have already accepted this in faith, our situation is very different. For Mary it was a startling message. Legally speaking, a pregnant woman, owning no husband, can be thrown to death. This was the then Jewish law. But Mary did not protest; but acknowledged the fact that she is a virgin. The answer of the angel was not something that makes much sense to the mental logic. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you...therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." These high sounding

words of the angel do not make much sense to a thinking mind, because none of which is very easily verifiable; but Mary's humble heart filled with grace and profound faith could silently listen to the inner whisperings of the Spirit contained in the message. A humble handmaid of the Lord, she surrendered to the Lord's wish; saying: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk. 1:26-38). What happened to Mary must happen to us at the end of our contemplative prayer, that we too may say the same words: "let it be to me according to your word."

4. Irenaeus of Lyon (CE 115-202)

The Word became man and the Son of God became the son of man, so that man, united to the Word of God and receiving sonship, man might become son of God. (PG 7,939).

5. St. Basil (CE 330-379)

When sunlight falls on a transparent object it will be fully lighted up. So will an enlightened soul be spiritualized by the Spirit. In divine presence the soul experiences the likeness of God and the state of becoming God as well: *theon genesthai* (On Holy Spirit, 36).

6. St. Bonaventure (CE 1221-1274)

Only those, within whom the fire of the Spirit sent by Christ burns to the innermost, perceive the Mystery of the Divine. If you want to know how this happens, seek in grace, not in science; feel the quest of the soul, not the reasoning; listen to the groaning of prayer, not to the activities of life; ask the bridegroom, not the teacher; approach God, not man; search in darkness not in light; feel that fire that consumes you with effulgent love, and in a mystical anointing transforms you into the Divine. Christ has kindled this fire in us (*Itinerarium*).

7. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 600-CE 100)

The turbulence senses, of son of Kunti, do violently snatch away the mind of even a wise man, striving after perfection. The meditating monk, having controlled them all, sits focused on Me as the Supreme. His wisdom is steady, whose senses are under control. Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed in man. From attachment longing, and from longing anger grows. From anger comes delusion, and from delusion lose of memory. From lose of memory comes the ruin of discrimination and from the ruin of discrimination he perishes. But

the self-controlled man, moving among objects with senses under restraint, and free from attraction and aversion attains to tranquillity. In tranquillity, all sorrow is destroyed. For the intellect of him, who is tranquil minded, is soon established in firmness (BG CH II: 60-65).

CHAPTER II

THE PATH OF PURIFICATION

1. Introducing the Principles of Purification

1.1. Why Purification?

Call to contemplative prayer is certainly a call to deeper divine union. That this goal be achieved the soul must be devoid of all sorts of stain, the stain in the body as well as in the soul. This is because the human operation pervades all the faculties of body and soul. These operations are affected, maligned and even distorted by the motivations of the individual who does them. Motivations are intentional movements of the faculties to achieve a goal which could be self-centred or God-centered. In simple spiritual language the soul, yearning for divine union with her Lord, should do all her actions only for the Lord, that too with great and unconditional, surrendering love. But until and unless the embodied soul is completely purified, the operations may vary or waver at least sometimes in the opposite direction and get characterized by selfishness, hidden or obvious. That this may

not happen the soul should undergo a process of purification, which is known as the dark night of the soul or the night of purification.

1.2. Why the Dark Night?

When the glorious sun is shining in the sky and his brilliant rays illumine the universe, we see everything crystal clear. Our eyes are happy because they could see their objects that are everything in light. But when sun is set, and incidentally the moon was covered by a cloud, the sense-objects of the human eyes are completely withdrawn. The eyes do not see anything. No objects to be engaged with. The eyes are experiencing the night. Now our eyes can rest nicely. Night for the eye means withdrawal of the objects from the sight.

Analogically or in a similar way what happened to the eyes can happen to all our sense faculties, when the appropriate object of the faculties are withdrawn or abandoned or denied. This is the night of the senses. This is also known as the night of purification of the respective faculties. Since we have sense faculties and spiritual faculties, we need purification of the senses and of the soul or the spirit, that is all the intellectual faculties, namely intellect, will and

memory. Let us now start with the night of the senses. There are two kinds of the night: active and passive, and this is true for senses as well as for the soul's intellectual or spiritual faculties.

2. The Active Dark Night of the Senses

The active night means a night, into which the soul is eager to enter wilfully, because the soul, with the grace of the Lord, now knows that she has to strictly follow the way of the Lord and give up everything that may hinder her journey. Therefore the soul or the person concerned is wilfully ready to sacrifice many of her sensuous satisfactions, which are not sinful in themselves and which she could have otherwise enjoyed. In simpler language this is mortification. This is done with a joy of heart, as a loving sacrifice for the Lord. The soul knows very well, though she has a good will, in fact nothing can be done without the continuous assistance of the Lord. This is called the active night for the senses, because the would-be desired objects of the sense are now wilfully denied. This is especially done, when it is to render some voluntary services to others. The soul has already started the initial steps of the union with the Lord, as she continues a life of sacrificial offering to the Lord.

3. The Passive Night of the Senses

The active night is sacrifices offered with full knowledge and active involvement of the soul. It is also the soul's desire, decision and action. When the soul does so much, the Lord is naturally pleased with her. Then the Lord breathes his spirit in a special way upon her and she is now led by the Spirit which she naturally does not resist. Sometimes the soul does not even know, what is happening to her. These operations of the Spirit can be sometimes with joy, but very often through painful agonies or sufferings of life, such as unexpected disease, rejectedness, deep misunderstanding and criticism by others, and in community life, by other members of the society and the like. In the history of many saints, we see all these happening to them. So do not get too much surprised and struggle to solve the problems through the logic of the mind. But when the fault is on your side, and their criticism has at least one point in the right direction, please correct it immediately. For the contemplative, it is not a question of bargaining, but a question of pleasing the Lord more. But, when others criticize, make sure that on your part you are faultless. Otherwise correct yourself immediately. It is the Lord who is displeased with

you, with your wrong attitude and action. This should not happen. Passive night is the night of purification led by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it could be darkness to the eye of reason.

4. The Night of the Spirit: Active and Passive

General Introduction: Faith is the only means to touch God directly. Carefully presenting all other ways of knowing God, natural and supernatural, St. John of the Cross rules out all of them and opts faith and faith alone. This is because God transcends all parameters of our reason. Hence we need the 'eye' of God to know God directly. "Though, truly as theologians say, all creatures carry with them a certain relationship with God and a trace of him... Yet God has no relation or essential likeness to them. Rather the difference which lies between His divine Being and them is infinite" (*Ascent*. 11.8.3). They are like foot-prints of a person which we could see on the ground; they can point to, but cannot communicate with me as a person does. Hence the contemplatives are led by the spirit to withdraw from all forms of their beloved, and see him 'directly' through the eye of faith.

