

**Fr. Pawel Tarasiewicz**

Adler–Aquinas Institute  
Manitou Springs, CO, USA

## **CONTEMPLATION: IF IT MAKES FOR PEACE, WHY NOT FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS TOO?**

Were a modern man to read this paper, he might already be confused by its title. His confusion could probably be expressed by the question: “What has contemplation to do with peace?” And it would be perfectly understandable. All the more so that contemplation seems to be utterly alien to the mainstream of modern culture in the West and to our contemporaries “dedicated to action, production, results, measurable achievements,”<sup>1</sup> rather than to contemplation.

What is the relationship between contemplation and peace? To explain it, let us invoke Josef Pieper who—in his book *Happiness and Contemplation*—wrote as follows:

In the commentary . . . on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* . . . Thomas is speaking of politics, which is the summation of all man’s active cares about securing his existence. The sentence sounds almost utopian. But it is based upon a wholly illusion-free estimate of what is commonly called “political Me;” it contains the insight that politics must inevitably become empty agitation if it does not aim at something which is not political. “The whole

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Austenfeld, “Josef Pieper’s Contemplative Assent to the World,” *Modern Age* 42: 4 (Fall 2000): 374.

of political Me seems to be ordered with a view to attaining the happiness of contemplation. For peace, which is established and preserved by virtue of political activity, places man in a position to devote himself to contemplation of the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, peace, which is one of the proper ends of political activity, serves at the same time as a means to practice contemplation which is, to use Pieper’s own words, “the goal of man’s whole Me.”<sup>3</sup>

Is contemplation totally unknown to the Westerners? Though it is possible that most people in the West today would not be able to answer the question about Pieper’s approach to contemplation, but—fortunately—it is not that contemplation is entirely forgotten in Western societies.

In the U.S., for example, there are some individuals and groups particularly interested in recovering contemplation for the good of the whole nation. What do they mean by contemplation?

There are some for whom contemplation is a synonym for deep analytical thought. For instance, Jessie L. Mannisto, in her article “Restoring Contemplation: How Disconnecting Bolsters the Knowledge Economy,” quotes Thomas J. Watson, former CEO of IBM Corporation, who already as early as in 1911 aptly noted: “The trouble with every one of us is that we don’t think enough. Thought has been the father of every advance since time began. ‘I didn’t think’ has cost the world millions of dollars.”<sup>4</sup> And Mannisto believes that, since “the United States of America has a knowledge-based economy,” American “citizens with the capacity to think deeply” should be regarded as “one of its most precious natural resources.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1998), 94.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Jessie L. Mannisto, “Restoring Contemplation: How Disconnecting Bolsters the Knowledge Economy,” *OITP Perspectives* 2 (March 2012): 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

One can also come across The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, the center having its station in Northampton, Massachusetts. Their objective is to promote contemplative practices. What do they mean by ‘contemplative practices’? As they explain, they

use the phrase “contemplative practice” to refer to any activity undertaken regularly with the intention of quieting the mind and cultivating deep concentration, calm, and awareness of the present moment . . . Contemplative practices can include many forms of single-minded concentration, such as meditation; journal writing; mindful movement such as yoga, t’ai chi, and dance; prayer; mindful reading; experiences in nature; artistic practices such as poetry, music, and spoken word; and forms of social activism in a context of mindfulness.<sup>6</sup>

What may surprise in this presentation is a variety of forms contemplation can take on to live in the West today.

Taking advantage of this already-existing interest in contemplation, I would like to introduce a new function for it to serve. Its newness consists in using contemplation in its philosophical and non-religious sense in order to strengthen Christians who, by bearing witness to their faith, are engaged in dialogue with the modern world.

Christianity is a special religion. It belongs to the elitist group of the three universal religions—beside Buddhism and Islam—which address their message to all the inhabitants of the Earth and seek to encourage them to become their followers. Once one becomes a Christian,

---

<sup>6</sup> *The Activist’s Ally. Contemplative Tools for Social Change* (Northampton, MA: The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2011). And also, *ibid.*, 1: “These practices may be done in silence and solitude, but they may also take a communal form. We consider various kinds of rituals and ceremonies, such as those designed to create sacred space, mark rites of passage, and celebrate cyclical nature of time, to be forms of contemplative practice. These include the practice of Shabbat, seasonal celebrations, fasting, and vision quests. We also view engaged interpersonal communication as a form of contemplative practice, including the Native American council circle process, storytelling, dialog, and deep listening.”

they confirm their identity by bearing witness to the authenticity of their Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

