

"The Contemplative as Iconoclast: The Countercultural Nature of Contemplation."

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By way of an introductory comment, let me say that I am not a mystical theologian. I approach this topic as a systematic theologian, and so I present my position more as a question or a "perhaps" rather than as a statement of fact, and I ask that you receive it as such. Having said that, I am not too sure that what I have to say is all that startling or new in the first place. Perhaps I am like the scribe in Mt.13:52 who brings forth from the storeroom (the tradition) both the old **and** the new.

Let me begin by stating the thesis on which my paper is based. As goes our understanding of God, so goes our understanding of contemplation and the contemplative. But our understanding of God is culturally and linguistically determined. Hence, if our understanding of God changes, so also our understanding of contemplation and of the contemplative will change.

My paper has five sections: 1) substantiate my thesis (give reasons for it); 2) say a few words about the understanding of God which emerges in Christianity in the second century and which for the most part has dominated Western Christianity since Augustine. 3) say a few words about the understanding of contemplation and the contemplative which corresponds to this "classical theism." 4) present a contemporary and more biblically inspired understanding of God. 5) work out the implications of this contemporary understanding of God for our understanding of contemplation and the contemplative, concluding that **one** dimension of a contemporary understanding of contemplation is that contemplation of its very nature is countercultural and hence the contemplative is an iconoclast.

Let me begin the first section, i.e. to substantiate my thesis that as goes our understanding of God, so goes our understanding of contemplation; that our understanding of God is culturally and linguistically determined, and that, therefore, if our understanding of God changes, so also will change our understanding of contemplation.

I must be brief here, lest I try to give a course on the history of contemporary philosophy. So let me just say that prior to Immanuel Kant (d. 1804), most philosophers held that human experience is totally derived from the "object," "the out there." The human knower or subject is merely a passive receiver. In no way is the human knower creative or constructive in knowing. Kant showed that the human knower is active in knowing, i.e. that the knower himself/herself contributes something to experience. Today we call this insight of Kant "the turn to the subject."

This basic insight of Kant regarding the role of the subject in knowing was further developed by Hegel, and even more so by Marx, both of whom held that consciousness or experience is very much determined by one's particular place in history. In other words, consciousness or experience is always historically conditioned or circumscribed.

Applying this position to the question of experiencing God, Karl Rahner holds that all experience of the divine is mediated by one's historical experience. We are not pure spirits who have direct, unmediated access to the divine. In experiencing the divine, we never leave the world or our history. We are always "**in the world** spirits" or embodied spirits, spirits whose embodiment places us in this particular history, in this particular culture, at this particular time, and hence spirits who have access to the divine only through our particular worldly experience. Transcendence is always historically mediated.ⁱ

This turn towards the subject to understand experience, including the experience of the divine, has been further developed by many contemporary philosophers of language, e.g. Paul

Ricoeur. These philosophers tell us that precisely because experience, including the experience of the divine, is culturally conditioned or constituted, it is also therefore conditioned or constituted by the language of any given culture. If Marx says (and he does) that "life determines consciousness" or experience, today we must also say that language determines experience, including therefore one's experience of the divine. There is no language-free experience of the divine.ⁱⁱ

Now since there is no language-free experience of the divine, that means that one's experience of the divine (contemplation) is always very much determined by one's religious tradition, or to put it in more contemporary rhetoric, by one's inherited religious story and its understanding of the divine. The contemplative experiences of the likes of Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross did not just appear on the scene from nowhere. That experience was itself already to a great extent (though I do not say **totally**) programmed by their religious tradition or story, by their understanding of the divine. Another way to say this: There is no universal, raw, acultural contemplative experience, because the contemplative experience is very much determined by the God contemplated, and the God contemplated is very much determined by one's religious story. Hence if the story (understanding of God) changes, the contemplative experience changes.ⁱⁱⁱ

I now move on to my second section: the understanding of God in Christianity which began to emerge in the 2nd. century and which has been rather dominant since Augustine. Again I must be brief.

As Christianity moved into the Hellenistic world, its faith came to be articulated in Greek categories and hence influenced by Greek philosophy or the Greek story. This is merely another

instance of the influence of culture and language on thought.

There are two areas in which Hellenistic philosophy influenced Christian thought which are of interest to us, np. 1) our understanding of God; 2) our understanding of the human subject. [I want to say a few words about the Hellenistic understanding of the human subject, because it also influences somewhat our understanding of contemplation. But my main concern is the understanding of God.]

First, the understanding of God.^{iv} Under the influence of various strains of Platonic thinking, the God of Judaeo-Christianity came to be conceived along the lines of the "Absolute One" of Hellenistic philosophy and thus quickly came to be understood in very apophatic or world-negating terms (e.g. immutable, infinite, indivisible, ineffable, incomprehensible). This Hellenistic view of God itself presupposes the absolute abyss between the divine and the creaturely (the world of "being" and the world of "becoming" posited by Plato).^v The otherness of the divine is so stressed that God is no longer truly related to the world and history. God's creative activity is understood as merely a past act of God through which God established the created world as a completed given in which nothing truly new happens and which needs only to be sustained by God's governance and directed by his providence.