5. The Night of the Intellect: Intellect Is Purified by Faith

This is the journey through faith; not through reason. The logic of reason is surrendered to the light of revelation. "Having given us His Son who is the Word, the only Word, the Father has told us all He has to say, and hence has nothing more to tell us" (*Ascent* II.9.17). This means that, we have no other norm for our life, except that of 'Jesus and his life'. This is accepted by faith.

This faith is not a conclusion of any amount of rational thinking, but simply a gift from God, and is available to the least educated as well. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit who will reveal the truth about God" (Jn. 15:16-17). Slowly the soul gets accustomed to interpret all created reality in the light of faith.

6. The Night of the Memory: Memory Is Purified by Hope

John elaborately deals with the problem of cleansing one's memory of all forms kept in it, whether natural or supernatural. The reason is because none of these really represent God, but only points to. Be free of all of them that God

may guide you directly even without making recourse to the forms we keep in our memory. As St. Paul says, "The Spirit of God will unite with our Spirit and guide us" (Rom. 8:16).

The emptier the memory is, the more it has room for hope. For, hope is for what we do not possess. Memory is of the past. It is keeping the past in our mind, which leads us to a lot of imperfections such as rash judgment, unavoidable depression and the like. Instead, hope is the 'memory of the future', based on the promises of the Lord which is a historical fact and sealed by faith. In this absence, in this night of all created things and their images kept in memory, hope progresses and the soul is certain about its future union with God.

7. The Night of the Will: Will Is Purified by Charity

Senses bring the sum total of their experience to the mind. Mind processes and presents the sum of sense-experience to the intellect. Intellect (*intus-lectiva* = reading inside or content of what is presented by the mind) forms 'idea' of the thing outside and presents it to the will. Will opts it or shuns, as it likes or not, and goes to or away from it. Both, going to or away, left to itself, can bring bondage. The wise person does

not crave nor hate. Hence, the intellect and will must be trained to fall in line with the vision and will of Jesus.

John says “We would achieve nothing by purging the intellect and memory to ground them in the virtues of faith and hope, if we neglected the purification of the will through charity, the third virtue... Without the work of charity faith is dead” (*Ascent*. III.16.1). The will should direct “all the faculties, passions and appetites towards God, turning them away from all that is away from God in order to love God with all its might” (*Ibid*. No. 2).

Hence when the divine light of contemplation strikes a soul not yet entirely illumined, it causes spiritual darkness, for it not only surpasses the act of natural understanding but it also deprives the soul of this act and darkens it. That is why St. Dionysius and other mystical theologians call this infused contemplation a “ray of darkness” – that is, for the soul not yet illumined and purged (DN BK II, 5.3).

8. Purification for Divinization

John also eloquently speaks of two extremes meeting here, the divine and the human. ‘The divine extreme is the purgative contemplation’,

that is, the purificative action from God and 'the human extreme is the soul, the receiver of this contemplation'. God strikes in order to renew and divinize the soul, by way of stripping the soul of its habitual affections and properties. The soul, the receiver, at the sight of its miseries feels that it is melting away, that is, being dissolved into something which it does not know. But do not fear. This dark night will put you right (DN BK II, 6.1).

9. The Soul and the World

We are embodied human souls. The embodied soul is placed in this world. We cannot do anything without the world. By every action of ours we are creating a world of ours. This can be a world of garden work, a world of cooking, a world of play and the like. Though the garden is there, the materials to be cooked and the instruments are there, the play ground and other play mates are there, they all become part of myself when I work in the garden, cook in the kitchen or play on the playground. This is a small extension of my world in action. In this action of mine, am I ego-centred or Lord-centred? Always the 'I' will be there and the desire for the immediate result will be there. We will naturally be happy when we end up with

success and we should also earnestly strive for success. All these are perfectly in order. Yet the question is who is the inner most centre of my life: myself or my Lord? Let there be no action in us that is not dedicated to the Lord. But let us do everything with utmost sincerity and earnestness as if everything is for us. The Lord is the giver of the results of all our works. If this attitude is accepted, we can remain the same in success or failure, in accomplishment and non-accomplishment. Naturally we all will be slightly elated when success welcomes us and slightly dejected when we fail. Take it as natural. But this feeling of elation or depression should not last very long. Let us be free of all attachments and anxieties, let us focus of attention being fixed on the Lord alone. This should be the result of the nights of purification.

10. Contemplative Prayer and the Spirit of Detachment

St. Teresa of Avila, a great genius and doctor of the church in mystical theology, says: "Contemplative prayer is possible for all, provided they are humble and detached from all that is not God." This does not mean the contemplatives should not take food or enjoy life with their companions. The meaning

of detachment is not at all a new doctrine. It is the essence of the teaching of Jesus: "First seek the kingdom of God; everything else will be given to you" (Mt. 6:33). 600 years before Christ, Sri Buddha preached the doctrine of perfect detachment (*nekkama*) from everything in order to experience the purity of consciousness. But Buddha kept silence on God. Later, the *Bhagavadgita* elaborately deals with this spirit of detachment in action in a theistic way (see BG ch. 2 and 3). For example:

Being steadfast in Yoga, O Dhananjaya, perform actions, abandoning attachment, remaining unconcerned as regards success and failure. This evenness of mind (in regard to success and failure) is known as Yoga (*Gita* II.48).

11. True Spirituality Is Inner Freedom and Freedom Is our Power to Transcend All, Except God

The reason for this unconditional demand for detachment is that the contemplative must be free of all strings that bind him or her. He or she must be totally free of all bondages, fetters, impulsive and uncontrollable desires. Otherwise the person will be a prey of oscillating desires which are bound to disturb the serenity of the

mind, expected to be in a contemplative. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "Truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:32). This means that our freedom is based on truth. The Indian word for truth (*satya*) seems to me very inspirational, because it delves deep into the essence of truth. The Sanskrit word *satya* is derived from the root *sat* which means being or reality. *Satya* (truth) is the claim of reality (*sat*) over us. Absolute Being is also absolute Truth. Since God is the Absolute Being and Absolute Truth, we can transcend everything in our orientation to God and establish ourselves in true freedom. This is what Holy Spirit is doing in us through his operations during the dark nights.

Focused on the Lord, the detachment becomes easier. Nobody can give up anything unless he/she sees something better. The holy ones love the Lord dearly. Hence everything else is abandoned that no-thing or person may stand in the way blocking my passage to the Lord. Hence the spirit of total abandonment becomes easier for a contemplative. Spiritual authors use the expression 'denuded' which means 'stripped off' all cover ups of desires, delusions and ambitions. To follow the way of the Lord steadily and unconditionally one must be free of

all desires and impulsive inclinations. This is the spirit of detachment. Though it sounds negative, the inner content is very positive. The spirit of detachment is the way to inner freedom.

