

HANDBOOK of  
SPIRITUALITY  
for  
MINISTERS

*perspectives  
for the  
21st century*

*volume 2*

edited by

Robert J. Wicks

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## Contents

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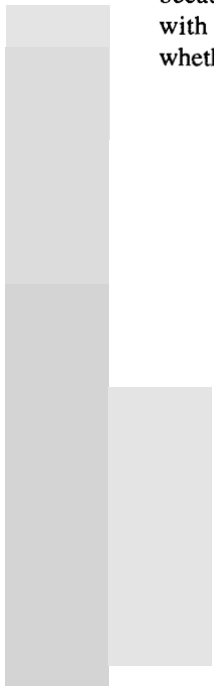
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**Dedication**

For my friends who remain faithful to a life of ministry and compassion, especially—

Chet Artysiewicz, John Ball, Jim Barker, Mel Blanchette, Dan Boyd, Helen Maureen Campbell, Muriel Curran, Jeffrey Dausen, Charlene Diorka, Fran Dorff, Mary Dunne, Susan Engel, Mary Filan, Constance FitzGerald, Sue France, Kevin Gillespie, Marie Gipprich, Loreto Hogge, Agnes Hughes, Jody Kearney, William Keeler, Timothy Kelly, Ed Killackey, Barbara Jean LaRochester, Joe Luca, Kevin Lynch, Cathy Maguire, Bob Morneau, Rita J. Murphy, Charlie Pereira, Maria Rieckelman, Joyce Rupp, John Joseph (Hilde) Schuyler, Bill Sneck, Loughlan Sofield, Mike Steele, Kevin Strong, Alice Talone, Julie Thompson, Ed Thomson, Virginia Unsworth, Ann Raymond Welte, and in memory of Ken Wicks.

For those who are not included, it is not for a lack of gratitude but rather because of an increasingly faulty memory. Now that I am past fifty, I lament with Mark Twain that when I was younger I could remember everything... whether it happened or not.



## 27. Socially Engaged Contemplation: Living Contemplatively in Chaotic Times

Currently, many people in American society seem to be longing for a slower pace of life, a less frenzied rhythm, a less compulsively busy daily round. Even more important, they want a daily round that fosters in them an openness to the deepest yearnings of their hearts, truly wanting to discover anew how to embrace a contemplative way of living. A recent issue of the *Ume Reader* used these telling phrases: “finding your natural rhythm in a speed-crazed world”; “A balanced life—intervals of creative frenzy giving way to relaxation—is what people crave;”<sup>32</sup> and even more intriguing, a series of descriptions by public personalities, from race car drivers to composers, on ways they “put on the brakes.”<sup>33</sup>

Juliet Schor, author of the 1992 best-seller, *The Overworked American*, identifies economics, not technology, as the major reason for the speeding up of American life. Jeremy Rifkin in *The Time Wars*, writes, “We have quickened the pace of life only to become less patient;...we have become more organized but less spontaneous, less joyful. We are better prepared to act on the future but less able to enjoy the present and reflect on the past.”<sup>34</sup>

Pastoral ministers are no strangers to this cultural phenomenon of the speeding up of American life. They, too, long to live more contemplatively and often wonder how they can feel so driven and deprived of a contemplative sense of God’s presence when their very call to ministry and its relentless demands seem to be their greatest obstacle to experiencing it. Some, of course, long for a relationship with God of real depth, but never really have the opportunity or the formative means to nurture this dimension of their lives. So-called “normal” ministry schedules rarely include quiet time for reflection, silent prayer, or retreats of significant length.

Others, nonetheless, have managed to commit themselves to the spiritual disciplines that fostered a contemplative dimension within lives of active ministry. These ministers are contemplatives in action and have learned to cultivate and maintain a contemplative attitude toward life in both prayer and action. Some among this latter group, in my experience, appear to be experiencing an eclipse of or loss of peaceful immersion in the divine presence and

wonder what may have gone wrong. This loss may be a result of “burnout” or overextension in ministry, family responsibility, and ever-lengthening community agendas. These ministers may simply have become unable to set appropriate limits to their caregiving activities and are no longer devoting enough energy or time to contemplative practices. For others, this loss may be the result of dramatic changes within their operative theologies, their painful confrontation with the suffering of people who are poor and marginalized, or their own personal experiences of loss in the midst of ever-increasing institutional and personal stress.

Others continue to pray, but may not entirely recognize the depth of this prayer because their prayer experience differs so markedly from their expectation and prior experience. Others may find times of retreat wonderfully fruitful and nourishing but find daily prayer, or a regular pattern of living in and from this level of depth, nearly impossible once they return to their daily round. They may be helpless to confront their own resistance to the transformation God is trying to work in them. Thus, they delay it by neglecting their contemplative lives outside of solitary time, either frequent focused prayer throughout the week, or periodic times of retreat.

In this essay, I explore this inherited dichotomy and reclaim the essential unity of action and contemplation as core elements of spirituality. In the process, I hope to shed some light on some of the objective difficulties pastoral ministers experience in wanting to be in God so desperately yet often finding themselves farther away than many would like to admit. Finally, I want to describe some characteristic features of contemplative experience that is socially engaged. By “socially engaged contemplation,” I mean both the social and cultural context in which contemplation occurs, deeply affecting one’s consciousness, and the way the “stuff of life” of pastoral ministers who accompany people who are poor or who struggle with other concrete forms of oppression emerge in their contemplative prayer.

### Descriptions of Contemplation and Contemplative Attitude

Just what are contemplation and a contemplative attitude toward life? Contemplation can be understood in three different yet related ways. First, it points “to a practice, something we do, something we set aside discrete periods of time to undertake.” To contemplate means “something like: to consider, to look upon, scrutinize, study, mediate on, turn our attention fully and clearly to something, to open our hearts to something we are beholding. It means especially, turning our attention to the actual.”<sup>35</sup>

This activity of contemplating is paradoxical. It is doing something but is closer to not doing anything at all. The monastic tradition had a word for it, *otium*—contemplative leisure—something akin to sabbath rest. Or an art the

Italians have mastered called the “sweet art of doing nothing.” Monastic life in its most authentic times carefully maintained a culture in which this contemplative leisure was valued and nurtured. This kind of leisure is not “time out” or “time off” but an interior and exterior quality of openness and attentiveness. In this state of mind, one is alert, awake, connected to the divine presence and one’s own heart. This contemplative quality of consciousness differs remarkably from the way many people “do nothing” in front of the TV, which may be “time off our feet” but which does not necessarily enliven our hearts and awaken our attentiveness. The passivity of watching TV is more often a distraction, a form of numbing, a constriction of consciousness and a deadening of feeling.