In this Hellenistic view of God, God has nothing new to do. Hence God himself has no history. He exists in the timeless and simultaneous perfect self-possession of his infinite being.

Perhaps nowhere is this view of God more clearly seen than in its understanding of God as absolutely immutable or unchangeable in every respect. Because God is perfect and infinite in his being, he lacks nothing and hence cannot change. No wonder this God appears as unrelated to an ever changing history and himself has no history, has nothing new to do. No wonder this

God appears so static and timeless.^{vi} Pannenberg notes clearly the implications of an immutable God: "... the concept of the immutability of God necessarily leads to the consequence that the transition to every innovation in the relationship between God and man has to be sought as much as possible on the side of man."^{vii}

In fairness to the past, I am not saying that this ahistorical, static view of God totally dominated the patristic or later Christian tradition. Pannenberg correctly states: "On the whole, one ought not to speak of an uncritical acceptance of the philosophical idea of God..."^{viii} All I am saying is that this view of God definitely exercised its influence and that it co-existed in an uneasy tension with the biblical view of God which I will take up later. In Pannenberg's words: "The ideas of God as world principle and as the free Lord of history remained for the most part inharmoniously alongside each other."^{ix} Thus the Christian appropriation of the philosophical notion of God has yet to be critically completed.^x There is still need for dialogue between Jerusalem and Athens, the God of the Scriptures and the God of philosophy.

The second area of interest to us in which Hellenistic philosophy influenced Christian thinking is in its view of the human subject. Here I see two influences. Again I must be brief.^{xi}

The Greek ideal of the human subject is "the knower." Knowledge or contemplation of that which is eternal, of the world of the divine, is the highest and most noble perfection. Hence in Plato's Republic, primacy of place is given to the philosophers, those who know the world of the divine, the world of being. Lowest on the social ladder are the "doers," the artisans, who live only in the world of "becoming." Also important to point out is that the view of "knowing" here is understood in that quite passive sense which I mentioned above. Vis-a-vis its already constituted object or truth, with which it becomes one, the knower is purely receptive and

passive. Here we are dealing with the Greek ideal of contemplation: the passive union in knowing with the divine.

I point out also that this primacy of knowing over doing is itself related in Platonic thinking to the primacy of spirit over matter, a primacy which at times could lead to the denigration of and flight from matter and hence history.

The second influence of Hellenistic thinking upon the understanding of the human subject is found in its highly individualistic or substantialist view of the human subject, i.e. a being, whose existence, meaning and intelligibility are self-contained. This view is quite different from both a Marxian and process philosophy view which sees the human subject not as an isolated island but as a political or organic subject constituted in its very being by its various relations (e.g. political, social, economic). I will point out below how I believe this highly individualistic view of the human person has affected our understanding of contemplation and the contemplative.

(Third Section): I have just said a few words about the Hellenistic view of God and the human subject which entered into the Christian story. I now want to point out what I believe is the resulting understanding of contemplation and the contemplative.

If the God of your story is a God who is infinitely removed from history, who is timeless, who himself has no history, one would anticipate that contemplation is going to be understood in somewhat ahistorical terms. This, I believe, is to a great extent the case. If you read Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism,^{xii} you will see that again and again she talks about contemplation in terms of a loving knowing, an altered state of consciousness, in which one transcends this world and becomes one with or rests in the divine.^{xiii} And she clearly distinguishes the contemplative or mystic from the artist in virtue of the fact that the artist, unlike the mystic, must **do** something,

must **act**.^{xiv}

Citing Eckhart she says: "The Soul is created in a place between Time and Eternity: with its highest powers it touches Eternity, with its lower (powers) Time."^{xv} She then goes on to say: "These, the world of Being and Becoming, are the two 'stages of reality' which meet in the spirit of man. By cutting us off from the temporal plane, the lower kind of reality, Contemplation gives the eternal plane, and the powers which can communicate with that plane, their chance," i.e. their opportunity.^{xvi}

This is the world of Greek philosophy with its infinite abyss between the divine and the creaturely, with God understood as timeless and beyond history. Contemplation takes us out of the world of the creaturely and puts us into the world of the divine, which, Underhill, just as Plato, calls "the real world."^{xvii} Note also here the emphasis upon knowing, albeit a loving knowing, in speaking about contemplation. Nothing is said about a possible action or praxis dimension of contemplation.

We see the same understanding of contemplation reflected in the six definitions of contemplation which Harvey Egan presents on pp. 4-5 of Christian Mysticism.^{xviii} In all six cases, including the definitions of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, contemplation is conceived as loving knowledge which results in union with God, a union which in its highest form involves transformative union resulting in mystical marriage.^{xix}

Now the points that I want to make here regarding this traditional understanding of contemplation is that 1) the God contemplated is the timeless, immutable God, who has no history, who has nothing new to do; 2) contemplation is the loving awareness of and union with

that God, which on the one hand results in a tranquil resting in God (in its highest form, mystical marriage) and on the other hand is opposed to action. This understanding of contemplation as tranquil resting in the lord comes to me as no surprise, given that the God contemplated is himself/herself quite tranquil, i.e. ahistorical and immutable, a God who has no future. No wonder that contemplation and the contemplative tend here to be understood as aworldly, as indifferent to history, since in contemplation, one transcends the world and history into the quite distinct and unrelated realm of the divine. The contemplative becomes more and more transformed into and one with a God who himself/herself is beyond history, change and action. Now this is basically the critique of Segundo Galilea and others of this view of contemplation.^{xx}