Inspiring Texts for Contemplative Prayer

1. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE)

The purified soul is being divinized through the inner ascent (On Ex. 24, 12). The soul will be reborn unto the nature of the divine Sophia, will be transformed by the divine Spirit (CW 1, 197).

2. Origen (CE 185-254)

When our consciousness is purified and through contemplation elevated above the material realm, to see God, it will be divinized by the God that is seen (PG 14, 817a). In the Holy Spirit the divine Word divinizes us (PG 26.589).

3. Meister Eckhart (CE 1260-1328)

If you long to know God in a divine way, then your knowing must sink into unknowing and to the oblivion of yourself and of all creatures (Mieth, 173).

4. Katha Upanishad (BCE 800)

They one who has not turned away from wickedness, who has no peace, who is not

concentrated, whose mind is restless – he/she cannot realize the Atman, who is known by wisdom (Kath Up. II:24).

5. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

He who is everywhere unattached, not pleased at receiving good, nor vexed at evil, his wisdom is fixed (BG II:57).

6. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

The senses are said to be superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind; and that which is superior to the intellect is He (the Atman). Thus, knowing Him who is superior to the intellect, and restraining the self by the Self, destroy, O mighty-armed, that enemy, the unseizable foe, in the form of desire (BG II:42-43).

7. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after happiness, who has become free from worldly affection, fear, and wrath, is indeed the *Muni* of steady wisdom (BG II:56)

CHAPTER III

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY OF INTERIORITY

True spirituality is our participation in divine consciousness. In this chapter we look at contemplative prayer as a journey to our own interiority where the Holy Spirit abides in us as divine consciousness or consciousness of Christ. Spirituality of interiority demands transcendence over the lower layers of consciousness and this is confirmed by numerous biblical texts and Christian teachings.

1. Contemplative Prayer as Our Participation in Divine Consciousness

Divine consciousness is communicated to us through Jesus Christ. Hence, true wisdom becomes our participation in Christ's consciousness, which actually means our participation in values, life-style and his surrender to his Father etc. Since Jesus has breathed his Spirit into us, it is the Holy Spirit that awakens us to the wisdom of Christ and thus to a true spiritual life. Jesus has breathed this Spirit into his disciples and has told us he is abiding within us.

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him because he remains with you and is in you (Jn. 14:16-17).

According to Jesus, therefore, we, who are in search of profound prayer, have to reach this Spirit abiding within us.

2. Spirituality as a Journey to Our Own Interiority

When God created human being, He said let us create him in our own image. What is this image of God, if not consciousness? God is by nature Being and consciousness. He is the 'Word' born of the Father's Being, to be uttered or to be communicated. This Word abides in each one of us, as a spell, or seed of divine consciousness, by which we participate in the consciousness of God.

Since the Holy Spirit, the Spirit which comes from the Father and the Son, is abiding within us as the inner core of our wisdom, we have to make a journey to this inner core to lead an authentic spiritual life.

Jesus is also very clear in his statements that we should be taught, helped and guided by this Holy Spirit in our spiritual life.

Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:22-23).

When however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears, and will tell you of things to come (Jn. 16:13).

From these texts it is clear that our spirituality depends on the action of the Holy Spirit in and through us. The abiding Holy Spirit as he represents the consciousness of Christ within us, is at the same time the supreme wisdom and the power which motivates and guides our action from within. When we are led by the Holy Spirit, we are really spiritual.

3. Spirituality of Interiority Demands Transcendence over the Lower Layers of Consciousness

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Indian classical book on wisdom and devotion, says: "Wisdom

is covered by unwisdom," that is, the inner most divine consciousness within us is covered by many layers of lower awareness.

These lower layers of awareness are that of the world, body and of the mind.

- a) The most ordinary consciousness of the human being is that of the world which is full of food for the senses, pleasures and all that world can offer us. This is well presented by Jesus in the story of the prodigal son, in his first stage of awareness. In this stage there is no life of interiority; rather the entire life is buried in worldly matters.
- b) Transcending this layer, one may make a journey further and reach the level of the mind. Hence, in this stage mental world, that is, ideas, ideology etc. become important. They are good, but they are not quite often divine consciousness. The world of ideas does not take us directly to God, though, if religiously developed, they are very helpful.
- c) The third stage is the awareness as our response to revelation. Here we move to faith. The revealed God sets values and norms for our life. This is what happens

when we encounter Jesus Christ. In the faith level God's own values become our values. Holy Spirit, whom Jesus breaths into us, begins to lead us through divine wisdom. In contemplative prayer it is the Holy Spirit who guides us.

4. Further Biblical Texts on the Spirituality of Interiority

Jesus says, "I am the real vine and my Father is the Gardener. He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit... You can do nothing without me" (Jn. 15:1-2, 4,5). John the evangelist clearly says that Jesus is the agent of all our spiritual actions. That is, these actions are guided by his Spirit abiding within us, which is the Holy Spirit. The inner core of our wisdom is this abiding Holy Spirit which is the consciousness of God within us. Real spirituality is our entry into this abiding divine awareness, getting awakened by it and produce results by our actions. Jesus concludes his talk saying, "I choose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures" (Jn. 15:16). Our contemplative prayer should bear fruits. Wherever there is union of

two consciousnesses there will be fruits from this union. This fruit will be interiorly divine and naturally human as well, because we are a union of spirit and flesh, soul and body.

St. Paul in his letter to Romans writes: "Those who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons. For, the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father my Father'" (Rom. 8:14-15). Hence, spirituality of interiority is ultimately a spirituality of continuous giving into the guidance of Holy Spirit who operates from within us. In his letter to Corinthians St. Paul further develops this as the wisdom of the Spirit which has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ. "The wisdom I proclaim is God's secret wisdom, which is hidden from mankind, but which he had already chosen for our glory even before the world was made... But it was to us that God made known his secret by means of his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, even the hidden depths of God's purposes. It is only a person's own Spirit within him that knows all about God" (1 Cor. 2:7, 10-11). According to this text, it is clear that the divine wisdom is the

wisdom that is taught by the Holy Spirit, abiding and operating in and through us. It is this Spirit who is guiding our soul in the darkest nights of contemplative prayer, when our greedy senses and wandering mind are silenced.

5. The Ancient Christian Teachings on Holy Spirit as our Inner Energy and Light in Our Prayer Life

The Oriental Fathers of the Church considered the Holy Spirit as "the uncreated energy of God" operating in us. St. Ephraim called the Holy Spirit as the 'luminous eye' (Poem on the Holy Spirit). This means that the Holy Spirit is the eye which makes us to see things through the eye of God and thus leads us to divine wisdom. The expression 'luminous eye' also reminds us of the Indian expression, the 'third eye' which is the Atman or the Spirit abiding within us. When our luminous or third eye is open we enter into contemplative prayer.