Second, contemplation points to an underlying dimension of human experience, a state of consciousness that is actualized through such practices. “It is characterized by intense attention, intuitive understanding, a depth and fullness of feeling, and experience of union with a larger reality.”<sup>6</sup> So it is not simply something we do but a way of experiencing that is awakened in us. Gerald May offers a number of rich descriptions of this kind of consciousness: “Contemplation is most frequently defined as an open, panoramic, and all-embracing *awareness*, brought into fullness of living action, an attitude of the heart and a quality of presence rather than just a state of consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> May elaborates further: “Contemplation happens to everyone. It happens in moments when we are open, undefended, and immediately present. People who are called contemplatives are simply those who seek the expansion of the moments, who desire to live in that quality of presence more fully and continually.”<sup>8</sup>

Third, contemplation also implies “the reality which is disclosed and made accessible in such an experience. This might be called: the sacred, the divine, the realm of grace, the mystery of God. Thus contemplation is not merely a practice, nor merely a state, but also an *encounter*, a meeting.”<sup>9</sup> This definition of contemplation emphasizes the experience of discovering oneself in contact with, in relationship to, in the presence of ultimate reality. It is this deepest level of encounter with the Holy Mystery in which we experience the essential unity of the love of neighbor and the love of God, the essential inter-relatedness of all that is. When we dare to relax our “driven egos,” we may be graced with unspeakable revelation and a love poured out by the Holy Spirit into our hearts with which we can dare to embrace reality itself. To encourage an increase in this experiential awareness, literally to live contemplatively, requires both resisting the outer voices from the local culture as well as resisting the internalized inner voices from this culture. It requires us to adopt particular practices: taking time for reflection, for prayer, for leisure. Above all, it requires our learning how to shift our consciousness so that we can open our hearts and vision to a fullness of reality precisely when do not have time for solitary contemplation.

### Practices Nourish a Contemplative Approach to Action

Here, I believe we can learn from other religious traditions with great fruitfulness. Many meditation traditions teach ways of working with breath: counting breath, breathing fully and consciously, synchronizing breathing and walking, connecting a mantra or prayer phrase with breath. Others—t’ai chi, shibashi, yoga—employ movement patterns, which through specific attentive movements gradually integrate mind, body, spirit so that our hearts open and our consciousness deepens without necessarily trying to “sit still” while our thoughts race on without us. These practices cultivate an open, spacious form of consciousness, which is not as easily captivated by our compulsive inner programs. When we practice becoming fully present in this way, we are more easily able to recognize the emergence of the divine presence in our experience and to enter into the great cycle of the mutuality of care and presence in our ministerial and personal relationships.

Of surprise to many is the fact that many ministers are often engaged in these contemplative practices without necessarily being aware of it. For instance, in spiritual direction, women say they are not praying or are not praying very well, and yet when pressed for what is happening, they describe themselves as almost always “praying” in this brief way—acknowledging that they are not alone, that God is weaving through their days, constantly emerging and disappearing from view as they move through their daily round. Often God is very present, but they are so busy that they do not enjoy the peacefulness, rest, refreshment of such moments because they do not stop to savor them. They are not quite able to assimilate the grace. These moments of presence do not exactly feel like Tabor, gazing on the face of Christ with such awe and joy that one doesn’t want to leave. This is a more situated form of contemplation.

### Misconceptions and Alternative Interpretations about Contemplation

Too often, the tradition teaches that contemplation is some highly desirable experience in which we recognize and understand almost nothing of what is happening. Or it occurs to the very special and very few—an erroneous position corrected by Vatican II, which taught that contemplative prayer is the normal unfolding of a regular life of prayer for all Christians who so persevere. Or the tradition suggests that if powerful images or experiences in the senses occur this must not be contemplation. Or one must be secluded in some beautiful place.

I claim almost all of these impressions as partly erroneous because I believe contemplation occurs in very many ways. It may emerge in deep imaginative prayer when we release control of the line of imaging and God reveals God’s self anew. Or it may be in the context of a simple breathing practice with

nothing other than mutual presence. Or it may occur in the practice of centering prayer, as one silently holds a sacred word expressing one's intention toward God. Or it may occur to someone walking down the street, gardening, in the shower, in the midst of a pastoral or personal conversation. What makes it contemplation is not the location but the experience. Any time we touch our truer, deeper selves and some intuitive sense emerges of God's presence to us, this situation is contemplation. It is as much a matter of intention as it is attention.

### Practices That Facilitate the Shift from Self-Preoccupation to Awareness

In addition to prayer and mindfulness practices, I read poetry, personal narratives, and mystical writings to foster this contemplative attitude. These uses of language help me feel and perceive beyond the clichéd and superficial conventions of culture. I am also turning to music, to nature, to fully embodied experiences that help me shift from my own anxious inner program of busyness or racing against the clock, to reconnect with more of life concretely in the present moment. Many different kinds of sensory experiences can help. For some, the domestic arts of cooking or sewing, when done with a focused attention rather than split attention, achieve the same end. Practicing an art form can facilitate this shift, as well as can receptive attention given to another's creation. This movement outward to beauty, to sound, to the senses often has a way of breaking through a habitual set of well-worn preoccupations that prevent present moment awareness.

### The World's Pain Discloses Itself in Contemplative Awareness

Contemplative consciousness is often characterized, as Walter Burghardt put it, as "taking a long loving look at the real."<sup>10</sup> It doesn't matter what the starting point is. All reality leads us more deeply into God, who sustains all of it, both the sublime and the beautiful, the loving and the gracious, the painful and the conflicted, evil and sinfulness, suffering and healing—all of it. Burghardt's phrase is quite telling because it so totally unites vision—really seeing, a seeing through to the heart of the matter, a seeing beyond the surface and the superficial. This is a loving openness to reality, the reality of the other, the reality of creation, the reality of God.