Another way in which Galilea and others have formulated this critique is to say that this understanding of contemplation and of the contemplative is overly privatized, spiritualized and eschatologized, i.e. it is focused too much upon the subject as an isolated individual, upon the other-worldly and the hereafter. Lacking is the importance of salvation or the reign of God for the social, the worldly and the here and now.^{xxi}

(Fourth section). I now move on to the fourth section, a contemporary, biblically inspired theology of God. I feel that I owe it to Georg Hegel (d. 1831) to say that, in my opinion, we owe the inspiration for the rediscovery of this biblical view of God to him.^{xxii}

So now a few words about the biblical view of God, and again I stress "a **few** words."^{xxiii} The Hebrews did not understand their God so much as a static essence who/which was both removed from history and himself had no history. God for them was not the actus purus of Thomas which admitted neither of change nor relation. Rather the Jews had a much more

dynamic view of God. God is not pure act but pure **action**, and more specifically, pure **saving** action. Furthermore, beginning with Abraham (1750 B.C.) God is not conceived so much as a God who acts only or even primarily in the past or the present, but rather a God who acts from the future, a God of the future, a God of the promises, a God who from the future calls us into the future and empowers us to create that future. This is the God of "salvation history." So for Israel, God is the big "saving doing," the God who in the history of his people more and more manifests himself as and in fact **becomes** their savior, the God who becomes more and more God-for-us.^{xxiv} With and after Isaiah, Israel believes that this God, Yahweh, will only be fully God when he/she is fully savior, when he is fully manifested and victorious over his creation. And that is the end of time as we know it, the eschaton.

It is this eschatological view of God which is captured in the symbol "the reign of God," the malkuth Yahweh, which I translate as the reigning God. The reigning God is God himself/herself precisely as the God of the absolute future, the God of the End, the God who will be fully victorious over his creation.^{xxv} So for the Jew, God is a God who has a history, because he/she is not yet fully our God, the saving God, the reigning God. And this history of God comes to its completion only in the End, when God fully reigns. So the Jew has a much more futuristic and hence also historical understanding of God than we have. God for them is the God of the Future, who has always yet new and surprising things to do on our behalf until he/she fully reigns.

This also was the God of Jesus. The twist that Jesus gave to his understanding of this reigning God is that this God of the Future is **now** beginning to break into history through him. He is the agent of the reigning God. The followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection, for reasons too involved to get into here, will confess that this reigning God had indeed fully

occurred in advance of the Absolute End (the Eschaton) in Jesus himself, especially in his resurrection. Moreover, they will confess that the reigning God of the End-time has now, in raising Jesus, filled this Jesus with his own creative presence and power, i.e. his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. And so Jesus in his Resurrection has become the life-giving, powerfully creative Spirit of God, who now sends forth that Spirit into the world to continue God's work of creating and saving, until God reigns fully over all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Given this view of God as the God of the absolute future, it is no surprise that Jesus in his preaching of the reigning God used parables.^{xxvi} Parables are iconoclastic, for they bring together two aspects of experience or reality which do not belong together (e.g. Samaritan and good). In doing so they shatter the past and bring about a whole new experience of reality, in fact a whole new reality, namely, the reality of the God of the Future, who in bringing about the absolute future (np. Himself-Herself) must shatter every past and present. The reigning God, present in Jesus, is the new wine which shatters every old wine skin. No wonder then that Jesus' parables, and in fact his whole ministry, were perceived, rightly, by the leaders of Israel as such a challenge. The reigning God present in Jesus was challenging Israel to shatter and transcend its past and present into the ever new future. Jesus and his parables were iconoclastic because Jesus' God is iconoclastic, the God who demands that we shatter and transcend every past and present until she fully reigns.

So I am saying that we need to formulate a new understanding of God which is more compatible with the biblical experience and the experience of Jesus. We need a theology of God which does justice to God's own history of becoming God for us not only in Christ but also in the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is God as a God who is still creating and reconciling his creation and will do so until the Eschaton, until God fully reigns, until God is all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).

Section Five: A contemporary understanding of contemplation and the contemplative.

I have given you a new and biblically inspired dynamic view of God. If this God were to become once again the God of our story, how would that affect our understanding of contemplation and the contemplative? This is an important question, for as Sobrino points out, the issue is not whether one believes in God or prays to God, or contemplates God. The issue is: which God? In which God do you believe, to which God do you pray and which God do you contemplate?^{xxvii} The God of the Christian story as influenced by Hellenistic philosophy or the God of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, the God of Athens or the God of Jerusalem?