The Byzantine liturgy glorifies the Holy Spirit as follows:

The Holy Spirit is light and life, a living fountain of all spiritual reality; he is the essence of Wisdom, the Spirit of knowledge; he is goodness and understanding, the

leader of righteousness; he cleans us from sin; he is divine and makes us so; he is Fire proceeding from Fire; his word is action, the distribution of gifts. Through him God witnesses, prophets and apostles were crowned (Byzantine Daily Worship, trans. and ed. By Most Rev. Joseph Raya and Baron Jose de Wink, Alleluia Press, 1969).

These references from the literature of the ancient churches show that the abiding Holy Spirit is understood as the source of wisdom, guide in our prayer life and also the agent of our spiritual actions.

6. The Contemporary Search for Contemplative Wisdom and Spirituality of Interiority

Many people from the West keep coming to the East, especially to India in search of wisdom and spirituality. They come neither for money nor for academic knowledge. The vast majority seek spirituality. The spirituality that India offers is a spirituality of the abiding Atman namely, the divine Spirit within us. Many of these young ones come to study meditation and spend hours in silent meditation with some guidance from a Guru, well versed in meditative prayer. Remember that the Indian word *dhyana* is not

at all the discursive meditation, as Christians generally understand it. Patanjali, the renowned author of the *Yogasutra*, in which he treats the steps of meditation, *dhyana* comes only after the perfect silencing of the senses and the mind. (See V. F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality*).

Hence, may I conclude this chapter with this note: our renewed interest in contemplative prayer and the Spirituality of Interiority are very much inter-related. This may need a Christian answer to the world searching for silence, contemplative prayer and a profound journey to one's own interior depth where God abides as our inner breath, that is, as our Holy Breath (Spirit).

Inspiring Texts for Contemplative Prayer

1. Gregory of Palamas (CE 1296-1359)

A thousand times you may think over the divine treasures with you mind. But if you do not ntemplate the Divine with the trans-mental iritual eye, you do not really experience the vine, nor do you attain anything divine in u. (It is like telling a lot about gold, without er having seen gold) (*Triades*, 1.3.34)

2. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1550)

Consider how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in humans giving them understanding. And so in me: giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation, making me to understand and likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of his divine Majesty (Sp. Ex. 235).

3. *Mundaka Upanishad* II.2.1

Revealed and yet dwelling hidden in the cave is that which is called the great Abode. Whatever moves and breathes and blinks is fixed therein. Know this as being and also nonbeing, the desire of all hearts, transcending knowledge, best beloved of every creature.

4. *Katha Upanishad* II.22-23

Bodiless among bodies, stable among the unstable, the great and all-pervading Atman - recognizing him thus, the wise do not grieve. This Atman is not attained by instruction or

by intelligence or by learning. By him whom he chooses is the Atman attained. To him the Atman reveals his own being.

5. *Surya Upanishad* I.15

As oil in sesame seed, as butter in cream, as water in hidden springs, as fire in fire sticks, so is the Atman grasped in one's own self when one searches for him in truth and with fervour.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND DIVINE TRANSFORMATION

Two Brilliant examples of Transforming experience of Prayer in the New Testament are:

1. Mary's words to the angel: "Let it happen in me"
2. Jesus' confirmative statement in his prayer in Gethsemane.

Mary starts with a question: "How this could be?" Her mind set was different from what had been suggested to her by the angel. In the light of the angel's words, Mary went through a change of attitude and understanding. This was a movement from reason to faith. Deeper transformative experience takes place in the depth of faith, the reason is 'transformed' by faith.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane obviously shows how he prays in order to conform his will to that of the Father. The agony of confrontation of the ordeal presented and conformation of the will of Jesus to the will of the Father is well depicted in his short, yet thrice repeated prayer:

“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mt. 26:39).

Having said this as an introduction, let us see how prayer and self-surrender are interrelated and is moving towards one goal, namely, our Divine Transformation.

1. What Is Prayer? What Do We Pray, and What Should We Pray For?

1.1. What Is Prayer?

We can look at prayer in different stages: 1. Petitions addressed to God. 2. Dialogue with God, listening to God’s words. 3. Resting in or with God in perfect silence. All these are good modes of prayer. The third one is known as contemplative prayer where less words are used and more surrendering attitude prevails. But this is not a sudden act. It is a process subject to many degrees of advancement.

1.2. Why We Pray?

We pray that we be with God and to read his mind with regard to us. In every prayer, at least indirectly, there is a movement from our will to the will of God to whom we pray.

1.3. What Is the Real Goal of Our Prayer?

The real goal of our prayer is divine union. The embodied human soul should ever remain united with God, receiving his power that we may not fall into temptation, because even if the spirit is willing the flesh is weak (Mt. 26:41). Hence, our soul and God should always remain in union: this is the goal of our prayer.

2. Levels of Prayer

Children pray for smaller things as they wish. Adults pray for success of ambitious projects or jobs. Religious minded people pray for the spread of the kingdom of God on earth. All these are good forms of prayer according to the level of our awareness and our needs. When we pray for the coming of the kingdom of God on earth, we are praying for the transformation of our mind to the will of our Lord. St. Paul says: Who will separate me from this mortal body and unite me with the Lord (Rom 7:24-25). This longing is a great prayer. Prayer becomes identified with one's own breath of life. Paul also says: "to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Bl. Chavara writes in one of his poems: "you are my breath; you are my food and drink" (*Atmanutapam*).

In short, our prayer-life depends on the level of our consciousness. In higher levels of prayer, it moves to a greater degree of silence and finally becomes complete silence, as a simple, unaltered gaze of the Lord with a perfectly surrendering attitude. This is a privileged form of contemplative prayer. In this level you become what you gaze or contemplate. Remember the Indian saying: "Knowing is becoming". *Brahma-vid brhamo-bhavathi*: one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. This principle is true for all. For the first Christians it was Jesus Christ and they said that every Christian is another Christ (*Alter christus*).

3. Prayer and Divine Union

Divine union is transformation into God's likeness. This transformation is the goal of our prayer. This is a slow process happening in us and should be experienced. If we really progress in this transformative process taking place in us we will feel the need of a spiritual guide or master. St. Teresa of Avila, a theologian of mysticism in the church, says about her own struggle for a holy and capable spiritual director. She needed such a director to get a confirmation of the 'transforming experience of prayer' she was

going through. On the demand of this spiritual director, later she wrote her *Autobiography*. In this book from chapters 11 to 22 she deals with the transforming experience of prayer in four stages, using the symbol of water.

4. Different Types of Prayer

- a) *Namajapa*: recital of the holy names of God.
- b) Types of vocal prayers including breviary (Benedictines have developed a meditative recitation of breviary).
- c) Meditation, in which reason dominates, known as discursive meditation.
- d) Contemplation, an advanced state of meditation in which mind, intellect and will are surrendered to the Lord for self-transformation.
- e) Eucharistic sacrifice as self-surrender united with the sacrifice of Jesus. This is happening in each one of us when we participate in the Holy Mass.