Barry and Connolly describe this ability to become absorbed in reality as an experience of transcendence and self-forgetfulness. "Thus, one effect of paying attention to something outside of ourselves is that it can make us forget ourselves and our surroundings. Contemplation leads to, or rather is an experience of transcendence—that is, of forgetfulness of self and of everyone and everything else except the contemplated object."<sup>11</sup> Such a contemplative

stance is particularly open to the very real forms of suffering in our world. Pastoral ministers as disciples who companion and console others in their suffering are called to contemplate Christ not only on Tabor but on the cross as God's love poured out upon the world. This contemplation of the crucified leads to faithful love—intercession, accompaniment, and service. Pastoral ministry invites contemplation of Jesus' suffering now in all who are disfigured, oppressed, struggling—every time hearts are moved to compassion. Pastoral ministers accompany the suffering, walk with them as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Compassionate hearts feel the world's pain. When such pain passes through our hearts, we are led to intercession and to action. Our action leads us back to prayer as we are both challenged by the poor and suffering and also gifted by their resilience and hope.

Frequently, some of our contemplative experiences as ministers are more embodied, more immersed in connection and in care than in solitude. A contemplative stance in the midst of action is so often a process similar to that reported in the resurrection narratives when the disciples' eyes suddenly open, like scales falling, while they ponder the mystery. At such times our hearts are so held in God we become unafraid to feel the world's pain as well as our own. We become absorbed in the deep mysteries of life and death, of love and grace, of freedom and joy. Like the women who go weeping to the tomb, our sorrow turns to joy as we find nothing is as it appears on the surface. There is more than death, more than sorrow, more than defeat, more than disappointment. There is a livingness and a lovingness that overwhelms and surprises us.

An example of such compassionate contemplation that issues in intercession, a partnering with God while feeling one's own pain and God's for the world, is this account from a spiritual direction intern:

I woke up with gratitude in my heart for all the blessings in my life. Today I celebrate the joy of the gift of priesthood. I took my bible and prayed over the whole of John:17. As I prayed, an overwhelming sense of sadness and grief permeated my whole being. There was a sense of loss and anger over the way things are going in the church. As I continued to pray, I was feeling the anguish and confusion of the many people who suffer and continue to suffer. Then I saw myself praying inside a cold, darkened church with all the other people who seemed to be in anguish like myself. Later I noticed someone approaching me and putting her hand on my shoulder saying, "I have told you this so that you will have peace by being united with all the rest. The world will make you suffer. But have courage! I have overcome the world!" It was then that I recognized those last words. They were the very words I used during my ordination as my theme, John 16:33. I ended my prayer

with a sense of assurance and determination to move on in spite of difficulties. I never thought that such a verse would continue to be my strength and reminder after fourteen years of ministry. Here, I realized that I may not be called to take suffering away in the church and in the world but here I am to be one with all who suffer to overcome everything, suffering included. To provide warmth and light to this cold and darkened church that needs to open up so that the light will penetrate the inside and that people may enter to warm each others hearts.<sup>12</sup>

Martin Buber says, “We listen to our inmost selves and do not know which sea we hear murmuring.” John Dunne, reflecting on this statement, asks, “Is it a sea of human longing? Is it a sea of divine love?”<sup>13</sup> When we allow ourselves to be affected by God’s longing and our own, we open ourselves to this blessed ambiguity when we encounter our own pain and the world’s pain. When our hearts are filled with compassion and sorrow over the suffering of ourselves and others and moved to respond, we may not know which sea we hear murmuring—our personal mystery or the mystery of the sea of God’s love, which remain inextricably related to one another.

Contemplation as a long, loving look at the real is open to whatever form the mystery chooses to reveal itself to us. It is not restricted to pain, but I think many ministers have more than our share just now. And that grieving or suffering can blind us to a deeper hope, a deeper joy, a deeper peace, and even prevent us from recognizing and responding to dazzling beauty.

### Definitions of Contemplation from the Mystical Tradition

Gerald May collected some moving and lovely definitions of such contemplation from the tradition. Which ones evoke something of your own hearts and desires? Gregory of Nyssa: “Divine wakefulness with pure and naked intuition”; Ignatius of Loyola: “Finding God in all things”; Brother Lawrence, “The Pure loving gaze that finds God everywhere”; Marie of the incarnation: “Seeing God in everything and everything in God with completely extraordinary clearness and delicacy”; Elizabeth of the Trinity: “A kind of continual communion through all things by quite simply doing everything in the presence of the Trinity”; or finally, Catherine of Genoa: “Hanging by God’s thread of pure love.”<sup>14</sup> Each of these descriptions suggests a kind of seeing, a blessed intuition or perception that sees beneath the surface reality to what really is, the world in God and God in the world. Each of them bespeaks an openness of heart, a willingness to be affected by reality at the heart of the world. And each of them suggests a quality of alertness, watchfulness, and a depth of response. If we are numbed to ourselves, to life, stressed out and

unconscious, we will not experience the world this way. We need to adopt whatever practices of attention, reflection, meditation, and intention that will help us keep our hearts and eyes open and responsive.

Thomas Merton recorded one such instance of contemplative oneness in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. It was, ironically, for this silent Cistercian, an urban experience.

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream.... Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.... I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. But this cannot be seen, only believed and “understood” by a peculiar gift.<sup>15</sup>

He develops his insight on this experience by describing the center of the self as the “virgin point of the soul”:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutality of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak [God’s] name written in us.... It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.... I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.<sup>16</sup>



### Impediments to Contemplative Presence

If Merton could experience this seeing on a street corner, what impedes us? Within many modern cultures, a first obstacle is the cultural addiction to “busyness”—our inability to resist a very time-bound sense of reality. We often feel busy and like it. We maintain a mental and emotional program that fills every available moment with activity or thoughts and feelings about the next dozen things on our “To Do” lists. This constant preoccupation with time and its use constricts our feeling states and diminishes our awareness of the depth dimension of reality. Since this state of mind and heart is highly valued in our society, we are continually reinforced in such efficiency by conversation, work rewards, and unreflective agreement to this pattern.<sup>17</sup> Second, I believe that our self-absorption gets in the way. This self-absorption is part of our busyness, but it is also more than that. Essentially, we can not recognize the “gate of heaven” unless we have the developed capacity for presence and for a capacity to become absorbed in the other. *Presence* means being at home in ourselves, fully there. If we are preoccupied with our worries, our griefs, our “To Do” lists, we are separated, cut off from the present moment and the deeper reality of God’s presence and of anyone or anything else. To be present means to be consciously experiencing, noticing, responding. It is an experience of mutuality in that we are open to another as well as ourselves, consciously available to being affected by the other. If you can remember a time when you were captivated by beauty, you’ll get close. Or if you recall a time in a relationship of such mutual attending, such as the way a nursing mother and child interact, totally absorbed in one another.