So what is contemplation, or what does contemplation involve if the God contemplated is the historical God of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures? If contemplation involves the loving experience of God, union with and transformation into the divine, then I question whether it can be only a "tranquil dwelling of the person in the presence of God"^{xxviii} or a "resting" in God, for the God contemplated here is the reigning God, the God opposed to all suffering and injustice, to all that dehumanizes, the God who continually sends forth her Spirit to complete her reign. This God is a restless God, a God whose history of creating-reconciling-saving is not yet finished. This is a God who is still sending forth her mighty spirit to empower us as prophets to denounce the world of dis-grace and announce the world of grace.^{xxix} This is a God whose spirit summons us to be iconoclastic and parabolic, i.e. to build the reign and to challenge every idol of our culture which is opposed to that reign, every false god which dehumanizes and enslaves human beings. In the words of Moltmann, "peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."^{xxx}

With this God, the prophetic and the mystical cannot be opposed as Friedrich Heiler maintained.^{xxx1} One can be a prophet only because one first tastes the divine. The prophet experiences the divine absence or dis-grace in history only because he/she first experiences the divine presence or grace. And it is this experience of the divine presence which compels the prophet to denounce its absence, the reign of Satan, and to announce a new future, the reign of God. Because the prophet first stands in the sight of the living God, he/she is filled with zeal for the Lord God of Hosts. One cannot rest tranquilly in the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, because this God himself is doing anything but resting tranquilly. And so with this God one can only be a contemplative prophet, not a contemplative or a prophet.^{xxxii} We must beware of a "contemplative docetism," an ahistorical contemplation. As Gutiérrez cautions: we must not set a praxis of heaven against a praxis of earth and vice versa.^{xxxiii} Along similar lines, Rahner says:

The Christian cannot simply dismiss politics as a 'dirty business', and expect God to give this 'dirty business' to others to carry out and not to him, so that he himself can pursue his own quiet devotions in the comfort of the petit-bourgeois.^{xxxiv}

Hocking nicely articulates this intrinsic relationship between the prophet and the mystic. He writes:

The prophet is but the mystic in control of the forces of history, declaring their necessary outcome; the mystic in action is the prophet. In the prophet, the cognitive certainty of the mystic becomes historic and particular, and this is the necessary destiny of that certainty: mystic experience must complete itself in the prophetic consciousness.^{xxxv}

Now what are some implications from what I am proposing? How are we to be contemplative prophets? I am a systematic theologian, and systematicians are theoreticians, not "how-to-do-it" persons. But I will hazard a few practical "how-to-do-it" suggestions. In the long run the "how-to-do-it" is a question which all of us Carmelites must address.

First there is the rather obvious "how-to-do-it", that is by direct and immediate

involvement in the socio-political-economic sectors of our world. We have only to think here of the likes of Oscar Romero, Raymond Hunthausen, Daniel Berrigan, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Mother Teresa, Titus Brandsma, Carlos Meesters, Canisius Hinde, Alban Quinn and Julio Labayan. And each of us could add many other names. But these are all rather extraordinary contemplative prophets, extraordinary iconoclasts.

Besides these extraordinary mystical prophets, there are the ordinary mystical prophets such as ourselves. Rahner speaks about ordinary, everyday mysticism.^{xxxvi} And so I would speak about an ordinary, everyday prophetic mysticism or iconoclastic mysticism. Perhaps there is a more ordinary way of being counter-cultural. What I have in mind here is not so much what we do by way of **ministerial activity** but what we say and witness to by the way we live. Let me spend a few moments on that point now.

I have said that if we are truly contemplatives, we will be iconoclastic, we will be counter-cultural. We will shatter and transcend all false and oppressive idols in our culture. I believe that the Jesuit philosopher, John Kavanaugh, in his book Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance,^{xxxvii} has exposed in a challenging way **the** (number one) false idol of our Western culture. He calls it the "commodity form". The commodity form is a way of perceiving ourselves and others as things or commodities. Things replace persons; material relations displace human relations. The commodity becomes an idol which drives us to worship things and relate to them as if they were persons and to relate to persons as if they were things. The result is that persons are possessed by their possessions and produced by their products.^{xxxviii} The commodity form with its values of marketability and

consumption becomes a pathology against which we evaluate ourselves and others in terms of productivity and usefulness, with the result that there is no intrinsic human value.^{xxxix} Likewise the commodity form gives rise to a commodity ethics of rugged individualism, which results in violence, domination, manipulation, racism, sexism, abortion, euthanasia, ecological plunder and excessive consumption.^{xi}

Opposed to this commodity form is the "personal form." This is a "mode of perceiving and valuing men and women as irreplaceable persons whose fundamental identities are fulfilled in covenantal relationship."^{xli} The personal form promotes the intrinsic worth of persons, promotes respect, freedom, detachment, self-donation, justice, peace, forgiveness, healing, compassion and the empowerment of those who are least.^{xlii} The personal form is most fully revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

Now I believe that to contemplate the God of Jesus and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus (in obsequio Jesu Christi) demands living according to the personal form, and to live according to the personal form is to be counter-cultural and iconoclastic. It is to denounce the commodity form which leads to death and to announce the reign of God which leads to life.

The idol of the commodity form is the new Baal, the new Satan, the new adversary who prowls around like the roaring lion in chapter fourteen of our Rule seeking those whom he can devour. To contemplate the God of Jesus, the reigning God is to enter into battle with this roaring lion of the commodity form.

