

Contemplative Dryness

an extract taken from...

I am a daughter of the Church

Chapter VI

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Contemplative Dryness

As the sun, when it rises in the morning, will enter your house if you open the shutter, even so will God, who sleeps not in keeping Israel, ... enter the soul. Living Flame

Contemplative Dryness

Contemplative dryness is the name given the first forms of contemplation described by Saint John of the Cross.

Between the contemplative dryness and the delightful quiet of Saint Teresa there are points of resemblance that allow us to place them at the same stage of spiritual life.

Contemplative Dryness

These two forms of contemplative experience introduce us into different spiritual climates. Teresian quiet produces its effects, positive and delightful ones, in the will. The Joannine (Saint John) dryness seems to affect particularly the understanding (or intellect) and produces in it effects that are privative (gloomy) because dazzling with contemplative light.

Contemplative Dryness

Today's contemplative is generally attracted to the Joannine climate, because he finds it more in line with his experience.

Contemplative Dryness

To avoid all confusion, it is important to say the dryness in question is contemplative. In other words it bears the three signs required by Saint John of the Cross: lack of satisfaction in the things of God or of creatures; solicitous care about not serving God; impossibility to meditate.

Should these signs not be found together it is best, according to the Saint to return to meditation to nourish the exchange of friendship with God.

But when the dryness is recognized as the fruit of God's action in the soul, then it is obliged to both respect God's action and to act itself... The Saint likes to insist on the first duty...respect for God's action.

Contemplative Dryness

... Delight is actually not experienced in this dryness because the delight is too subtle for a soul having the memory of former graces and experiencing the wandering of the faculties...It tends to arouse in these intellectual temperaments the painful reactions of powerlessness, disquiet, and restlessness...

Contemplative Dryness

**The attitude to be maintained during dryness
is marked by suppleness and tenacious fidelity.
Two directives are suggested to maintain it:**

**A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of
the spirit and remain there.**

**B-To ignore the turmoil in the sense region of the
soul and calm it at times by means of certain
activities.**

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

We are now in the passive night of sense—a passage from sense to spirit by adapting God's action to one's own. Contemplative light brings about this passage.

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

The first directive points out what must be the soul's active cooperation: The soul should...cooperate actively with grace which affects it, by making acts of faith such as – God I believe you are here; that you love me; that you have been waiting for me; that you are making me over in your image...

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

...The mystics speak of an “interior cell,” of a “depth of the soul,” of a more intimate and more peaceful region which is the seat of God’s presence and action in the soul. For Saint John of the Cross, the senses and the intellectual faculties immediately relating to them represent the periphery of the soul. Spirit designates its more interior parts.

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

... In the Teresian quiet there is an interior perception indicating that the sweetness arises from a deep source. In this way it is easy to identify the spirit with those profound regions which produce quiet. The soul understands that it is the movement from sense to spirit that ...leads it to the water springing up within it.

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

In contemplative dryness, at least initially, greyness envelopes the soul and its faculties ...reducing them to the powerlessness and immobility ...How is one then to discover the location of the spirit...?

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

...yet there is the practical criterion of peace and silence within the soul's reach. "The senses" for Saint John of the Cross are the suburbs of the soul where turmoil and agitation reign... "Spirit" is God's abode where He dwells and acts in peace. It is where He lets Himself be grasped by faith and at times allows Himself to be experienced as the transcendent Reality...

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

...This divine dwelling place is silent... it is where in the silence of the Spirit, He engenders souls to a life of grace.

... One can attain it even in contemplative aridity by means of an act of faith.

A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful region of the spirit.

In fact faith, a theological virtue received at Baptism is “the only proportionate and proximate means for attaining God.” It elevates the intellect that submits to it; and with the intellect, the whole soul, bringing it into contact with God. Faith leads one into the supernatural world and into that region of the spirit where God acts and gives Himself.

**A-To tend by faith toward the peaceful
region of the spirit.**

**God's action which makes faith a living faith...
calms the soul...**

**... The activity of living faith produces... a subtle
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... The activity of living faith produces... a subtle impression of silence and of peace. The silence indicates to the soul the region of the spirit towards which it must tend...It will succeed in this by making acts of faith...

...It is the senses...which impede the perfect receiving of the Holy Spirit. Is it possible to render them less noxious, to free oneself from their troublesome agitations?

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

The exercise of faith..., although always opening up the soul to God's light, does not always succeed in establishing peace in the lower faculties which are restless and demanding... preventing the soul's escape into the region of the spirit. What can one do to quiet this noise?

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

The duty of the soul is to pay no heed to this noise; but to escape it by a determined movement towards the region of the spirit... Saint John of the Cross notes that the soul that has arrived at perfection excels in escaping the terrors produced by the devil in the senses. It runs to shelter in the dark hiding place of faith, in the realm of the spirit. The turmoil of the senses is an excellent means of purification and plays a part in helping one enjoy the silence of the spirit. In this transition period however, man's way in the spiritual life is less of his own choosing than at any other time.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

Whether it's his lack of experience as with a beginner that leads him to squander his strength in violent efforts; or his temperament making him unable to support passivity; or even the obsessing preoccupation that has invaded the faculties, it is often difficult and at times impossible for a soul to rise above the agitation or to dominate it sufficiently to maintain the peace of the higher regions undisturbed.

One gets fatigued, the body grows weary of immobility; frustration sets in. Discretion is necessary to direct one's strength and sustain the effort of resistance.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

1-DISCRETION

Will discretion demand that we leave prayer aside and engage in some activity to find rest? There are in fact times when diversion may be necessary. Saint Teresa tells us that ... it is good to leave prayer for activity. She writes:

The best medicine—I do not say for removing the trouble, for I know none for that, but for enabling the soul to endure it—is to occupy oneself with external affairs and works of charity and to hope in God’s mercy , which never fails those who hope in Him.