5. The Final Goal of Our Prayer

The final goal of our prayer is complete self-surrender to be one with God's will for each one

of us. No other desire, projects or fulfilment is so important, though we have naturally to care for our children or companions, see to our daily needs and so on. All these can be very well integrated into the above mentioned ideal. In this way we begin to participate in the building up of the kingdom of God on earth. That is why our Lord Jesus said: "Seek first the kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you" (Mt. 6:33).

Jesus has already breathed his Spirit into us. Quiet often, because of our very many concerns with regard to our daily life, this consciousness of the Spirit remains in a dormant stage. This divine consciousness should be awakened and become active in our life; namely, the Holy Spirit should guide our life from within.

6. Holy Spirit Is the Agent of Transformation of Consciousness

With the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit two consciousnesses become one within us, that is, the divine consciousness (the Holy Spirit) and our human consciousness (the embodied soul) become one. The Holy Spirit shines forth through all the layers of our awareness, starting from the inner centre of the soul (the intellect and will);

then moves to mind and transforming mind with his light and delight, proceeds further into the senses and ultimately with the help of senses into action. Holy Spirit is the inner agent of all these transformative action which a holy soul is performing to the wonder and admiration of the people all over the world. But quiet often this is happening not very publically, but in very hidden places like contemplative centres of prayer, monasteries, especially in an atmosphere of great silence and absolute simplicity. It is much later that it becomes known to the world at large.

7. Search for the Reliable Model for Contemplative Prayer: The Need of a Master

Surrender to a living master is not an absolute must, but is a normal way. Every seeker is a humble person and is ready to opt a living master to draw from his/her experience and guidance rather than to be filled with the bookish knowledge. Hence, we see in history many stories of discipleship in which young ones were groomed in the monasteries or ashrams under the loving care of gurus or masters.

Such living stories we see in the collections of Indian ashram experience in the forest. These books are known as the Upanishads, meaning: sitting on the ground near the master. In the Upanishads we can find how these young ones were praying, meditating and also doing everything with a spirit of detachment and freedom.

Gospel is a living model of discipleship in which Jesus was teaching his own disciples how to pray, by his own words and example. Guru, in our Indian tradition, is an awakened or realized person. Such a person is to be selected as a guide or master to initiate and lead us into higher degrees of prayer. They need not necessarily persons academically qualified. When his disciples requested Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus taught them the beautiful prayer 'Our Father'. This was not in the form of traditional Jewish prayer and thus Jesus inaugurated a revolutionary image of God, addressing him as Our Father. Jesus wants to introduce personal intimacy between God and ourselves, both in our prayer and our dealings. Good disciples are those who participate in the consciousness of the master and try to know him more by becoming like him rather than

mastering his ideas. Loving relationship of Jesus to his father and his surrendering attitude to him is a brilliant example for us to shape and foster our loving relationship to Jesus and through him to our Father in heaven. For this purpose Jesus breathed his own Spirit into us.

8. Discipleship to Prayer is Discipleship to Holy Spirit: Holy Spirit Is the Inner Guru

It is Holy Spirit who teaches us to pray and leads us to the mysteries of inexhaustible truth. The transforming experience in prayer is the experience of the Holy Spirit acting and working within us. Jesus thanks his Father saying: "you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes Father, this was how you wanted it to happen" (Mt. 11:25-26; Lk. 10:21-22). St. Therese of Lisieux quotes this passage when she speaks how she is led to the higher degrees of prayer and wisdom (*The Story of a Soul*). Jesus himself said: "I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the spirit who reveals the truth about God. The world cannot receive him, because it cannot see him or know him. But you know him because he remains with you and is in you" (Jn. 14:15-17).

Jesus presents the Holy Spirit as subject in us, not as the object of our mind. He (Holy Spirit), is the Helper (Jn. 14:15, 25), Teacher (14:25), Instructor and Judge (16:8), Revealer of the truth about God (16:13). Our experience of prayer means our transformative experience with and in the Holy Spirit who transforms us.

9. Need of Surrender

Holy Spirit will not do anything without our permission. Hence, unconditional surrender to the works of the Holy Spirit is a must in order to make advance in contemplative prayer. Remember Mary's surrendering 'fiat' i.e., 'let it be so' (Lk. 1:35) and Jesus' surrendering prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39, 42). We have to allow the Spirit to operate and follow his operation within us without any resistance. The first part in this process is 'active' co-operation in which from our part we offer our readiness with sacrifices and abandonment of worldly ideals and desires. In the second part we enter into a transformative experience which is 'passive' in nature, that is, a blind walk only through the light of unalterable and firmly established faith, as Mary walked into Bethlehem.

10. In a Spirit of Fearlessness and Faith

This journey to contemplative prayer is done in a spirit of fearlessness and faith. "For the Spirit which God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead the Spirit makes you God's children and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God Abba, Father. God's Spirit joins himself to our spirit to declare that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:15-17).

Transforming experience of prayer and discipleship is this experience of the work of the Holy Spirit taking place in us. That is, two consciousnesses become one. Very often the mystical theologians (e.g., St. John of the Cross) use the symbolism of bride and bridegroom in explaining the union between soul and the divine master, Jesus Christ.

11. Trials and Tribulations on the Way of Transforming Prayer Experience

The way through transforming prayer experience is not always rosy and easy. It is quiet often a path through bitter sufferings, testing and confrontation with God and through the nights of purification.

Though, strictly speaking, the purification is necessary only for those who are impure, in God's plan the purest also suffer and contribute their role in the total plan of salvation which Christ established through his own bitter suffering. This is all the more a must, when the chosen soul has deviated from the right path. God brings them to a zero point, makes them humble and guides them back to himself. Three brilliant examples from the Bible are given below:

- a) Prophet Jonah disobeyed God's plan, refused to go to Nineveh; but a storm in the sea broke out and because he owned the responsibility for it, he was thrown out from the ship, was swallowed by a shark (a symbol of the dark night and zero hour), where he was awakened and decided to obey the will of God. The result was a successful preaching and conversion of Nineveh. Everything is to be experienced and the person concerned must be in the mood of a complete surrender.
- b) The story of the prodigal son. The prodigal son starts his life, plunged into the pleasures of the world without any prick of conscience. But God places him in a bitter situation where he had to suffer abject rejectedness by all his

friends who were around him when he had money. This was the desperate situation in which he was awakened. Then he thought of his father, representing God, and returned to him with a penitent heart. Reunion takes place and the distorted way of life was totally given up. In this stage a holier union again takes place. Two consciousnesses, his father's and his own become one.