Now let me return to my question: how can we Carmelites be iconoclastic or counter-cultural? Over and beyond any direct ministerial involvement in the socio-political-economic spheres, we can be iconoclastic and enter into spiritual combat with the roaring lion of the commodity form in three ways, all of which have to do with life-style, the way we live.

The first form of spiritual combat is the life of the vows, especially today the vow of poverty. The vows are quite counter-cultural and opposed to the commodity form, for their purpose is humanization and liberation, liberation FROM the powers which drive us to the commodity values of power, domination and possession, liberation TO empowering others as human beings. The vows are a direct denunciation of the commodity form whose god is mammon and whose goal is productivity. The vows after all are really quite useless for our commodity world and its concern for productivity.^{xliii}

I said that I believe that it is especially through the vow of poverty that we can enter into combat with the commodity form of our culture. In our day I would define the vow of poverty as material, emotional and spiritual identification with the materially poor. This identification is often called the "preferential option for the poor," for those who are **most** victimized, **most** enslaved and **most** dehumanized by the rapacious greed of the commodity form. But of course we cannot prophetically denounce, we cannot be iconoclastic, we cannot shatter the idols of the commodity form if we ourselves are nothing but a celibate echo, a mirror, of our materialistic society, of the commodity form, if we ourselves have become enslaved to the commodity. In that case we are neither contemplatives nor prophets, for we are merely helping to legitimate disgrace, i.e. the divine absence in our society.

The second way in which we can do battle with the commodity form and hence be counter-cultural is through our Carmelite life of silence, solitude and prayer, which also are utterly useless in the commodity world. Silence and solitude force upon us the journey within where we encounter our radical poverty and need, where there is revealed to us the demons which drive us to control and manipulate and which deceive us with the dizzying illusion of

autonomy. Prayer arising from this silence and solitude puts us in touch with the God of the reign, reveals to us our true identity as persons, and liberates us from the illusions and the lies of the roles demanded by the commodity form. Authentic prayer is a decommodification of our lives and a reappropriation of our personhood.^{xliv}

The third form of counter-cultural spiritual combat is community life. The hermits on Carmel contextualized their walking in the footsteps of Jesus Christ by embracing the ideal vision of the Jerusalem community. As Sr. Constance Fitzgerald O.C.D. has pointed out, our Rule spells out this communitarian vision in terms of a sharing of goods and life, an egalitarian style of life, communal-dialogical discernment and a respect for the individual.^{xlv}

Now this communitarian life, signalled in our Rule, is itself a counter-cultural protest against the commodity form with its objectifying of the person through dominative and dehumanizing relationships, its lack of care and respect, its enslavement of freedom, and its idolizing of competition, achievement and control. In turn such a communitarian life witnesses to the values of the personal form: the intrinsic worth of persons, freedom, detachment, generosity, justice, peace, forgiveness, healing, compassion, the empowering of those who are least.

I believe, therefore, that our Carmelite life-style, with or without active ministry (as that term is usually understood), our life-style of the vows, of silence, solitude and prayer, of community can be a prophetic denunciation of the commodity values of our society and a prophetic annunciation of a new way of living. Kavanaugh calls it the "personal form." I would suggest a different word, a word from Eckhart, "Gelassenheit," letting-be.^{xlvi} Letting-be is a way of living according to which we no longer view things, persons or events in terms of their usefulness but accept them in their autonomy. We no longer wish to possess or subvert things to our

own projects; we wish only to restore things to themselves and persons to their own freedom.^{xlvi}

In our lives as Carmelites, we should be witnesses of "letting-be." To the extent that we are, we are truly counter-cultural, for letting-be attacks the very roots of a culture hell-bent on possession, productivity and domination.

In view of the God of Israel, the God of Jesus, we Carmelites must challenge ourselves in many ways. 1) we must ask ourselves to what extent we take seriously our contemplative vocation to live in the sight of the living God. 2) we must ask ourselves to what extent we take seriously our prophetic vocation to be zealous for the lord God of hosts, i.e. to what extent our contemplative life leads to a truly prophetic life, for not to be prophetic, not to be iconoclastic and counter-cultural is to re-enforce the status quo. If in our contemplation we evanesce from history, then we leave history in its state of dis-grace. 3) Likewise if in our ministry, we do not truly challenge the Baals of our society, the oppressors, the dehumanizers, those who deal out death, sometimes even in the name of God, then again we merely re-enforce the status quo, the reign of Satan. All we are doing is making the "haves," the rich and the powerful more comfortable with a pseudo-God, for the God of Jesus is certainly not the God to whom the rich and the powerful pray. Again, the question is: in **which** God do you believe, to **which** God do you pray? Not any old God will do! Some gods end up re-enforcing the status quo of oppression and injustice and hence also become a defense of social privilege and ruthless power^{xlvi}. Contemplatives who have no commitment to history and its transformation into the reign of God send out the message that what happens here and now is of no consequence, that salvation is strictly "pie in the sky." We must be careful not to be in league with the powerful and rich, even if only by default, by saying and doing nothing.

Before I close, I would like to say a special word to my contemplative sisters in Carmel. I hesitate to use the word "cloistered," because I fear that that term might be understood in such a way that it is indicative of precisely the view of God, of contemplation and the contemplative which I am questioning.