### Examples of Breakthrough

Let me give you an example. Some time ago, when I was in California for a congregational meeting, a good friend suggested an afternoon at the beach on the Sunday before we returned to our distant ministries. My agenda was doing my personal accounts for nine months! Of course, I wanted to do both. So I went, taking my paperwork with me. We sat on the beach talking, and she spotted something in the water. We attentively watched the horizon. Then we saw the graceful tail of one of three whales as it breached and dove into the water. Eventually, we saw one after another, three separate blow spouts spray into the air. We were, for those few moments, totally absorbed in the unexpected gift of this spectacular display of the whales. I had never seen them so close to the shore, just behind the breaker line, nor seen the wondrous tails fan above the water line. In that instance, I had found a way to honor my need for contemplative presence to the world, to open to the unexpected grace of time with a friend, and also to do a long overdue task. I really did not have

to choose between them when I allowed my consciousness to open rather than narrow. Some relaxation of a pattern of relating to time had to occur. I had to loosen up my demands on myself and was rewarded by the refreshment of the sun, water, friendship, whale sighting, and a sense that God was in all of this. So much of this living contemplatively has to do with the attitude and the state of consciousness we inhabit.

Preparing a workshop or a presentation, a common activity for pastoral ministers, also requires a certain disciplined use of time, but the thinking and writing yield a different kind of contemplation—an opportunity to think about a question and one’s own experience and that of others. In this process there is often a yielding to intuition, fresh discovery in the process of reflection. There is often for me the sheer joy of writing, once I get started and surprisingly discover what God might want to express through me for the sake of a particular audience. I am affected by the words I think and write. They often emerge in some unexpected way. I discover again that I know something from within my experience, informed by study, which is compelled to expression by the occasion.

I suspect this is a common experience. When we give ourselves wholly over to something without self-consciousness or performance anxiety, we find we know what to write, what to say to someone, how to be in some situation, or even quite concretely what to do. The moments of concentrated leisure—an open attentiveness clearly focused on something particular—opens to deeper levels of meaning and consciousness. From this place, whatever we say or do emerges from the depths. This is what I mean by living and ministering contemplatively. The Quakers call this following the “leading” of God, the opposite of “running ahead of grace.” It requires the habit of “continually renewed immediacy” taught by Thomas Kelly.

### Practices Support Contemplative Presence

We pray, meditate, center ourselves in solitary prayer so that we might ready ourselves for this ongoing experience. Meditation practices are just that—practices, ways of training attention, ways of quieting or focusing the mind, ways of fostering awareness and attentiveness, unceasingly intending the encounter with divine reality that is always present in the depths of our selves. Sometimes we get through only one or two layers of our conscious concerns. Sometimes we find ourselves deeply resting in the divine embrace. But this quality of awareness and presence is not restricted to solitary time. God is always in our midst and in our own depths; more often than not it is we who are not present. Many times, we simply cannot be—we are confronted with our own poverty, our own limitation, our own inability to take hold of ourselves and go deeper. This is why we belong to faith communities, which might offer us companions on the journey who would support us in our inability and weakness. So much of this is simply part of

the human condition. Were it not for my friend, I would have missed the whales! We need others to help us practice less frenetic, less violent, less fragmented, less compulsive ways of living. In this way we counterbalance the socially constructed cultural messages that encourage the opposite by participation in an alternative, intentional social group. To do so we need to make fresh choices to live in the depth dimension of ourselves, to create supportive communities, and to open up to God. To do so we need to cultivate new practices of intention and attention that fit the current shape of our lives right now. We need to learn and practice an almost poetic quality of attentiveness. The poet Mary Oliver claims, "To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work."<sup>18</sup>

This quality of attention enables us to take "a long loving look at the real." It is an acquired habit or practice, perhaps even a virtue. This contemplative attitude is rooted in the very depth of ourselves—the true self that Thomas Merton attempted to describe over and over again—that part of our selves which is always in communion with the divine reality. When we allow ourselves to experience that reality—our true selves already connected to God as the center of our being—initially moments of contemplation that serve to reinforce and help us gain experience of this way of being begin to occur. Contemplative awareness is essentially a way of being and not so much a matter of doing. To experience it requires us to shift away from ego consciousness, control, and willfulness, and move toward openness, vulnerability, and willingness. This spaciousness requires considerable self-discipline to place both our intention and attention in the deep center and to choose to return to it over and over again. Gradually this quality of mystical or contemplative consciousness begins to stabilize and last for longer and longer periods of time.

### Development of Contemplative Experience

Characteristically introverted persons usually first discover this sacred ground in solitary prayer, usually of a fairly long duration—thirty minutes or more at a time. Silent retreats of several days' duration help the person become accustomed to this territory; they tend to nourish deeply. When introverts move into action, they often feel somewhat deprived of their connection to this resting in God and the slower, less busy rhythm that directly supports these experiences. In the beginning stages of contemplative prayer, the slightest movement or any interruption from outside, such as a telephone ringing or a knock at the door, can disturb the subtle delicacy of contemplative prayer. As contemplation deepens, the absorption in God becomes so strong that it can be almost impossible to disrupt. From midlife on, introverts established in solitary contemplative prayer may find their most recognizable experiences of God occurring in the midst of activity. They may need more sensual stimulation or a different combination of

practices. Experiences of contemplative presence may become more extroverted than they ever imagined.

Characteristically extroverted persons may despair of ever experiencing such tranquil and simple prayer. Their spirits grow restless without some external stimulation. They get bored in the inactivity and find it hard to settle in their center unless supported by a group. Their encounter with the depth of reality may more readily occur in nature, where they can become easily absorbed in some aspect of surrounding beauty. Or they might find their hearts truly burning within while listening to a popular song that feels just like a love letter from God. This form of contemplative presence is rarely described in the classical works on prayer. But it occurs quite commonly. Many whose contemplative moments match these descriptions often find it fruitful to spend some solitary prayer time returning in memory to these moments, reflecting on them further, and re-experiencing them in order to deepen appropriation of this particular touch of God. As extroverts approach the second half of life, the more introverted experience of contemplation becomes available but usually requires shorter amounts of time than introverts need.

