Meditation on Non-Duality in the Christian Tradition, Reflections by Rob

This reflection and meditation can be done without the Youtube video (recommend the use of Youtube if you can). For those who struggle with hearing, the text below can also be used to support the video. Our Youtube presentation is an invitation to spiritually join regular meditators at Wisdom Centre (presently isolated and meditating in their own homes). The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

The text is on the screen with narration. Music and a count down timer are part of the presentation. For technical reasons, the reflection sometimes has some disruption to the sound quality. To overcome this, a transcript is below.

Begins with usual opening prayers and introductions (Audio Visual or follow using text below)

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition.

Opening Prayer: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life. We, in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters of all world traditions

With God are Wisdom and understanding. May our ears be attentive, may the meditation of our hearts be for understanding. Through Christ, may we seek and find you, acting only according to Your will. May we follow His teaching, also seeking, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we commit to love of earth, faithfulness, community, stability, peace and justice making.

Letting go of all else, in contemplation we surrender in love to you. Let our sacred word be a symbol of our consent to your loving presence and healing. May we be faithful to this word so that it rises in our hearts, awakening that sense of Your presence. **Amen**

Reflections on Non-Duality

Introduction: The concept of non-duality is at the heart of the mystic tradition and of Centering Prayer in particular. I also believe that it was central to Jesus's teachings, but not always understood by his disciples. Father Thomas Keating describes it as an evolving of consciousness which in the Christian tradition is called "Transforming Union". In the Zen tradition of the Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh it is called "Interbeing" which is a corollary of selflessness: the true self is everything which is not self.

It is important to understand the reason why it is called non-duality and not "oneness". This is because there is always diversity in the world and a necessary struggle towards connection and awareness. It is important to recognize the distinction between discrimination and discernment. It is sometimes satisfying to say that "everything is one" or that our goal is to achieve oneness or "union with God". These things may be true at one level, but at a perhaps

deeper level of understanding, there is no end to the journey; the journey itself is both the beginning and the end, and it is one of touching the other, and so of joining together, but of there ultimately being neither a joiner nor a joined.

Jesus's Teaching

In St Luke's Gospel there is an incident where a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner and is surprised that he does not do ritual washing (Luke 11:37). St Luke has him replying that the Pharisees clean the outside of cup and plate but not the inside, because they make a show of outward goodness but are greedy and wicked within, and then going on to rail against the Pharisees and lawyers. No doubt the Pharisees were hypocritical, and Jesus did point that out at times, but I doubt that he was responding in that way after being invited to dinner and it is more likely that St Luke or the source from which he took the stories was trying to make sense of recorded sayings of Jesus which they did not fully understand and fell back on the safe territory of hypocritical Pharisees.

In the (Apocryphal) Gospel of Thomas at Logia 89, the quotation is much more simple:

Jesus said:

"Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Do you not understand That He who made the inside Is also He who made the outside?"

I suspect that St Thomas, or whoever recorded that verse, understood a little better and that Jesus was using the concept of a cup to explain non-duality. It is a good way of explaining it. There is an outside and an inside to a cup and they are different. The inside has contact with the liquid and stops it spilling and the outside has contact with the air around it and keeps the cup together. But they are one and the same substance – in 1st century Palestine probably limestone - and the inside is seamlessly connected to the outside without any barrier or division. They serve different functions but are not separate. The same is true of the base and rim and of the handle of the cup. This is also true of the world. Seen from space the Earth is one object, a single sphere, and every part of it is seamlessly connected. But we create the borders and barriers and become fiercely attached to them. The same is true of the environment and of the plants, animals and humans. We create divisions of race, ethnicity and culture and become attached to them when we are in reality all one people. We all have a different nature, perform different functions and have individual experiences, but we all rely on one another and are fundamentally seamlessly connected. The same is also true of the whole Universe, and interestingly some astrophysicists say that the Universe seems to be shaped something like a cup.