Christian witness can be defined by two parallel factors, including confirmation and attraction. First, as a confirmation of faith, witness plays a significant role in our religious experience. It is so because faith in Jesus Christ—not only as a belief, but also as an inner force confirmed by deeds—is the first principle of the Gospel and as such is necessary for our salvation. Witness, therefore, becomes a major source of motivation in our life, and has a significant impact on our conduct.<sup>8</sup>

Second, the purpose of Christian witness is to attract people to believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Forty-some years ago, Blessed Pope Paul VI put a special emphasis on bearing witness by Christians, saying that:

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses . . . It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus—the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Christian identity is determined by two essential factors, namely religious (vertical) and civilizational (horizontal) factors. The first of these, covering authentic faith in Jesus Christ, is a necessary factor but not sufficient in itself, as religious faith identifies man in full only when it is professed, that is, confirmed by testimony. A necessary complement to the religious element of Christian identity is thus the civilization factor which sets out the principles of professing one's faith and simultaneously defines the essence of Christian witness.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Struk, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony: Ricoeur and an LDS Perspective," *Aporia* 19: 1 (2009): 45.

<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, *Evangeliū nuntiandi* (Rome, Dec 8, 1975), 41. Cf. Mieczysław Majewski, *Katecheza permanentna [The Permanent Catechesis]* (Kraków 1989), 108: "Religious testimony cannot be limited to catechesis, even to that given in the most proper way and based on the Bible. It should also not be identified with the faithful transmission of the teachings of the Church. It would also be unfair to place testimony on a par with piety. Finally, testimony should also not be reduced to apostleship. In sum, testimony is not any indoctrination, or being a Christian by trade or an evangelizer who enslaves, but an

As we know from our experience, the authentic witness of faith always intrigues and stimulates reflection. Thus our witness is not only needed for other believers to support their steps on the path of Christian faith, but also is often the only chance for non-believers to encounter the Gospel, especially for those people who are biased against or neutral to religion, who are captivated by consumerism or permeated by relativism.<sup>10</sup>

Modern society, however, is rather unfavorable to living the Christian faith and giving witness to it regardless of circumstances. Living in modern societies is often associated with tension between legal requirements and religious obligations.<sup>11</sup> The pragmatism of life seems to suggest pretending to be a witness, rather than being an authentic witness. Sometimes it even looks as if the modern world accepts the argument of the eulogists of injustice, cited by an interlocutor of Socrates in Plato's *Republic*, the argument which is to show that to be just is not profitable:

They will tell you that the just man who is thought unjust will be scourged, racked, bound—will have his eyes burnt out; and, at last, after suffering every kind of evil, he will be impaled. Then he will understand that he ought to seem only, and not to be, just . . . For the unjust is pursuing a reality; he does not live with a view to appearances—he wants to be really unjust and not to seem only . . .<sup>12</sup>

---

ordinary manifestation of one's existence organically united with Jesus Christ; it requires, and is an effective tool and vehicle of, a religious reality. On the one hand, the voice of testimony is the voice of God revealing Himself, and on the other hand, it is the voice of one's religious experiences."

<sup>10</sup> Tomasz Głuszak, "Rola i zadania chrześcijan w procesie budowania etosu Europy [The Role and Tasks of Christians in the Process of Building the Ethos of Europe]," *Spoleczeństwo* 14: 3 (2004): 532.

<sup>11</sup> See Paweł Tarasiewicz, "State vs. God: On an Atheistic Implication of European Statism," *Studia Gilsoniana* 4: 3 (2015): 333–342.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, II 362A, trans. Benjamin Jowett.

In the light of these words, to be an authentic witness does not pay off, since being a genuine witness inevitably entails the lack of success in this worldly life. And indeed, on account of unfavorable cultural environment, many Christians may feel compelled to turn away from giving true witness, and to choose bearing false witness.

What is false testimony? It is what results from being a dishonest witness. False testimony is defined as a deliberate lie told by a person called to witness, and as an assault on justice which is the foundation of human relationships.<sup>13</sup>

Giving false testimony often results from conformist attitudes which seem to weave elements of theatrical acting into the reality of social life. That is why, already in the ancient times, there was an objection against the practice of theatrical acting as such. What the ancients objected to was the power possessed by actors who, when performing, were able, consciously or unconsciously, to awaken the dormant passions of the audience and thus contribute in lowering the standards of social morality.<sup>14</sup>