### Time Required for Contemplative Practice

Although experiences of contemplation have a timeless quality to them, one still must spend enough time in contemplative practice. Many teachers of meditation from different traditions consider twenty-five to thirty minutes of contemplative prayer, Zen sitting, insight meditation, or centering prayer twice per day the minimum to *maintain* the effects of practice that occur in the course of week-long retreats or intensives. Some of these traditions do month-long or three month-long retreats. Most sponsor a day of focused practice once a month. These longer periods of practice help stabilize consciousness in this attentive way of living and being. The removal of all the external events that so easily and exquisitely unsettle us enables the practitioner to recognize how much we ourselves are contributing to our distraction and inability to concentrate. Once we achieve some focus and concentration in the protective environment of the retreat, there is greater possibility that one will gradually integrate this way of being into daily life. Many of these contemporary adaptations of ancient contemplative practices recognize that the process is one of continually beginning over and over again.

While a certain amount of time is required, there are enormous individual differences. Some people do better with less daily time and longer, more intense periods on a day off or on a weekend. The amount of time needed varies with personality, stage of prayer development, and life circumstances. During times of transition or major change or challenge, more time is required.

### Contemplative Practices within Ministry

When active contemplatives resume their daily rounds, practice changes. It always does. I am not certain that pastoral ministers have consciously thought about and adopted practices that help maintain this contemplative attitude toward life, but I do suspect that many have made some discoveries. I'm not sure we've dared share them with others. There are countless odd moments during the day, especially when we are changing from one activity to another, that we can claim for a few deep breaths and a return to a more centered consciousness. In those minutes, we can halt the preoccupations and assumptions of our internal taskmaster. Many of us spend a great deal of time traveling, either driving or riding public transit. Such time is often one of those "spaces" we can fill with distraction, or we can reattune ourselves to God's music within or allow ourselves to move from self-absorption to an openness toward encounter and a reality that is always more than us. These internal choices remain ours to make; we often fail to notice we are making a choice at all.

### Experience of God in Ministry

The first two kinds of contemplative experiences I described are extremely common for anyone who perseveres in some form of regular practice of prayer. However, I find increasingly that many apostolically motivated men and women are experiencing similar kinds of contemplative awareness in the midst of ministry or in relationships characterized by caring. I also see emerging what I sometimes name "new experiences" of God related to the prophetic utterances or activities of those who promote justice from a religious perspective and a correlative experience in contemplative prayer when situations of injustice or victims of injustice seemingly invade one's prayer.

I suspect that the depth with which ministers have integrated the social justice agenda of the church into our commitments has dramatically increased our experience of pain, compassion, and conflict even within our prayer experience. The appearance of such unsettling forms of awareness may be very disorienting, because we had come to expect contemplative awareness and prayer to be comforting and peaceful, a time of refreshment,

### Contemplative Experience While Caregiving

This may be the most common experience of ministers. One under-reported aspect of the important Nygren and Ukeritis study on "The Future of Religious Life" was the "Caring People Study." This part of the research consisted of intensive interviews with religious who were identified by others as

being consistently and particularly noted for their ability to care for others. Those who identified them to the researchers experienced their caregiving as nonmanipulative and unselfish. Since the altruistic capacity to care for others is an essential competency for ministry, the findings about caregiving can fruitfully be extended to others. The investigators sought to learn from these outstanding caregivers, as distinguished from codependent, compulsive "do-gooders," how best to describe such altruistic love as an enduring characteristic of apostolic religious life. The researchers were surprised to discover that these extraordinary caregivers rarely suffered "burnout."

The...study found that, in contrast to typical religious, religious who are perceived as unusually helpful, understanding and caring feel closer to and more trusting of God, who is seen as the source of healing and care....Caring religious connect divine assistance, in contrast to individual effort, with healing experiences. They are less self-controlling and more spontaneously inclined to generosity.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, these caring religious also seek and value the experience of contemplation. They have not been seduced by the "my activity is my prayer" deception. They both treasure their experiences of contemplation in solitary prayer, and they "demonstrate a greater interpersonal involvement in caring experiences." They "describe these relationships as growing and mutual, and as containing a wider meaning or significance beyond the immediate relationship." Their experiences of giving and receiving in their ministry are deeply meaningful beyond each instance. "Finally, these religious experience more joy in caring and zest for living. This contrasts with typical religious, who describe their caring as a response to a need in themselves such as caring out of duty or repayment, or caring in response to special needs such as illness, rejection or trauma of others."

Even more telling, this study found, for these religious,

there is a third force in the relationship that might...be called...God. The caring religious stays in close touch with God and wants to share [God] with others. When encountering a person in need, the goal of the caring religious is not primarily to relieve his or her suffering, but to create a three-way relationship in which Jesus and the Gospels' values are deeply involved.

Helpers of this type do not see themselves as agents in the process; at most they are partners with...the real source of helping. They do not feel ultimately responsible. For this reason and also because the helping in itself is joyous, caring religious do not as readily "burn out."

This description also explains why caring religious who are so motivated are perceived to be helpful rather than manipulative. Because they so obviously believe they can do nothing of themselves and want to establish a mutually rewarding relationship, caring religious are not perceived as egotistically threatening the self-esteem, interpersonal power or independence of others.... Caring religious live an operative Christology which is simultaneously imminent and transcendent.... The immediacy of presence of the caring person to another is possible because of this effort to mediate God, whom they see as benevolent...and the source of their action.

...Those who learn to be authentically caring are inclined spontaneously to generosity, trusting and aware that God acts in and through them. This level of freedom requires viewing God as a benevolent authority in whose name one acts as mediator.

These characteristics, I believe, are richly suggestive of what a “contemplative attitude toward life” looks like to others and what it feels like to the minister within ordinary experiences of caring. It suggests both a program for ministerial formation and a program for renewal. Each of us might well ask, “Do I perceive my apostolic work as an arduous ‘To Do’ list through which I compulsively rush, or is my ministry so infused with God’s activity and presence that I am regularly nourished by God even while I pour out my love upon those who enter my circle of care?” These broad descriptions and observations apply to the entire network of sustaining relationships that enjoy a quality of mutuality: community, family, friendships, colleagues, and those for whom we care in our daily ministerial round.

### New Experiences of Socially Engaged Contemplation

There are, I believe, yet other “new” experiences that many pastoral ministers are having. I saw them mirrored in a very helpful way to me in a young peace activist who at the time was still within her original Quaker tradition. Subsequently, I find them frequently in pastoral people whose experience inserts them into situations of oppression or suffering.