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B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

1-DISCRETION

...In the case of contemplative dryness, to abandon prayer for activity because of the aridity experience, would ordinarily be to yield to a dangerous and often seductive temptation... God at times makes Himself more sensibly present to the soul in exterior activities than in prayer. He seems to withdraw Himself when the soul goes in search of Him and hide behind a thick veil....This confirms the impression of sterility left by contemplative dryness which puts a seal of certitude that contemplative prayer is a waste of time. It is a subtle temptation...and a grave danger.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
1-DISCRETION

During contemplation, light and love flow into the soul. The abundance of light and the unfitness of the faculties to receive it, produces dryness. The supernatural effects of light and love seem to remain in the region of the spirit; hence the lower faculties are either paralyzed or agitated.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
1-DISCRETION

When the contemplation ends the faculties resume their activity. The soul becomes conscious of the work that has been accomplished in it by contemplation and of the riches it has received. The faculties ... seem to be filled with light and love. Only a moment ago the soul wearied itself in its search for a God who did not reveal Himself and who seemed nowhere to be found.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
1-DISCRETION

And now this soul, whom aridity has filled with thirst for God, sees all things filled with that hidden God and discovers the divine secrets hidden in their depths...The soul is in a festive mood. The faculties, now at peace, are bathed in light and overflow with supernatural delight.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
1-DISCRETION

Following the dryness of contemplation, this feast of the soul might cause it to think it has risen to a more elevated spiritual state. It is nothing of the kind. It is the awareness of the benefits of contemplation that is creating this joy which takes place only when contemplation has ceased...

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
1-DISCRETION

What are we to think of one who would seek the joy of the awakening but refuse the immobility of the sleep? ...this would be the case of the soul so carried away by the spiritual delights found in activity following contemplative dryness, as to think it possible to enjoy these continually by leaving the dryness and giving itself up only to activity.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm 2-Patience

Contemplative dryness, a benefit to the soul, must be endured...such is the law... discretion and patience were never more necessary...

In using violence against it, one would quickly exhaust one's forces and disturb the peaceful action of contemplation.... Patience is the only effective remedy.

When agitation of the faculties is very great...one can try and arrest its harmful effects by exercising some other calming influence over the faculties...to allow them to escape into the region of the spirit or keep them in check so as not to disturb contemplation.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm 3-Several Calming Influences

To find the means of this happy evasion is an art and its efficacy only passing. Each one must find what suits him and change when it's no longer effective. Suggestions only can be followed not exact advice.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

a-...The slow recitation of a favorite prayer...can stop the first movements of a rising tempest...Vocal prayer is the necessary companion of contemplation for those whose habits of activity render the passivity of contemplation intolerable...the soul will devote itself less to the meaning of the words and more to drawing from them the power of recollection they contain.

The choice of prayer is of great importance...a psalm, for example, will express the solitude of the soul...experience will teach one which prayers are most helpful to him...this prayer will for the most part be a cry of the soul...The agitation may return; but to gain time is to gain much.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

b-The attitude of the body during prayer is not a matter of indifference and can contribute to calming the soul...The physical attitude, while being restful, must not favor sleepiness...and must be a support for it and sustain it in its painful waiting for God.

c-Nor must one forget the tranquillizing influence of the Eucharist...the soul in quest of recollection may seek the nearness of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to enthrall the interior senses.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm
3-Several Calming Influences

d-For other souls, complete solitude seems preferable and more conducive to calm... and allows the individual to give themselves up completely to divine rapture... in the nourishing silence of the desert...

Each one discovers his own way to flee through the tumult to the peace and silence of the depths of his soul...

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

At times the soul must simply groan under its own powerlessness calling on God's help and the intercession of the Saints, who bring calm with deliverance... Humble patience is not always a disposition that liberates one but a humble person always derives from this turmoil a purification.

**In the silence that comes from powerlessness, from emptiness, Saint Teresa thinks of her soul as a garden of which God is the gardener.
... What matter the manner of soul, provided that it remain peaceful and that God can act in it in full liberty?**

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

Saint Therese of the Child Jesus admits that she would sometimes go to sleep when the emptiness was too heavy. She was however not disturbed upon awakening for she felt that children are equally dear to their parents whether awake or asleep; that, in order to perform operations, the doctor has to sometimes put his patient to sleep. Autobiography

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

With her gracious story of the little bird, Therese describes her attitude of contemplation, carried on with her gaze steadily fixed on God through all the aridities and the mists, in spite of her weaknesses and even the sleep that intervene to hinder it or interrupt it.

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm 3-Several Calming Influences

I see myself as a feeble little bird...yet I dare to gaze upon the divine Sun, the Sun of love, and my heart feels within it all the eagle's aspirations...

With reckless abandon, it gazes upon its Divine Sun, nothing frightens it, not wind nor rain and if dark clouds come and hide the Star of Love, the little bird does not move, it knows that beyond the clouds its Sun shines still, that its radiance is not for a single instant eclipsed....

When....the clouds keep it from seeing a single ray, its little eyes close...its little head under its wing, and the poor little thing sleeps...When it awakes...it is not at all desolate...it resumes its task of love...Collected letters of Saint Therese of Lisieux, 284-5

B-How to ignore the noise of sense and bring it calm

3-Several Calming Influences

The experience of Saint Therese...sets before us the suppleness the soul must have ... if it would hold firm, peaceful and alive in its faith, and open itself wide to the power of the divine light that is striking it...The only thing that matters is to watch peacefully in faith, looking up to that loving Wisdom whose presence is indicated by the darkness, in this mingling of silence and tumult. Out of the dark night divine Wisdom causes transforming waters to spring.

AMEN