



A fable from the fourth century Egyptian Christian tradition reads as follows: «A father used to say, “Just as it is impossible for you to see your face reflected on troubled waters, in the very same way, your soul cannot pray to God in contemplation if it is not free from alien thoughts”»<sup>1</sup>.

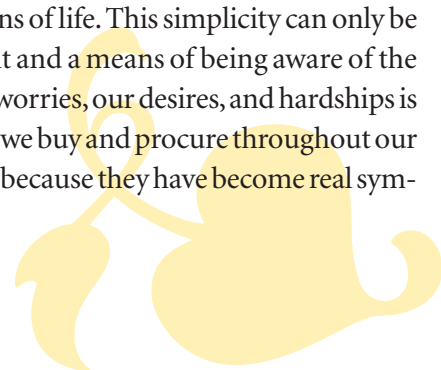
We are living on a long path that returns us to the center of ourselves. Increasingly, we attempt to recover from the feeling that we are traveling on a high-speed train in which our personal and social experiences flow at such a velocity that we are unable to understand them and make them our own. This results in feelings of disorientation and of being aliens in our own land, in our own history, and in the collective history that has shaped our being. We all feel the need to return to our own center and to come to terms with the fact that we live in this world, that we exist as human beings. We desire to cope sensibly with the realities of our lives and to assume and accept these realities in such a way that we can become more human and that we can be free. Achieving this way of living is indeed not the only task of religion. Beyond this, the primary goal of religion is to reunite a person with one's center, with other human beings, with history, with the world, and even more so, with the transcendent.

How can we turn our experience in the world in which we live into an inner and personalizing reality? How can we feel alive again and be the possessors of our personal and social history? How can we come to an understanding of the plot of our existence, while at the same time leaving space for the mystery of our lives? How can we free ourselves from our fatal fascination with violence, fear, barbarity, and all those elements that dehumanize us as beings, and regain our dignity and self-respect? Undoubtedly, there are no recipes or formulas for having access to that «philosopher's art». Faced with the complexity of life, there are some simple, though not easy, gestures, such as approaching others freely and kindly while expecting nothing in return, reading a good book that aids us in reflection, or devoting a few minutes daily to the praxis of meditation, that could assist us in returning to our own center and discovering ourselves in the face of others and the Other, so that we may feel alive once again. Through these significant yet *simple* gestures, we can open ourselves to a world of life that is full of meaning.

The complexity of life begins to slow its deafening rhythm when *simplicity* enables us to enter the realm of authentic *silence*. When silence invades the noise and superficial nature of our environment, we really begin to see the depth of our lives and of our world as well as the height of our possibilities as human beings who are capable of transcending. Silence is the absolute opposite of absence or nothingness. Indeed, it is *per se* a form of presence of the Mystery. Its apparent void is what enables us to discover our own ways of relating to others and of assuming from our *human nature* the reality in which we live, rather than merely being guests of such a reality.

The simplicity that emerges from silence is not the bland simpleness or simplification of life; instead it is a simplicity that enables us to remain centered, even amid all the conflicts and contradictions of life. This simplicity can only be attained when one begins with the clear intention of making it a lifelong habit and a means of being aware of the routine of everyday life. It is clear to us that the only fruit of all our rushing, our worries, our desires, and hardships is the sensation of feeling tired and worn out. Likewise, in the case of all the things we buy and procure throughout our lives, there are very few, if any, that stay with us until the very end, and then only because they have become real symbols or living memorials in our life history.

<sup>1</sup> Translator's Note: Free translation of the text





RETURNING TO ONE'S OWN CENTER. THE NOVELTY OF SILENCE

The ideas about progress and development that have shaped our modern mind-set seem to distract us constantly from our real origin. They have led us to succumb to the vague temptation of trying to overcome all of life's challenges by resorting to the magical illusion of oblivion or by desiring to leave everything behind and starting from scratch. This notion of self-improvement which is instilled in the modern psyche, is based on the increasingly pervasive attitude of overcoming and leaving behind everything that has been previously experienced and lived. This way of thinking has clearly forgotten our personal histories and has only led us to live with the magical illusion of wishing to replace one thing or one person with another one. Very rarely do we realize that what progress entails is precisely returning to our origin and addressing our present in order to grow into the future in the depth of what we are as human beings, with true inherent dignity. Only in this way, will we be actively involved in the present, building our personal and social history without straying from our origin.

Every fear is dispelled in love and in trust. Fears disappear when we return to ourselves, as we open up to others and to the historical reality that is far wider than each one of us. Only in this way can we understand that even the worst of fears can turn into a fabulous and creative challenge rather than into a setback that frustrates and paralyzes us. Only when we are capable of trusting and loving, will we understand that we are not alone, that we have not been abandoned. In this magical and yet real situation, waters settle, and when they become calm, our true face emerges, along with the face of God. They appear and they are transparent in the reflection of our lives. It is precisely then that the depth and measure of our own human nature is revealed. This is the gift of our life that is revealed to us when we discover that silence unveils our presence, poise, and excellence as human beings.

In closing this brief reflection we can recall the splendid words of John Main, «Meditation is the path that leads to silence because it is the path of silence... Remaining silent when we are with another person is a true and profound expression of trust and feeling secure. It is only when we do not feel safe and confident that we feel compelled to talk. Remaining silent when we are with another person is really being with that other person. Nothing is as powerful for building mutual trust among people than a comfortable and creative silence. Nothing more drastically reveals the lack of authenticity than a silence that is not creative, but rather, fearful» (Cf. John Main, *The Path of Meditation*, Convivium Press, Miami 2009, 112).

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