Jennifer Haines found herself “led” repeatedly to intercessory prayer at Rocky Flats, a nuclear weapons plant near Denver, Colorado. Her persistence in prayer led to lengthy incarcerations for her nonviolent resistance to the pervasive violence in our culture, most dramatically symbolized by our enchantment with producing ever more deadly weapons of destruction. Haines’s autobiographical narrative, *Bread and Water: A Spiritual Journey*, poignantly and powerfully demonstrates some of the dynamics of contemplative consciousness when it is

“socially engaged.” In her spiritual journey, she carefully describes her constant attentiveness to the consequences of her choices, which she tries to embrace from a stance of peacemaking rather than of contributing to the escalating violence in society, including the prison situation. A common experience of many peace activists, who work carefully with the dynamics of responding nonviolently when themselves attacked for their prophetic speech or actions, is that reflection time is essential prior to and after acts of civil disobedience. The intensity of emotional reactions in oppressive and unjust situations is extremely challenging. It requires the achieved capacity to take hold of one’s “passionate thoughts” and impulses, as the desert elders taught, in order not to respond to violence, manipulation, or abusive power simply with anger and opposition. A passage of Jennifer’s prepublication version of the manuscript is an exquisite description of the kind of flooding with pain that may occur if we really allow ourselves to care about the poor and to walk in solidarity with them. This moment occurred while she was praying when she lived in an inner-city Denver neighborhood.

I loved the people a lot. My bed was under a third-floor window that overlooked the street. I would sit sometimes at the window praying. One never-to-be forgotten time, I opened myself to all the pain of everyone on our street—and throughout the neighborhood—and all over the city—and found myself imaging the city as one huge, open, festering wound, raw and bleeding. The pain was almost more than I could bear. I had to pour it out to God—in the most powerful, impassioned, yearning intercessory prayer that I had every experienced. I say then that the heart and well-spring of intercession is pain. To love is to make ourselves vulnerable to pain, and the pain sends us back to God in prayer. Carrying the pain of the world is the work of the intercessor. I felt it and understood it and embraced it.”<sup>20</sup>

This is a remarkable testimony. Her distinctive call is to the work of intercessory prayer. But this is no sheltered, socially disengaged contemplative. This is a woman who touches real pain in real people. By feeling it, opening her heart to it, she is able not only to be a compassionate presence in this very poor neighborhood, she herself becomes a spiritual transformer. She pours it back out to God in yearning. The pain enters her, but, and this is vital, moves through her back into God.

### Contemplative Intercession and Co-Redemption

I am increasingly convinced that ministers burn out and lose heart in our justice activities because too many begin by carrying so much pain, simply

absorbing it numbly without ever turning this pain and their hearts expectantly back to God. Jennifer's experience is not Tabor; it is clearly pure Calvary. Yet unless we really believe in the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection, we dumbly and numbly distance ourselves from God instead of leaning on the heart of Christ and plumbing more deeply the mystery of redemptive love.

Contemplative presence to suffering persons or to situations in the world is a grace. It is one way contemplatives share in the redemptive activity of Christ. Jennifer, at first, is nearly overwhelmed by the intensity of pain she senses just in her neighborhood and city. She instinctively realizes she cannot bear the pain alone. She "pours it out to God." This response requires a certain level of spiritual maturity—a surrender to God. Her glimpse of this socially generated pain and suffering evokes in her a form of intercessory prayer in which she helps transform that pain through her connection with those who suffer and her connection with God. She contributes to transformation on the spiritual level, and she herself is transformed toward compassionate loving if she maintains her connection to God's all-embracing love and compassion. She, of herself, cannot carry this kind of pain, nor does God expect that of us. Yet we are called to embrace those who suffer.

### The Shock of Contemplative Suffering

Such moments of insight and contemplative love often take a person by surprise. "Contemplation requires the willingness, honesty, and courageous desire to face into ourselves just as we are and our world just as it is—no distortions, no exclusions, no avoidances, no anesthesia. It means entering our own emptiness, our unrequited longing."<sup>21</sup> The effect of encountering seemingly unresolvable suffering is perilous. We discover our helplessness in the face of such suffering, our fear, our resistance to suffering at all. Some instinctively isolate ourselves even from God. Instead of instinctively giving this pain into the divine embrace, we experience it in a state of separation from God. Suffering that evokes such a strong, almost unconscious level of resistance is also capable of profoundly challenging our view of God and our ability to maintain hope in the face of the enormity of evil that God does not seem to mitigate.

When scenes of suffering and pain invade prayer, prayer itself may be the place of struggle against hopelessness, despair, and negative feelings about others. According to Gerald May, "Contemplation may lead to deep trust and faith, but not to uninterrupted peace of mind. It opens us in love to the suffering and brokenness of the world as much as to its joy and beauty."<sup>22</sup> It is easy to confuse this searing and transformative quality of contemplative experience with "vicarious traumatization," a clinical description emerging in psychotherapy, which notes the traumatizing effects on the therapist or others in a

helping relationship of witnessing the psychological and physical effects of trauma on those with whom they work.<sup>23</sup>

I have found it helpful to suggest to directees who discover the world's pain invading their contemplative experience to consciously place their pain and the world's pain in God's heart. In this way, the directees can join their love and active concern for actual people with whom they are connected to God's infinite, supportive love. They can let this kind of suffering pass through their hearts and awareness, giving it back over to God without absorbing it and becoming possessed by it. I learned this approach from Joanna Macy, who describes a process called "breathing through," from the socially engaged Buddhist tradition. She works with breath, imaging the transformation of suffering by breathing it into one's body, directing it to pass through the heart, and out of one's heart into the "world net."<sup>24</sup> It can easily be adapted to embrace healthy heart practices and a theology of co-redemption within Christian practice.

Such moments of exquisite pain, which are both personal and social or structural, are uncomfortable, complex, and confusing. There is clearly a spiritual form of interbeing or intercommunion as well as a physical form. If all life on this planet is a complex interaction among persons and all other forms of life, so too do persons affect one another spiritually in profound ways. If pastoral ministers are integrated into the larger community and engaged with ever-expanding communities, we can expect to be affected by, as well as contribute to, both social grace and social sin.