- c) St. Paul's confrontation with Jesus. Paul was an enemy of Jesus marching forward to Damascus with a sword in his hand to kill the disciples of Jesus. He was a self-justified religious believer, born and bred in an upper class of the society, the Pharisees. Jewish religion is a religion very heavily based on faith as well as strongly linked to the human blood and a blood-based political state. This is not at all a value in the mind of Jesus. On his way to Damascus Jesus touched Paul and he was called to move from this rationally established religion of blood to a higher stage of religion based on the consciousness of God awakened by the Holy Spirit. In the new kingdom of God Jesus established on the earth, the human blood is replaced by

the Spirit of God. The human community, the Church, is no more based on the purity of human blood but totally on the immaculate purity of the divine consciousness which the Holy Spirit establishes in every human heart of good will. Then onwards this enemy of Jesus, his consciousness being transformed, became an ardent disciple of Jesus and finally he dies for him. Prayer will cut across all human made structures of limitations whether it be of blood, country, colour or culture and give us the power to transcend all these limitations, though naturally we maintain with honour and dignity what we really are with regard to our birth, country, nationality and so on.

All these three examples show us that there can be human limitations entering into our prayer life; but also teach us all these limitations can be overcome when the Holy Spirit guides us in true prayer. In contemplative prayer the soul, characterized by the consciousness of the very Holy Spirit, puts on the very nature of the Spirit and thus easily transcends all structures of limitations made by human beings. For divine transformation we should be liberated from all

these fetters of prestige or glamour and purified from the filth and folly they engender.

12. Mary: An Excellent Model for Transforming Experience of Prayer

We again come to Mary before we conclude this chapter on contemplative prayer. The unexpected call from God and the turn of life with a new mission was an ordeal for Mary, changing all her future and asking her to walk in darkness. It begins with annunciation. Though in common language we say that the annunciation was a happy tiding, and really it was so because it brought the good news of the advent of our Lord to this world, it was not so jubilant a message for Mary, because it had a lot of unanswered questions. But Mary believed and surrendered her life to God for a new becoming process where every bit of knowing was becoming. She becomes the Mother of Jesus in the midst of so many problems, including the possible suspicion from the part of Joseph to whom she was already betrothed. God's timely intervention relieved both Mary and Joseph from this problem (Mt 1:20). Mary always walked in faith, not solving all the problems beforehand, but peacefully accepting everything, walking in

complete trust in the Lord. Our deep prayer life is always a 'walk in faith', not so much within the logical framework of reason.

Mary's prayer life was very contemplative. She chose her meditation points from her own life experience and integrated them very deeply into her heart. The inner Guru, the Holy Spirit, gently guided her in contemplative silence, giving power to accept the new situations without resistance and with complete adaptability to the new encounters and even rejections, such as: "There was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7).

The Gospels says: "Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them" (Lk. 2:19). More or less the same words are repeated: "His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2:51). This is a small summary of Mary's prayer life. What do we usually keep in our heart: what we understand or what we do not understand? What we understand we keep in our mind. It is what we do not understand, we keep in our heart and lovingly ponder over them, though not well understood. What are the things or events which Mary treasured in her heart? Her life events. Each time it was a surprise

mingled with a lot of suffering. Very often the suffering was the first part and surprise came only in the end. Two examples of such Marian experience are given below.

13. Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem

This was a journey in faith. God the Father had already planned that at this moment Augustus Caesar, the Emperor in Rome, orders a census to be taken all through his empire. Hence, Mary and Joseph had to go from Nazareth to Judea. This was not the right time for Mary to undertake such a long journey, because she was already pregnant. Mary accepted the ordeal. Joseph was very gentle and equally believing in the divine plan of things. They reached Jerusalem to hear the repeated message from all hotels and inns: no place, no room. Doors were shut one after another. The agony of the search for a room and pressure of the time-limit for the delivery of the baby loomed large as unsolved, vexing problems. This was the dark night through which they finally made their way to Bethlehem, a cattle shed, not far away from Jerusalem. One has to wonder at the absolute contrast between the high sounding promises of the Angel Gabriel about the future son of Mary whose kingdom

will not have any end, and the realities taking place on earth when the actual time of giving birth of this Baby was at hand. In spite of all these incessant, apparent contradictions, Mary silently follows the guidance of the Spirit in faith.

After the birth of the baby there were some pleasant surprises. The shepherds come, narrating the story of the angels and heavenly music and the message they got from the angels. This was a pleasant surprise. A greater surprise followed immediately. Three Kings from the East, followers of other religions, come to the manger where the Baby Jesus was born, seeking the new born prince. Their readiness to believe and accept this Baby in the manger as the Divine Baby was also another great surprise for Mary and Joseph. Your faith and walk in darkness will always be rewarded by sweet surprises. But neither the value of suffering nor that of surprise will be noticed in the right attitude unless we have very great faith and trust in the Lord. Contemplative prayer gives us great power to admire the invisible in the visible, the heavenly in the absolute poverty of this worldly existence. Suffering and surprise are perhaps the summary of Mary's life.

14. The Same Pattern Continues in Her Journey to Egypt

A new command comes from the angel of the Lord: "Flee to Egypt, because the life of the baby is in danger." Mary and Joseph had no option but to start immediately to a country which is known to be the enemy's land. Remember the old story of liberation of Israel from the slavery in Egypt, killing all the male babies in the kingdom and defeating the royal army of Pharaohs in Egypt. Because the baby had no safety in their own country, the angel suggested of going to another country in the neighbourhood, though traditionally known as enemy's land. All these possible objections are simply discarded and overcome and Mary and Joseph make their journey without a single word of protest in complete darkness and in complete faith. These are the meditations of Mary which were always in the spirit of contemplative prayer with a total surrender to the will of God. The Egyptians received them well and they had a safe return back to Palestine, as the angel directed them when the threat of life was no more. One has to wonder why God leaves Mary and Joseph to such unsympathetic ordinances from the authorities and disgraceful events of life which

are very painful! But Mary and Joseph could transcend all these problems with the power of their faith, walking through the dark nights of the soul which always bring the believing ones into the safe haven of peace and joy.

Inspiring Texts for Contemplative Prayer

1. Gregory Nazianzen (CE 299-390)

He takes over the poverty of my flesh so that I may attain the richness of his divinity. He who is fullness emptied himself, so that I can have a share in his fullness. He grants a second union, much more glorious than the first union: at first he only granted us the better nature, but now he takes a share in our lowly nature (*Aphorisms*, 38).

2. Augustine (345-430)

Christ is born; may he be born in our hearts. Mary bore him in his womb; may we bear him in our hearts. The virgin became pregnant with the incarnation of the Logos; may our souls be impregnated through faith in Christ. The virgin gave birth to the Saviour; may our souls give birth to salvation. We shall not remain unfruitful, for our souls have to become fruit-bearing in God (Christmas sermon).

3. From Sufi Mysticism

I am like a piece of iron gluing in fire. I take on the colour and heat of the fire. "I am fire!" I cry out. You do not believe? Touch me and see! "I am fire" Still you cannot believe it? Just put your face on me and feel it! (Rumi 1273).

4. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

Liberated from all negative forces such as egoism, power, pride, anger and possessiveness, freed from I-and-mine feeling, established in inner peace, they are destined to be divinized (*Brahmabhuyayā* XVIII:53).

5. John of the Cross (CE 1542-1591)

The Holy Spirit makes certain divine assaults on the soul and in such encounters God penetrates the soul continually *deifying* its substance and making it divine. Herein God absorbs the soul, above all being, in the Being of God, for he has encountered it and pierced it to the quick in the Holy Spirit, whose communications are impetuous when they are full of fervour, as is this communication. But this is an eminently sweet encounter (CW, III: *Living Flame*, 34-35).

CHAPTER V

THE STATE OF BLISSFUL UNION

1. General Nature of this Union

1. In fact along with the purification, the life of loving union also advances. They are two aspects of our spiritual life simultaneously taking place side by side. The more the soul is purified, the profounder is the union.
2. As darkness and light cannot exist together so also the filth and holiness cannot co-exist. The soul slowly becomes a total reflection of the Lord whom she loves, and all her actions, reactions and patterns of behaviour manifest it.
3. Divine serenity reflects on her face, loving surrender becomes the art of her performance; unassuming and undemanding, she wants to be always with her Lord and with those the Lord gives her to be with.
4. The loving and blameless union she enjoys with the Lord, even in the midst of suffering, is a foretaste or a shadow of the heavenly bliss, which she foresees and expects to

participate in greater depth in the fullness of time, lovingly destined for her by her Lord.

5. The embodied soul, in this state, is usually very tender, delicate, loving, though she is deeply determined in her unwavering surrender to the Lord, and no compromise with that radical offering will never be accepted.
6. The soul in this state is normally free from the three weaknesses or passions of the human beings, namely attachment which causes anxiety and anger, because all these three are linked and rooted in one: namely attachment to persons or things, which the soul has now totally given up. One should know well that detachment is not un-love and love is not slavish attachment. Once totally attached to the Lord and seeing her Lord in everyone, service is her motto and motive of action. But this service is often hidden and not known to the world, quiet often until her death, and even for many years after death. It is entirely left to the will of her beloved Lord, and the holy soul is not at all bothered about it.

7. She is simply an embodiment of divine trust and her Lord is very much pleased with her innocent, child-like trust in him. This accompanying faith, makes her very powerful and even daring, because totally surrendered to the Lord in Love, her emptiness becomes her richness and her trust her power.
8. As the soul comes closer and closer to Jesus, her desire for the salvation of souls gets ablaze, because she knows well how the heart of Jesus is yearning for the same cause and made his prayer on the cross: 'I thirst', which, apart from the natural thirst, was also an inner thirst for the salvation of souls for which he was dying on the cross.
9. As the Mother of Jesus followed the footsteps of her own son, also going through the unexpected ordeals of life, and finally stood near the cross watching her dying son, who also entrusted her to the loving care of this immaculate Mother, this loving soul, the bride of Jesus, looks at Mary as her own Mother with loving devotion, praying for spiritual guidance. The Holy Mother certainly and very lovingly takes care of her.

10. Finally, burning with the incandescent unquenchable flame of divine love, the loving soul offers herself as a victim of sacrifice, to be immolated by the living flames of sacrificial fire ascending to heaven, that she become part of that ever living sacrifice Jesus offered on the Mount Calvary, and every day is being offered on the altar of Eucharistic sacrifice. She too renews her sacrificial offering everyday so that she be completely transformed to the divine likeness of her own beloved, and become one with him, as two hearts burning with one and the same flame, and the human heart is completely transformed into the divine, since it is natural to fire to convert everything into fire itself. This process will continue until the soul is perfectly transformed into the Divine Likeness of Her Lord.

2. The Secret Ladder of Contemplation Leading to Intimate Union (DN II. Chs. 17-20)

Spiritual life is often compared to a journey. It is a journey to the depths of interiority. It is also a journey to the heights of heaven. Here, John of the Cross, the great mystic theologian,

is presenting this journey as a secret ladder of contemplation to rise up to heaven and to climb down to the nothingness of one's own self. This ladder is called secret because the divine communications that take place on the steps of this ladder are unknown to the human faculties and it is the Holy Spirit who infuses them into the heart of the soul. This ladder has 10 steps: They are the following.

1. The soul feels sick of love in an advantageous way. It says: "I am love sick" (Cant. of Cant. 5:8) See DN II.19.1 ff. She does not feel at home when she misses the Lord even for a moment.
2. The soul intensely and unceasingly searches for God. Search is not research. Search is always into new depths and new heights.
3. Love prompts her to work for her beloved and gives her fervour (*tapas*) not to fail. She feels deep sorrow for all tiny omissions; and every great work will be considered as small. This is because love does not know to count.
4. Love makes her ready to face any suffering for her beloved; yet it is not wearisome.
5. Love imparts an impatient desire and

longing for God. Therefore, ever ready to do what the Lord wants.

6. Love swiftly raises her to God and his loving touches. Now she flies unfainted by reason (DN, BK II, Ch. 20.1). She flies with the wings of faith.
7. Love makes her bold, because God gives her also ardent daring. "Charity believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).
8. Love keeps her always attached to her Lord and she does not let Him go. Even if He disappears she lives in his remembrance. "Meditation is steady remembrance of the Lord as the uninterrupted flow of oil" (Ramanuja, *Shri-bhashya: Commentary to Vedanta-Sutra*, I.i.1).
9. Love causes her burn gently. "Holy Spirit produces this gentle and delightful ardour by reason of the perfect soul's union with God" (DN II.20.4). John says: "I will mention no more here than this step of the ladder of love than it is succeeded by the tenth and final step, which is no longer of this life" (*Ibid.*).

10. Love “assimilates the soul to God completely because of the clear vision of God which a person possesses as soon as he reaches it” (DN II.20.5).

3. The Sweet Bliss of the Divine Union: The Living Flame of Love

A brief summary of the previous chapters and introduction to the Living Flame of Love

1. We are in a very inauthentic state of spiritual life. This is our predicamental situation, subject to sin and distortion. We are a prey to our own lower appetites, desires, and passions. This is treated well in the beginning of Ascent to Mt. Carmel.
2. The second stage is that of a deeper awakening and the difficult journey to interiority. In this journey the soul has to pass through dark nights, the night of the senses and that of mind and intellect, memory and will, insofar as they are in the lower degrees of our knowledge and correspondingly the spring-board of all desires. The soul has to do its best, in order to sacrifice these desires and steadily walk through the path of self-

purification. This is treated in the *Dark Night of the Soul*, books I & II.