First, almost all that I have said above is applicable to you.

Second, there are many who question your life of silence, solitude and prayer. They believe that you are foolish. I do not. To those who do I respond with the words of St. Paul: "Brothers (sisters), you are among those called.... Not many of you are wise, as people account wisdom; not many are influential; and surely not many are well-born. But God chose those whom the world considers foolish to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something; so that humankind can do no boasting before God. (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

I believe that it is especially you, through your somewhat hidden life, who can and do shout out to all of us and to our commodity society that in the end only God can heal, **only God** can save, that in God alone do we find our salvation. Your silent life of solitude and prayer is a scathing prophetic denunciation of those who peddle the ersatz salvation of oppressive power, enslaving possessions and naked autonomy. And in turn it is a prophetic annunciation of a new way of living, a new way of being human, an annunciation of authentic salvation which is found only in God. Through your parabolic lives, you too, and perhaps I should say "especially you," are iconoclastic and countercultural.

And now I conclude. I began by saying that perhaps I am like the scribe who brings forth from the storehouse things old and new. To say that the contemplative is iconoclastic is nothing

really new. Apophatic mystics have always shown us that all idols, all finitudes, even our images and concepts of God must be transcended. The mystics of old have always reminded us that God is no-thing, that God is always yet greater. I have merely recast this teaching by calling this God the God of the Absolute Future, the God of the reign who remains always yet ahead of us. In doing so, i.e. in using the biblical symbol of the reigning God, I have tried to bring out the historical-social-political or prophetic dimension of contemplation and of the contemplative. The true contemplative, therefore, is of his/her very nature an iconoclast, an image breaker, one in search of that one fine pearl, the reigning God. The images which the contemplative shatters are not only the images and concepts of God but all those idols which enslave society and prevent the reign of God from becoming a reality within it. The true contemplative, in shattering and transcending all images of God, likewise shatters all the ersatz gods within the Church itself which surreptitiously attempt to displace God and to enthrone themselves as the true God, the reigning God, the God who is always yet ahead of us, the God who remains "not-yet." The true contemplative prophetically challenges not only society but also the Church to absolutize nothing, least of all herself, to move beyond every past so that the reigning God may be ultimately victorious in her creation. In doing this the true contemplative provides both society and the Church with the much needed "eschatological proviso,"^{xlix} i.e. with the message: "Let God be God," with the message that the reign is "not-yet," that no-thing alone is God, that not even the Church with all of her church-men and all of her church-women, with all of her creeds and doctrines, with all of her sacraments and liturgy is the reigning God. Indeed we Carmelites must recall today the subversive memory of our mystics.¹ But we must also listen attentively to Marx' well-known eleventh thesis against Feuerbach. Marx said: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it."^{li}

Perhaps at times contemplatives have left the world to itself to rest tranquilly in a tranquil Lord. I am proposing that with a biblical understanding of God and contemplation, contemplatives are those who are passionately in love with a God who herself is passionately about the business of bringing her reign to completion. And hence their passionate love for God turns them not from the world or history but radically commits them to a world and a history for which our God in Christ has died and to which he through Christ still sends forth his Spirit until he is all in all.

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ⁱ See, e.g. Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, trans. William Dych (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), pp. 81-89, 140-42, 151-52.

ⁱⁱ Hence for Ricoeur language is the new 'transcendental,' i.e. a universal or a priori structure of the human subject which accounts for experience. See Paul Ricoeur, "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology," in The Conflict of Interpretations (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 258. A key writing of Ricoeur dealing with the relationship between language and religious experience is "Biblical Hermeneutics," Semeia 4(1975): 29-148. Regarding the relation of language and experience in the thought of Paul Ricoeur see John W. Van Den Hengel, S.C.J., The Home of Meaning: The Hermeneutics of the Subject of Paul Ricoeur (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 10-22, 117-27. In chapters eight and nine of this same work Van Den Hengel discusses the role of language for religious experience. Many contemporary systematic theologians in their methodology have taken what might be called "the linguistic turn," and hence reflect this sensitivity to the importance of language, tradition and narrative for experience, including therefore religious experience. Best known perhaps is David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism (New York: Crossroad, 1981), especially pp. 47-98, 99-153, 154-229, 405-445. Similar to Tracy is Claude Geffré, The Risk of Interpretation: On Being Faithful to the Christian Tradition in a Non-Christian Age, trans. David Smith (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 21-45, 46-64. See also George A. Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 30-45. Lindbeck critiques the "experiential-expressive model" for understanding the relationship between experience and language, according to which language is nothing but an expression of a previously existing, pre-linguistic experience. In place of this experiential-expressive model Lindbeck suggests "a cultural-linguistic alternative."

ⁱⁱⁱ Harvey Egan notes: "Many contemporary commentators emphasize ... that the

contemplative's total formative milieu is an intrinsic part of his mystical experience. The person's entire conceptual, social, historical, and linguistic matrix enters into the contemplative consciousness and experience." Harvey D. Egan, S.J., Christian Mysticism: the Future of a Tradition (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), p. 107; see also pp. 153-54. The same point is made by Jure Kristo, "The Interpretation of Religious Experience: What Do Mystics Intend When They Talk about Their Experiences?" The Journal of Religion 62 (1982): 21-38.