The shift in our worldview that is emerging from the new cosmology fosters a shift in contemplative experience from the personal and peaceful immersion in divine presence and love to experiencing mystically the interdependence of every aspect of the creation, including that of oppressor and oppressed, the mystery of evil that seeks to be transformed through the ongoing offer of redemptive grace.

### Case Study

An experience of a recent retreatant is useful for showing some of the dynamics and characteristics of contemplative experiences. There was in the course of this religious woman's retreat a series of profound mystical experiences related to the mystery of the cross as she was uniquely experiencing it.<sup>25</sup> It was the fourth retreat she had made with me, and she had sensed that, prior to the retreat itself, something very profound was already inviting her. The overall result of this retreat experience was a breakthrough into a sustained mystical union that had been impending for several years, but that was impeded or delayed by a pattern of excessive busyness and avoidance of contemplative prayer during her cycle of demanding apostolic ministry. On retreat, she gave herself over fully to contemplative prayer. Witnessing her

experience yielded for me both awe and a deeper understanding of some of the dynamics of these experiences that I had been exploring for some time.

The retreat began with attraction to a sculpture of Jesus in agony, which sister had discovered and photographed in the Garden of Gethsemane on a recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She brought it with her in addition to Bonaventure's Tree of Life. She felt drawn to begin her retreat in the mystery of life-giving suffering. This imaged scene of the suffering one in agony eventually became the place of unitive love for her. The cross, although a locus of suffering, was also experienced as life-giving. But the process of the retreat required that she allow the pain to open her to God's love in the world and for her. She began her retreat feeling the burden of empathy that opens her to so much pain in ministry. She actually prayed for this grace: "Give me the grace to desire to be with you (Jesus) in this scene (agony). Help me to surrender, to go with you where you lead. Help me to contemplate my sins and the sins of the world that contribute to this alienation and, then, to find you in the experience of powerlessness, anger, fear, anxiety, loss or whatever else surfaces."

Here was a pastoral counselor and campus minister in touch with the effects of walking with others in pain, aware of her own pain, and a willingness to seek God in and through it intentionally. Later the same day, her prayer began to be answered. The compline service was celebrated on the rooftop that night under the summer sky. A large fire was lit as the central symbol for the service, and poetic lines about God's creative fiery spirit were read from Hildegard of Bingen. This retreatant, however, recalled the television scenes of the embassy bombing in Nairobi, and was flooded with scenes of the surrounding area and the people she had served as a missionary there several years before.

Yet, she stayed with the experience of social sin and the world's pain in the company of Jesus. However, the suffering of the innocent children led her to compose and sing a rather cynical song of lament detailing the effects of terrorists and our indifference. The refrain was a Kyrie... a plea for mercy. As the experience deepened, she was tempted to engage in this presence to suffering *alone*. She was helped by the invitation to seek God in this prayer and take with her the company of any other helpers, saints, angels. And she was invited to be in this prayer in a positive intercessory mode.

Despite predictable resistance to the deepening mystical experience and its painful qualities, sister responded to gentle challenge around the resistance, and amazing transformations occurred. As her unitive prayer shifted to spontaneously imaged scenes with Jesus, even within the thematic archetype of suffering and redemption, many scenes depicted increasing mutuality with Jesus, and the song of lamentation transformed into a song of jubilation. The prior year she had scenes of the radiant, transfigured Christ; this retreat was the crucified one. In one of her meditations, the Christ commissioned her to participate

in redemption. These images led her not only to pray for the victims of injustice but to be aware of what she could do personally to alleviate the causes. Her prayer then deepened still further into being crucified with Christ. She was able to stay with this challenging experience, which became increasingly more mutual in the relationship with Christ and which then began to be filled with images of life...nurturance, flowing water, and others. This led to the transformation of the garden of union and to spiritual gifts that would help her not be overwhelmed by the negative suffering in the world. Gradually, the experience of God moved on through a complex set of images that integrated many polarities in her life and brought to completion an entire movement toward transformation, healing, and union.

### Features of Socially Engaged Contemplation

There is much we can learn from this sister's experience. Her prayer experience was consoling, but not in a stereotypical way. If she were unable or unwilling to stay with the unfolding depth of her mystical experience, she may not have been able to go through the pain of her images and the resolution of her negative emotions in response to them. Her contemplative experience grew out of her connection with the pain of her world. She experienced her world as Jesus did in and through her. The compassion of Jesus enabled her to contemplatively encounter the brokenness in her world, in her, in the people with whom and to whom she ministers. This type of image does not arise in a person who is not in touch with herself and the griefs, hopes, and joys of her world. This kind of imaged prayer expresses her intuitive connection with Jesus present in her world, in her, in her compassion, in her pain, in her ministerial activity and contemplative prayer. This is a unitive image of Christ the lover and crucified one, with whom she shared a mission of redemption or liberation. She could let the pain and suffering of the world affect her because of her contemplative union with Jesus, which God reveals to her in her prayer. Her abiding union with Jesus became conscious in her prayer because she was moving through her world and her ministry in an ongoing contemplative connection with God. This is truly a moment of transformation, a moment of revelation for her: she was not as alone as she felt, and yet she felt quite helpless. Somehow, the felt connection with Jesus enabled her not to be daunted by the seeming helplessness. Does anything in this experience ring true to your own experience of encountering the pain of the world? Do you not also experience both feelings of helplessness and simultaneously a mysterious empowerment?

Within the retreat experience, this sister was keenly aware of the support she was receiving from the process of the spiritual direction sessions, liturgy, and the natural environment. Although this graced experience was clearly God's action in her, she needed accompaniment, much of it silently empathic.

This was an important form of social support combined with her spiritual companions in the process, the founders of her religious tradition. In addition, some of the emotional intensity was focused and released through the use of expressive arts. She drew a series of pictures expressing key images she received in prayer, composed and sang her lamentation, and she used a variety of gestures and postures in her prayer. She also used movement meditation and other forms of physical activity to help her release the increasing energy of the experiences and to ground herself afterward.

Finally, it seems to me that her experience, as well as Jennifer Haines's, illuminates another key aspect of this contemplative experience of the world's pain. Each person seems to be affected by a local or particular form of social suffering. There is a specific and personal connection to a person or situation. For instance, Jennifer was aware of her neighborhood and city. The retreatant was connected to the city of Nairobi in her personal history. The connection is specific, not universal or global. It is as if the situation or situations to which one has personal connection is sufficient. One does not need to be flooded with everything in all parts of the world at once. Rather, when the heart opens compassionately to one event, person, or situation that enters contemplative awareness, everything else is also present but does not need to become explicitly visualized or worked with. The retreatant was focused quite clearly on particular instances, and that particularity of focus contributed to her personal transformation from helplessness and fear to active compassion, concern, and strength within the contemplative experience.