Comment: Non-duality is not, however, a static concept. As Father Thomas has reminded us, it is a dynamic process. The cup is also not static although it may appear so. It is actually changing all the time invisibly to us, and will eventually after a very long time perhaps, break down and fall apart. Science has shown us that the particles of which matter is made in atoms and molecules are constantly moving and undergo changes at a microscopic level which are not always predictable. Scientists tend to say that these changes are either

"determined" by cause and effect or are "random". But the fact that they may not be predictable does not make them random. It means two things: first that determinism is not rigid and complete – in other words that although causes have an effect, there is often more than one effect they can have, perhaps many possibilities. Secondly every part of nature from the smallest particle to the most complex organism yet known to us, which is the human brain, has the power of action, and can decide by its action which of the possible effects to pursue. That choice may not be informed. At the molecular level it probably is not. However, there is a guiding principle which can be followed. Not a determining cause, but something more like an inner intuitive longing which is universally present. This is the longing to explore, to make connections and to discover. This is the Divine energy.

It was this energy or longing which encouraged particles to join together many millions of years ago to create more complex organisms leading to living beings and eventually to consciousness. We can also see it at work in our own cultural history, for example in the urge to go out and find some limestone, hollow it out and carve it into a cup and handle to aid collecting liquids and drinking. Ironically it is this very longing which urges materialistic scientists themselves to explore the world around them and to keep finding out so much more about it. With each action towards true connection we have to give up a little of our individual identity, but in doing so there is a rich reward. There arises a knowing and understanding of the "other", which means that our future actions can become more informed and wise, and there arises an appreciation of and empathy with the other. These two constitute love, and are the beginning of the process of entering into full communion with and participation in the divine nature . God is Love.

Evolution of Consciousness: Consciousness is itself conditioned by nature and evolution. The evolution of the "self" which Father Thomas speaks of is a movement into heightened awareness, in fact into the unconditioned. To do this we must look, not outwardly as scientists do, but inwardly, and we need to stop exploring and acting willfully, and instead allow the divine principle of connection and fellowship into our hearts. Father Thomas describes this as no longer needing the same effort as was needed at earlier stages. Instead of making connections, we are now embarking on the path of realising with our whole being rather than intellectually that the connection was present all along, and we gradually discover the possibility of pure, unconditioned action. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin describes this beautifully in Part 3 of Le Milieu Divin.

"However vast the divine milieu may be it is in reality a centre. It therefore has the properties of a centre, and above all the absolute and final power to unite (and consequently to complete) all beings within its breast. In the divine milieu all the elements of the universe touch each other by that which is most inward and ultimate in them. There they concentrate, little by little, all that is purest and most attractive in them without loss and without danger of subsequent corruption. There they shed, in their meeting, the mutual externality and the incoherences which form the basic pain of human relationships. Let those seek refuge there who are saddened by the separations, the meannesses and the wastefulness of the world. In the external spheres of the world, man is always torn by the separations which set distances

between bodies, which set the impossibility of mutual understanding between souls, which set death between lives.

Let us establish ourselves in the divine Milieu. There we shall find ourselves where the soul is most deep and where matter is most dense. There we shall discover, where all its beauties flow together, the ultra-vital, the ultra-sensitive, the ultra-active point of the universe. And, at the same time, we shall feel the plenitude of our powers of action and adoration effortlessly ordered within our deepest selves.

But the fact that all the external springs of the world should be co-ordinated and harmonized at that privileged point is not the only marvel. By a complementary marvel, the person who abandons themself to the divine milieu feels their inward powers clearly directed and vastly expanded by it with a sureness which enables them to avoid, like child's play the reefs on which mystical ardour has so often foundered."

Meditation: So let us find and move into a comfortable position, relaxing the body, noticing its contact with the chair or cushion and with the floor. Letting go of the efforts, difficulties and worries of our day, and bringing ourselves into the peace of the present moment. Noticing our breathing as it slows and deepens. Giving attention to any points of tension or discomfort. Allowing the divine principle of connection and fellowship into our hearts. Becoming aware of that centre where all the elements of the universe touch each other by that which is most inward and ultimate in them.

The meditation will last for 25 minutes and will begin and end with the sound of the gong.

Bell Sounds…

25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Ends with usual closing prayers: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life, we in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters around the world. Moments of your personal prayer follow**…Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon

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