

Christianity and Social Progress – (Mater et Magistra) – Saint Pope John XXIII – Paragraphs 236-239

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.

It is important for our young people to grasp this method and to practice it. Knowledge acquired in this way does not remain merely abstract, but is seen as something that must be translated into action.

Differences of opinion in the application of principles can sometimes arise even among sincere Catholics. When this happens, they should be careful not to lose their respect and esteem for each other. Instead, they should strive to find points of agreement for effective and suitable action, and not wear themselves out in interminable arguments, and, under pretext of the better or the best, omit to do the good that is possible and therefore obligatory.

In their economic and social activities, Catholics often come into contact with others who do not share their view of life. In such circumstances, they must, of course, bear themselves as Catholics and do nothing to compromise religion and morality. Yet at the same time they should show themselves animated by a spirit of understanding and unselfishness, ready to cooperate loyally in achieving objects which are good in themselves, or can be turned to good. Needless to say, when the Hierarchy has made a decision on any point Catholics are bound to obey their directives. The Church has the right and obligation not merely to guard ethical and religious principles, but also to declare its authoritative judgment in the matter of putting these principles into practice.

On the Way to Work – Vinal Van Benthem OFS – See-Saw – pages 67-68

It was just a casual exchange at the train station. The morning was cold and I was standing in line waiting to purchase a cup of coffee. The young woman ahead of me ordered a cup of hot chocolate.

“I haven’t seen you in a while,” came the cheerful voice of the middle-aged woman behind the counter.
“haven’t you been taking the train?”

“I haven’t been around for the last couple of months,” the young woman replied.

“You’ve lost some weight, haven’t you?” continued the woman.

“I had a baby. That’s why you didn’t see me. I was on maternity leave.”

“Congratulations!” the older woman exclaimed. “That’s good news!”

“Thank you!” The young woman walked away smiling, recognized, known.

A simple exchange. Nothing particularly striking or “spiritual.” Or was it? There is, some say, a third eye – an all-seeing eye – God’s eye, if you will – that sees into the heart. A simple exchange, a business transaction, really. But one *saw*, and one *was seen*.

“Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mk 10:21). We all, in the course of an average day, have many such exchanges – with family, friends, employers, employees, co-workers, store clerks, and so on. We all, in the course of an average day, look at other individuals and in some way address or respond to them. The question is: do we really *see* them?

Engaged Spirituality – Joseph Nangle, OFM – Contemplation – pages 44-46

Some years ago, three friends and I wrote a book called *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*. It was a reflection on the impact that saint of the thirteenth century has had on the non-poor of modern times. People seemed to get what we were driving at – that Francis of Assisi still continues to question, inspire and challenge people of good will even eight hundred years after his time. We writers were a mixed group: two men and two women, two married and two single, two Protestants and two Catholics, two ordained ministers and two laity. Our differences seemed to enrich the discussions we had on the various chapters, and the writing went along very well – until we began to write about contemplation.

The two of us who were Catholics felt that contemplation was basically one further dimension of prayer. There are, we said, private and public prayers, individual and communal prayer, liturgical and devotional prayers – and contemplative prayer. All pretty much equal. We thought that contemplation was simply one expression of prayer among many. So, for example, Francis could be found praying with his brothers, with people around Assisi, with his friend Clare and her sisters, at Mass – and from time to time he would go off to places like the cave at Mount Alverna and get lost for days in contemplative prayer.

One of our Protestant colleagues saw it quite differently. For her, contemplation was a way of being in the world, a posture with regard to life, a kind of all-inclusive attitude toward oneself, toward others, toward creation, and toward God. Contemplative prayer was not, she believed, a single slice of one's prayer life – time taken out to "do" contemplation – but a totality of outlook, looking at reality the way God looks at it.

The discussion we had around this subject got tense and emotional at several points, because we all had strong opinions on the matter. But we stayed with it and in the end came to agree that our sister was making a valid point, that whatever the "experts" in such matters might say, contemplation needed to be seen in this integrated way – as a way one moves through life. We wound up writing one of our best chapters on Francis and contemplation in that vein, because as we discussed and wrote, it became clear to all of us that Francis' contemplative life happened not only in those well-documented, mystical experiences of ecstatic prayer before the crucifix at the Church of San Damiano or at Mount Alverna when he received the wounds of Christ on his hands and feet. Those were peak moments for sure. But we realized that Francis also walked through the world consciously contemplating God's handprint on everything. His great hymn to Creation, "Blessed are you, my God, for Brother Sun....for Sister Moon....Sister Water....Brother Fire....Mother Earth," speaks of an attitude, an awareness, a life fascinated by and wrapped up in a keen sense of God's presence in every speck of creation. His was an ongoing, contemplative response to life.

Whatever the theological merits of our discussion and decision to write about Francis and contemplation that way, it seems clear to me that understanding contemplation as a way of moving through life – trying to see everything in and around us through the eyes of God – is worth thinking about. For one thing, this way of viewing takes the contemplative vocation out of the exclusive domain of cloistered religious like the Trappists and puts it squarely in the nine-to-five, nitty-gritty marketplaces of this world, within the reach of busy, modern people of faith. It invites us to see all reality through the eyes of the Creator and to love the world as God loves it. It also means, I believe, that each of us is called to be a contemplative.

Before continuing with this line of thought and citing examples of contemplatives in the noise and clamor of the world, let me say a word about the traditional cloistered contemplatives. I have no intention whatsoever to imply that the vocation of Trappists or Poor Clares or Carmelites has no place in our hyperactive, goal-oriented society. On the contrary, the men and women who answer the call to spend their lives in the cloister can themselves speak a truly prophetic, corrective word to this empire where "time is money" and where people are judged on how much they have or how much they get done. In that way our contemplative communities do the rest of us an enormous and necessary service, saying with their own lives that the "wasted time" of prayer and silence has a place even and especially in our frenetic culture.

In addition, many of our sisters and brothers who have sensed within themselves a call to the cloistered life find themselves very much in contact with our hurting world. I once led a retreat for a Poor Clare community and found the sisters very much aware and interested in my reflections on engaged spirituality. They kept up with events by reading the newspapers and watching the news on TV, and they showed a lively interest in all sorts of current issues. Naturally, they took all of this to their main work – prayer. Today the Maryknoll Sisters, famous for their activist missionaries, maintain cloistered communities in Sudan, Thailand, and Guatemala. That's a telling statement from a group of "doers" about the need for praying with God's word and the newspaper in extremely conflicted areas of the world.

The rural diocese where I served during my years in Bolivia covered a vast area, and our work there with indigenous communities was endless. The bishop of the area took the trouble to invite cloistered sisters into the diocese so that they could learn all about the enormous pastoral challenges we faced and pray for us and with us. Once, during the bishop's absence, I took it on myself to invite a couple of these sisters, who happened to be nurses, on a short mission trip with me. That began a short-lived experience for the nuns, who seemed to appreciate firsthand contact with the extremely poor, marginalized people we were serving. However, the bishop on his return put an immediate stop to the experiment. He insisted that the cloistered religious were

there to know about the lives of the people, yes, but above all and exclusively to pray for them. I'm still not sure which of us was right – me with my sort of action-contemplation thrust or the bishop who wanted prayer above all.

Revelation 22:1-6

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."