### Conclusion

Immersion in the world just as it is—both its dazzling beauty and its terrifying darkness—opens in us a distinctively different kind of contemplative experience, which is rooted in embracing all of it. It is a result of our relinquishing the protectiveness of ghetto Catholicism prior to Vatican II, which often separated us from the world's pain through the structures of ministry and church. Today we are more involved, more aware, and more vulnerable. We are more deeply affected by our complex social awareness unless we defend against it by assuaging the pain with consumerism or other forms of distraction instead of undergoing the transformation of that pain and of ourselves in a contemplative process. We can avoid both the pain and the transformative process through some other form of "numbing," of restricting our feeling and our care.

We are so bombarded by the enormity of suffering and injustice in our world that it is easy to become immobilized. Unless we learn to plumb this mystery, and not simply be overwhelmed by it, we can easily close off our openness to the very real concerns that urgently require some response from us. But to do so, to learn to be contemplative with our hands as well as our

hearts, requires us to allow the pain of the world or at least that of those individuals and situations to which we are called to respond to actually affect us, to touch us deeply, to somehow reveal to us our neediness and helplessness. It is a subtle combination of acting wherever and however we can, and at the same time recognizing, as the religious in the Caring People Study did, that we do all of this with God. It includes the realization that we can be present even when we can't stop the injustice or completely relieve the suffering. At the same time, such a union of contemplation and action requires us to actually live in God. As Jennifer Haines did, we need to learn how to let life's sorrows ripen in us, to let pain pass through our hearts. Too often we stop right with our own hearts and absorb the distress without letting these sorrows pass through us back into God's heart. And finally, it requires active strategies to remain in connection and relationship with others who support in us this contemplative path and active concern for the world.

As pastoral ministers we cannot exercise the prophetic dimensions of ministry unless we are sufficiently present to God to receive any clear word, leading, or invitation to action in response to concrete situations. I believe we can only truly become both contemplative and prophetic as a unity. Prophecy emerges from a deeply contemplative attitude toward life. It is just as concerned with energizing others with hope and promise and possibility as it is with grieving and denunciation. Only experiences of amazement or genuine wonderment empower an authentic word of hope. These experiences are part of the lifeline for socially engaged contemplatives. They are among the means of keeping hope alive. The role of prophets is to envision a future that is better than the present. *Better* in this context means truer, less deceptive, an overcoming of illusions that maintain radical states of bondage and injustice.

I mentioned previously that I find reading narratives and poetry, listening to music, and inviting my body to mediate grace helpful. One of the reasons I am currently attracted to these expressive forms is that they are concrete. I often find my own experience mirrored in the experiences of writers. Contemplative life is always particular. Stories and images of actual experience facilitate a contemplative life that is both real and possible. As pastoral ministers, we can only humbly strive to respond to the concrete invitations of grace that are ours. But I do believe there is persistent grace in our midst. I do believe that our personal and collective journeys are amazing. We can reorient ourselves over and over again to the deep and abiding Godward focus of our living. We can adopt or adapt whatever new disciplines or practices will assist us to do what we most want to do in this new context. When our contemplation is socially engaged, we can help one another discover light through the darkness, peace in our restlessness, concentration in our dispersion. We can dare to speak our hopes and dreams and desires for a spiritual quality of living and for

a more just world; we can help one another find our unique apostolic-contemplative rhythms in our speed-crazed world.

### Notes

1. Cover, *Utne Reader* (March–April 1997).
2. Jay Walljasper, “The Speed Trap,” *Utne Reader* (March–April 1997), 45.
3. “How Do You Put on the Brakes?” *Utne Reader* (March–April 1997), 47.
4. Cited by Walljasper, “Speed Trap,” 43.
5. Robert J. Egan, “Contemplation in the Context of Contemporary Culture: Reflections on Spiritual Direction in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism,” Unpublished Keynote for Spiritual Directors International Conference, February 1990, Burlingame, California, 4.
6. *Ibid.*, 4.
7. Gerald R. May, *The Awakened Heart: Living Beyond Addiction* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 192.
8. *Ibid.*, 193.
9. Egan, “Contemplation,” 4.
10. Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” *Church* (Winter 1989), 24–28.
11. William Barry and William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 49.
12. Prayer Journal, March 14, 1997, used with permission.
13. John S. Dunne, *Loves Mind* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 113.
14. Gerald May, “The Experience of Contemplation,” *Spiritual Book News* (May 1992).
15. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1966), 156–58.
16. *Ibid.*, 158.
17. I develop this theme in greater detail in “On Resisting the Demon of Busyness,” *Spiritual Life* (Summer 1995), 79–89.
18. Mary Oliver, “Yes! No!” *White Pine: Poems and Prose Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 8.
19. David Nygren and Miriam Ukiritis, “Executive Summary, Forus,” *Origins* 122 (September 1992): 269, for this and all subsequent citations from the study.
20. Jennifer Haines, *Bread and Water: A Spiritual Journey* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997).
21. May, *Awakened Heart*, 193.

22. *Ibid.*, 193.

23. See Laurie Pearlman and Karin Saakvitne, *Trauma and the Therapist* (New York: Norton, 1995), esp. ch. 13: “Vicarious Traumatization: How Trauma Therapy Affects the Therapist.” By definition: “Vicarious traumatization is a process through which the therapist’s inner experience is negatively transformed through empathic engagement with clients’ trauma material” (279). It “results in profound disruptions in the therapists’s frame of reference, that is, his basic sense of identity, world view, and spirituality. Multiple aspects of the therapist and his life are affected, including his affect tolerance, fundamental psychological needs, deeply held beliefs about self and others, interpersonal relationships, internal imagery, and experience of his body and physical presence in the world” (280). The same researchers found that the negative effects of vicarious traumatization “are modifiable when addressed actively” (281). Avoiding isolation in the process of dealing with others’ trauma are among the ways of actively addressing VT in the helper.

24. Joanna Macy, “Taking Heart: Spiritual Exercises for Social Activists,” *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1985).

25. Used with permission.