^{iv} Among other sources, I am dependent here especially upon the following: Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," in Basic Questions in Theology, vol. II, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 119-183; Hans Küng, The Incarnation of God, trans. J. R. Stephenson (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 430-459, 509-558; Piet Schoonenberg, "God as Relating and (Be)coming: a Meta-Thomistic Consideration," Listening 14 (1979): 265-279; "Process or History in God?" Louvain Studies 4(1973): 303-319; "Denken über Chalkedon," Theologische Quartalschrift 160 (1980): 295-305; William M. Thompson, Jesus Lord and Savior: A Theopathic Christology and Soteriology (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 113-161; Walter Kasper, The God of Jesus Christ, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984): 147-157. John Macquarrie, In Search of Deity: An Essay in Dialectical Theism (New York: Crossroad, 1985): pp. 3-56.

^v Thus for example in the Phaedo 79a the following dialogue between Socrates and Cebes: "So you think that we should assume two classes of things, one visible and the other invisible? Yes, we should. The invisible being invariable, and the visible never being the same." Socrates continues in 80b: "Now, Cebes, ... see whether this is our conclusion from all that we have said. The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble and never self-consistent." See also among other dialogues Plato's Republic, Books VI and VII, and Timaeus, esp. #s 28-29.

^{vi} In the words of Jaroslav Pelikan, himself citing Whitehead's Process and Reality: "Whether theologians found Platonic speculation compatible with the gospel or incompatible with it, they were agreed that the Christian understanding of the relation between Creator and creature required 'the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality' - a concept that came into Christian doctrine from Greek philosophy." See Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 53.

^{vii} Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God," p. 162.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 178. See Macquarrie, In Search of Deity, pp. 59-167 for his treatment of an alternative, more dialectical tradition within Christianity regarding God and God's relation to the world.

ix "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God," p. 179.

x Ibid., pp. 182-183.

xi For more detailed development and bibliography, see my "Liberation Theology: Praxis and Contemplation," Carmelus 34 (1987): 3-58, especially pp. 21-32 where I discuss Karl Marx' critique of the Western philosophical tradition.

xii (New York, N.Y: Meridian Books, 1955). For an extended treatment of this "classical" view of contemplation, see R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, trans. Sr. M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1945), esp. pp. 221-260.

xiii See, e.g. pp. 71-74 of Mysticism.

xiv Ibid., p. 75.

xv Ibid., p. 65.

xvi Ibid.

xvii Ibid., p. 67; see also pp. 54, 55-56.

xviii Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition, pp. 4-5.

xix Ibid., 193-197.

xx See e.g. Segundo Galilea, "Liberation as an Encounter with Politics and Contemplation," in Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, eds., The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith. (New York, New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), pp. 19-33; Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," in Rosino Gibellini, ed., Frontiers of Theology in Latin America (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), pp. 1-33; Jon Sobrino, "Christian Prayer and New Testament Theology: A Basis for Social Justice and Spirituality," in Matthew Fox, ed., Western Spirituality, Historical Roots, Ecumenical Roots (Sante Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, Inc., 1981), pp. 76-114.

xxi See my "Liberation Theology: Praxis and Contemplation," pp. 6-7.

xxii For the importance of Hegel for a contemporary and yet very biblically inspired understanding of God, see Küng, On the Incarnation of God, especially pp. 430-460, 509-558, and Peter C. Hodgson, God in History: Shapes of Freedom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).

xxiii For this biblical view of God I am influenced by, among others, Piet Schoonenberg, John Macquarrie and the eschatologically oriented theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, both of whom are influenced by Hegel. For Schoonenberg, see the sources

mentioned in note 4 above as well as The Christ, trans. Della Couling (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), note 16 on pp. 83-86. For Macquarrie, see his In Search of Deity and his earlier work Thinking About God (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), especially chapters 8-11. For Moltmann, see among other works, Theology of Hope, trans. James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 37-229; "Theology as Eschatology," in The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology, Frederick Herzog, ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 1-50; The Crucified God, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), especially pp. 249-290; for Pannenberg, see among other works "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation," in W. Pannenberg, ed., Revelation as History, David Granskou trans. (London: The Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 123-158; "Theology and the Kingdom of God," in Richard John Neuhaus ed., Theology and the Kingdom of God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 51-71; "Appearance as the Arrival of the Future," in Neuhaus, Theology and the Kingdom of God, pp. 127-43; "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," pp. 119-183; "Historical and Theological Hermeneutics," in Basic Questions, vol. I; "What is Truth?" in Basic Questions, vol. II, pp. 1-27; "The God of Hope," in Basic Questions, vol. II, pp. 234-49; "The Revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth," in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. eds. Theology as History, vol. III of New Frontiers in Theology (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 101-133; "Response to the Discussion," in Robinson and Cobb, Theology as History, pp. 221-276; "Father, Son, Spirit: Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God." Dialog 26 (1987): 250-257; Jesus God and Man, Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 53-114; 127-132; 225-235; 365-397. Other influential sources are: Abraham Heschel, The Prophets (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), especially pp. 218-220; 221-231; 232-235; Thompson, Jesus Lord and Savior, pp. 113-161; Eberhard Jüngel, The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is in Becoming (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976).