3. The third stage is that of betrothal and spiritual marriage, a theme which both St. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross delightfully treat. Once the soul is purified and has made her painful journey through the darkest of nights and thus successfully purified her senses, intellect and will, she is ready for betrothal. The *Spiritual Cantic* begins with her search for the Lord who is now hidden for the moment. Nature helps her in her seeking because all which the Lord, her Beloved, has created and left around her, are symbols of his great love for her. In this stage, wounded with love, she seeks him everywhere. There is no resting place anywhere, because all are only symbols or pointers to the Lord, but not the Lord Himself. She is in search of the One who is the symbolized, whose loving touch or even lovely face she perceives everywhere. This is treated in *The Spiritual Cantic*.
4. The fourth stage is bliss of the soul and the glory of the Lord that is being realized in the

depth of the soul, the result of this divine union by transformation. The soul has already put on the likeness of her Beloved, and she is divinely transformed. The Divine union is in fact the transformation of the soul into the Divine or likeness of God, a result achieved by the work of the Spirit of the Lord abiding in her. This is treated in the *Living Flame of Love*.

The Living Flame of Love, Stanza I:

O! living flame of love
That tenderly wounds my soul
In its deepest centre; since
Now you are not oppressive,
Now consummate! If it be your will:
Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter.

“The flame of love is the spirit of the Bridegroom, which is the Holy Spirit” (1.3).

1. The Holy Spirit abides in the deepest centre of the soul. The innermost depth of the soul is where God abides. This is our divine core. This centre is now awakened and begins to operate without any resistance. Because of the unconditioned surrender of the soul and the immaculate nature of

its present state, the operation of the Spirit goes on uninterruptedly. All her actions are thus the acts of the Holy Spirit, divine and enormously precious before the Lord.

2. Her humanity now participates in the humanity of Christ in a very deeper sense, not only by participating in his human nature, which every human being does, but also by allowing the uninterrupted operation of the Word through his Spirit in her. As the Word is the sole principle of life in Jesus Christ, in spite of his perfect humanity with a human soul, so now in this blessed soul, the Spirit of the Master becomes the sole principle of life, to which the entire human operation is perfectly subordinated.
3. Jesus said: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). But now with Him she does everything, or better, he does everything in her through his abiding Spirit. He burns her, illumines her, activates her, transforms her into his very likeness and finally bears fruits through her.
4. But these ravishing visits become a wound. For the soul the divine touch is at the

same time painful and delightful, because after each visit, the Lord leaves her in her mortal body. The limitations of the body weighs down on the precious moments of this encounter, because the body is still the mortal body and not yet glorified.

5. This earthen vessel, which contains the inexpressible divine glory, has its own limitations, is yet to pass through the agony of death and decay, and for the moment is thoroughly incapable of containing so precious a gift.
6. Hence, the soul feels wounded or put down back again to her mortal body, which the soul wants to transcend, tearing away the veil of this sweet encounter.
7. The poem continues saying how each person of the Holy Trinity is involved in this work of her spiritual transformation (Stanza 2).
8. The other two stanzas describe the beatific and the enlightened situation of the soul which a human soul can experience while alive on earth. John refuses to comment on this further, because it is in fact inexpressible.

Inspiring Texts for Contemplative Prayer

1. Athanasius of Alexandria (CE 300-373)

The Word became man, so that we humans may become Divine (PG. 25,192). In the Spirit the Word divinizes us (PG 25, 192).

2. Maximus the Confessor (CE 580-662)

Love produces deification. God embraces the whole of the soul, together with the body natural to it, and renders them like Him in due proportion, so that He who by nature can in no way be manifested to any being whatsoever as He is in Himself, is able to be manifested wholly throughout the whole of the soul in a manner beyond all description (PG 91.1249c).

3. John of Damascus (CE 675-749)

What Christ is by nature, we humans attain in grace through participation in God (PG 94-116b).

4. Simon the New Theologian (CE 949-1022)

What happens to those who are found worthy of God: the divine Spirit transforms them from within; the Spirit makes them participate in his immortality; being Light he makes them filled with light; being Life he shares divine life

with them; being the Spirit of Christ he forms them into the likeness of Christ. God makes them reborn in grace to what Christ by nature is. He wants that we become what he is (Hymn 44).

5. St. Teresa of Avila (CE 1515-1582)

This secret union takes place in the deepest centre of the soul, which must be where God himself dwells. The Lord appears in the centre of the soul, not through an imaginary, but through a subtler intellectual vision, just as he appeared to the Apostles, without entering through the door. This instantaneous communication of the soul is so great a secret and so sublime a favour, and such delight is felt by the soul, that I do not know with what to compare it. God has been pleased to unite himself with the soul in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another. The soul remains all the time in that centre with its God (CW: *Interior Castle*, page 335).

6. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

Be of my mind (*man-mana-bhava*), be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Thou shalt reach Myself; truly do I promise unto thee, (for) thou art dear to Me (BG XVIII.65).

7. *Bhagavad Gita* (BCE 500-CE 100)

He who hates no creature, and is friendly and compassionate towards all, who is free from the feelings of "I and mine", even-minded in pain and pleasure, forbearing, ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled, and possessed of firm conviction, with mind and intellect fixed on Me - he who is thus devoted to Me, is dear to Me (BG XII.13-14).

8. St. John of the Cross (CE 1542-1591)

The soul that is in a state of transformation of love may be said to be, in its ordinary habit, like to the log of wood that is continually assailed by the fire; and the acts of this soul are the flame that arises from the fire of love, absorbed in the flame of the Holy Spirit. Here all the acts of the soul are divine, since it is impelled and moved to them by God (CW, *Living Flame*, III, 18).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Profound prayer is an event that takes place in the depth of our being, and we should be aware of that. We should also grow in that awareness day-by-day.

This event is accepted as the work of the Holy Spirit abiding in the centre of our heart or in the depth of our soul, who unites himself with our spirit and leads us into prayer, transforming us into his own likeness (Rom 8:16)..

He also adorns us with all his qualities which are mentioned by St. Paul in his letter to Galatians. The praying soul changes, gets transformed and becomes a shining abode of all the spiritual qualities of the Holy Spirit, namely: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control' There is no law against such things as these" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Sometimes physical movement is chosen by some seekers or holy men and women, leaving their families and dear ones, to dedicate their whole life to the promptings of the Spirit.

Thus, in the ancient Indian tradition, Yajnavalkya went to the forest in search of the Atman (Holy Spirit) and a new life focused on Atman alone. Later, his wife Maitreyi followed.

Thus, Benedict left his house and settled himself in a cave on the Mount Subjaco in Italy. Later, his sister Scholastica followed the same path.

Thus, Francis Assisi moved from his house to a small hut, namely *Portiumcula*. Later Clare, a noble lady from the same town, followed.

Thus, Blessed Chavara wanted to go to forest (*vana-vasam*) to live the life of the Spirit, which was slightly modified for the sake of pastoral work for the people and the *vanam* (forest) was sought in the vicinity of the people. And a host of ten priests immediately followed and the chain continued. The author of this book is a humble follower of Bl. Chavara.

All these centers became in course of time, great living centers of prayer.