**LIVING WORDS**

*compiled by Martin Tunnicliffe*

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**Contemplative Prayer in Crisis**

Peter Thorburn

*[Peter wrote this fine article for our journal “Living Word” in 1998. It is reproduced here both as a tribute to Peter who died in May 2015, and as a record of a valuable insight into the cutting-edge practical contribution that contemplative prayer can have in the world of every day. We may not all be hospital chaplains, but in a sense anyone who engages in contemplative prayer, especially in contemplative intercession, is in a sort of chaplaincy role. If you have ever been in a crisis situation, when you have stood helplessly by, uncertain and apparently unable to assist in any practical way, then you will be able straight away to appreciate the value of this article].*

What is crisis ministry? Let me give three examples. The first is being called to an intensive care unit and finding the Cardiac Arrest Team present. All were busy doing something. To have knelt near the patient who was lying on the floor would have meant obstructing someone. I stood and watched and prayed, in silence so as not to distract the necessary medical instructions. I focussed on a phrase from the Psalms — “Say unto my soul, I AM thy salvation ...(that is, thy healing, thy health, thy life.”) (Psalm 35.3).

The second example is similar. The medical team are fighting to save the life of a child. I am given space to baptise; then I drop into the background as the struggle for the child’s life goes on. I focus on the Word of God: “I have called you by name: you are mine: I have graven you upon the palm of my hands.” (Isaiah 43.2; 45.4; 49.56).

Thirdly: I open the sacristy door to a tentative knock and a young married woman stumbles in. She is a technician. She tells me something of her marital difficulties. She has an exam to sit on Friday. “I know there is nothing you can do to help me, but I had to tell someone.” She isn’t even a Christian but, yes, she does believe in God. “I know there is nothing you can do to help” ... true; but you can listen to a fellow human being in trouble and you can listen to God. “I have seen your tears: I have heard your crying: I will come and heal you.” (2 Kings 20.5).

Brother Roger of Taize said: “In Chinese the word *Crisis* is formed from two characters, one meaning *catastrophe* and the other *hope*”. The Chaplain (one might say ‘the intercessor’. Ed.) is daily in the heart of catastrophe trying to express it in terms of hope and his struggle is a Gethsemane of contemplation. He must be immersed in the silence of God. The word “contemplate” has at its heart the word “Temple”, that is, a sacred enclosure. So the ministry of the chaplain (or intercessor) goes out from the Temple where he has waited upon God. Brother Roger said: “Persons of silence exist who radiate Communion; the price they pay is high...In times past in religious communities if it was recognised that someone had a charisma, a great capacity for listening and intuition, then they were called to give freedom of forgiveness, whether they were priests or laymen.”

Mother Theresa of Calcutta said: “We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of Silence ... the more we receive in silent prayer the more we can give. We need silence to be able to touch souls. The essential thing is not what we say but what God says through us.” So we are obliged first to listen to the Lord of Silence, and then to listen to the Lord of the World. And the great theologian of the early church, Origen, wrote: “In the Scriptures with faces unveiled we shall behold the glory of the Lord. Then the Word of God shall have come into your souls and clinging to your hearts will form your minds according to the image of the Word itself...and thereby Christ Himself will be formed in you.”

Contemplative prayer turns the attention away from self to God. “I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.” (Psalm 85.8) (Jerusalem Bible renders this: “I am listening, what is Yahweh saying?”). Day by day the chaplain’s life consists of meeting, of encounter, of crisis, in which he and his fellow human beings are tested and judged. But this crisis is to be read not as disaster but as opportunity. He must be sensitive then to the voice of God in times of silence and also in what other people are saying or trying to say. We must be on the look out for Christ coming to us in his world. “My soul truly waiteth in stillness upon God” ... “We wait for thy loving kindness O God in the midst of thy temple” (Psalm 62.1; 48.9).

Brother Roger again: “Prayer, descending into the depths of God, is not there to make life easy for us. Prayer is not for any kind of result but in order to create with Christ a communion in which we are free. When a person strives to give expression to this communion in words we have conscious prayer, but our understanding can only deal with the outer surface of ourselves. Very soon it comes up short...and silence remains, which seems a sign of the absence of God. However, instead of coming to a standstill with the bareness of silence, know that it opens towards unheard of possibilities of creation”...In the underlying world of the human person, Christ prays, more than we can imagine. Compared with the vastness of this secret prayer of Christ in us, our explicit praying dwindles to almost nothing. Certainly, the essence of prayer takes place above all in great silence... “All prayer remains arduous for those who are left to themselves. God has made people social beings...which is why contemplation becomes less of an effort when it is lived in fellowship with others.”

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**God’s Purpose for Man**

*[This is a previously unpublished paper by the FCP Founder, Robert Coulson. The four points encapsulate in a compact and dense form the substance of his thought expressed more fully in his books, in particular in “The Threefold Reality”. This thinking lies behind both the theory and the practice of contemplative prayer as we know it in our Fellowship. So this brief document is a kind of FCP manifesto. It requires deep reflection to reveal its meaning, and will only be properly understood by those who engage in contemplative prayer based on the Word of God].*

1. All things whatsoever are of God, and through God, and unto God (Romans 11.26). They are essentially perfect as the endlessly manifold and diverse revelation of His ineffably Glorious Infinity. Hence we affirm, with all the Company of Heaven, that Heaven and Earth are full of His Glory (Tersanctus).

2. God first reveals His Glory in spiritual terms by the Goodness, Beauty and Truth of His Only-begotten Son, Whose “Name for ever” is I AM (Exodus 3.14-15). So Heaven is filled with His Glory. Through His Son, I AM, God then reveals His Glory in corporeal terms by the Goodness, Beauty and Truth of the endless multitude and diversity of His Sons, whose names are *I am*. “Everyone that is called by MY Name . . . I have created for MY Glory (Isaiah 43.7). So he fills Earth with His Glory.

3. Jesus is the perfect type of the Sons of God, is the perfectly normal man, and is the perfect incarnate revelation of His Only-begotten Son. He is thus the historical proof that the purpose of human creation is attainable and has been attained in one case, is the guarantee of its attainment by all men, and is the pattern for all men to follow in their struggle to attain their supreme destiny.

4. The turning point in every man’s earthly life must be the realisation of his glorious destiny, and at the same time of his miserably sub-normal or sinful state. Here he comes to understand the purpose of his suffering as a token of God’s Love in purging him of his sinful state, and enabling him to receive the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit through Christ, I AM, in order to attain fully normal manhood. So he accepts his cross for the joy that is set before him, becomes obedient to the godly motions of God’s Holy Spirit, and fully co-operates with God through Christ, I AM, in carrying out the purpose of his creation to the end.

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*Living Words appears under the direction of the FCP Council, but I am entirely responsible for the contents. Any comments or any queries, please feel free to write or email me:*

*The Revd M W Tunnicliffe 202 Ralph Road Solihull W Midlands B90 3LE . tunnicliffe@tmartin7.orangehome.co.uk*