^{xxiv} Not available at the time at which I wrote this paper was Catherine LaCugna's masterful work God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). I believe that I accurately state LaCugna's position in saying that it is precisely in becoming Trinitarian in history that God realizes God's being as a God-for-us. Thus God does have a history and this history is the history of God's becoming in our history Father, Son and Spirit.

^{xxv} See Norman Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 56.

^{xxvi} For Jesus' use of parables, see Norman Perrin, Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 32-56; 194-205; and John Dominic Crossan, In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

^{xxvii} See Jon Sobrino, "Christian Prayer and New Testament Theology: A Basis for Social Justice and Spirituality," pp. 80-81, 93-102, 110, and Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1988), 117-124. See also Segundo Galilea, The Way of Living Faith: A Spirituality of Liberation, trans. John W.

Diercksmeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989): pp. 23-25, and Edward Schillebeeckx, On Christian Faith: The Spiritual, Ethical, and Political Dimensions, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1987), pp. 54-56.

^{xxviii} See Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), s.v. "contemplation."

^{xxix} For the themes of prophetic denunciation and annunciation, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973), pp. 265-272; Segundo Galilea, Liberation as an Encounter with Politics and Contemplation," passim, and Rosemary Haughton, "Prophetic Spirituality," Spiritual Life 35 (1989): 3-12.. For the themes of grace and dis-grace, see Leonardo Boff, Liberating Grace, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), pp. 4, 60-63, 84-87.

^{xxx} Theology of Hope, p. 21.

^{xxxi} Friedrich Heiler, Prayer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 136. Concerning the essentially biblical nature of authentic Christian mysticism, see Richard Woods, Mysterion: An Approach to Mystical Spirituality (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1981), pp. 25-39.

^{xxxii} For the relationship between the prophetic and contemplative or mystical, see my "Liberation Theology: Praxis and Contemplation," pp. 50-58, as well as Schillebeeckx, On Christian Faith, pp. 65-75 and Richard Woods, Mysterion, chapter ten "Mysticism and Social Action," pp. 159-173.. For Rahner's resolution of the mystical-prophetic dialectic, see Karl Rahner, "The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World," Theological Investigations, III, trans. Karl -H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967): 277-293. For an excellent treatment of the "iconoclastic" role of the prophet, see Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), especially pp. 44-79.

^{xxxiii} Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Liberation, Theology and Proclamation," in Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, eds., The Mystical and Political Dimension of Christian Faith (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), p. 63. Latin American liberation theologians are more and more constructing a synthesis between spirituality and life, prayer and action, the contemplative and the prophetic. As recent examples of this synthesis, see besides the references already made to Gutiérrez and Galilea, Jon Sobrino, Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness, especially pp. 23-45, 80-86.

^{xxxiv} Karl Rahner, "Christian Living Formerly and Today," Theological Investigations VII, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 19.

^{xxxv} William Ernest Hocking, The Meaning of God in Human Experience New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 511.

^{xxxvi} See e.g. "The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World," "Christian living Formerly and Today," "Everyday Mysticism," in The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary

Spirituality (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 69-70, and in the same work, pp. 70-77 "The Theology of Mysticism." For a very lucid presentation of Rahner's everyday mysticism, see Harvey D. Egan. "The Mysticism of Everyday Life," Studies in Formative Spirituality 10 (1989): 7-26.

^{xxxvii} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983).

^{xxxviii} *Ibid.*, pp. xviii, 3-5, 26.

^{xxxix} *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 26.

^{xl} *Ibid.*, pp. xviii, 9, 30-40.

^{xli} *Ibid.*, p. 51.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

^{xliii} *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 137-138.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

^{xlv} "How to Read the Rule: An Interpretation," in Albert's Way, Michael Mulhall O. Carm., ed. (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1989), pp. 61-62.

^{xlvi} Eckhart himself proposes Gelassenheit as an alternative and response to what he calls "the merchant mentality," which has points of similarity to Kavanaugh's "the commodity form." See Matthew Fox, O.P. "Meister Eckhart and Karl Marx: The Mystic as Political Theologian," in Richard Woods, O.P., ed., Understanding Mysticism (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 544-550.

^{xlvii} See Reiner Schürmann, Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 16.

^{xlviii} One of my major difficulties with a God who is absolutely immutable, who does not change, who has no history, is that such a God too easily ends up re-enforcing the status-quo.

^{xlix} It is Johannes B. Metz who has given this term common currency, although he did not "coin" it. See his Theology of the World, trans. William Glen-Doepel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 114. Regarding the iconoclastic significance of the Carmelite tradition as witnessed by Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, see Segundo Galilea, The Future of Our Past: The Spanish Mystics Speak to Contemporary Spirituality (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press), especially pp. 25-43.

¹ Again it is Metz who has given common currency to this notion of "dangerous and subversive memory." See his Faith in History and Society, trans. David Smith (New York:

Seabury, 1980), pp. 184-99, 200-204.

ⁱⁱ See Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in The Portable Karl Marx, Eugene Kamenka, ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 158.