Czeslaw Milosz, however, in his book "The Captive Mind," while describing the way people lived under communism, clearly indicates the difference between acting in the theater and acting on the stage of life, and the devastating consequences of the latter. In life, everyone can act in front of all the others and knows that all the others can act in front of him too. Conscious acting in everyday life, when practiced long enough, can lead to such a strong identification with the role that the acting person can no longer distinguish between his real self and the character he plays. The identification can reach the point at

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. E. J. Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self," *Political Theory* 20: 1 (1992): 95. *Nota bene*, if the Church is to function in a constructive way in reference to public morals, then She must possess internal discipline consistent with Her external testimony; see F. Ernest Johnson, "Do Churches Exert Significant Influence on Public Morality?," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 280 (1952): 131.

which the behavior associated with the role appears in man automatically and pretends to be his authentic way of living.<sup>15</sup>

Is acting on the stage of life the peak of false testimony? No, it is not. The pinnacle of false witness is an attitude called ‘Ketman’—the name derived from Persian, meaning: *to hide, to camouflage*. In the Islamic tradition, Ketman means an exception in the observance of religious laws, brought about by being coerced or threatened, which allows one even to publicly renounce the faith.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, in his book *Religions and Philosophies in Central Asia* (1865), while describing the phenomenon of Ketman, distinguishes two of its phases. First, caused by dealing with cruel persecutors of the faith, Ketman takes on a form of silence and requires concealing one’s identity and avoiding to be a witness for the sake of prudence. According to Gobineau, the people of the Muslim East believe that he “who is in possession of truth must not expose his person, his relatives or his reputation to the blindness, the folly, the perversity of those whom it has pleased God to place and maintain in error. One must, therefore, keep silent about one’s true convictions if possible.”<sup>17</sup>

The second phase of Ketman, as Gobineau writes, occurs when avoiding testimony is not enough,

when silence no longer suffices, when it may pass as an avowal. Then one must not hesitate. Not only must one deny one’s true opinion, but one is commanded to resort to all ruses in order to deceive one’s adversary. One makes all the protestations of faith that can please him, one performs all the rites one recognizes to be the most vain, one falsifies one’s own books, one exhausts all possible means of deceit.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 52.

<sup>16</sup> Piotr Jaroszyński, “Ketman,” *Punkt.ca* 7–8 (2007): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, 54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Doing so, one gains great satisfaction and merit for getting himself protected, for preserving his precious faith from a horrible contact with the infidels, and, finally, for bringing shame and spiritual poverty on the infidels who fully deserve to be treated in this way.<sup>19</sup>

Both phases of Ketman are based on the conviction that applying this attitude is rewarded with satisfaction. Ketman, as Gobineau concludes,

fills the man who practices it with pride. Thanks to it, a believer raises himself to a permanent state of superiority over the man he deceives, be he a minister of state or a powerful king; to him who uses Ketman, the other is a miserable blind man whom one shuts off from the true path whose existence he does not suspect; while you, tattered and dying of hunger, trembling externally at the feet of duped force, your eyes are filled with light, you walk in brightness before your enemies. It is an unintelligent being that you make sport of; it is a dangerous beast that you disarm. What a wealth of pleasures!<sup>20</sup>

Living in a society wherein the tension between politics and religion makes false witness possible is a sufficient reason to start looking for a way of supporting those who try to bear authentic witness to their Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

Certainly, bearing witness to Christian faith can be reinforced in a supernatural way. God can enable man to bear authentic witness by granting him a special grace. This grace can take on different forms among which mystical visions occupy a special place. Mystical experience provides man with certain information about God's essence, but—what is also important—it deprives him of any doubts concerning God's existence. Men who become mystics need no proof that God

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> On the tension between politics and religion, see Pawel Tarasiewicz, "Between Politics And Religion—In Search of the *Golden Mean*," trans. Jan R. Kobylecki, *Studia Gilsoniana* 1 (2012): 117–131.

exists, since God's existence is exactly what they experience during their mystical visions.

One of the philosophers who made their assertions on mysticism was Henri Bergson.

The testimony of the mystics . . . was in the eyes of . . . Bergson the strongest confirmation of the arguments for the existence of God. When . . . [the mystics] testify in unison of their knowledge of the existence of God as a lived experience, the only adequate explanation is, in the words of Bergson, "the real existence of the Being with whom they believed themselves in communication."<sup>22</sup>

Bertrand Russel, in turn, highlighted the connection of mysticism with certainty. According to him, the mystic insight "begins with the sense of a mystery unveiled, of a hidden wisdom now suddenly become certain beyond the possibility of a doubt."<sup>23</sup>

Is it that we can get rid of doubts concerning Christian faith only by means of mysticism? Is it that nobody but mystics can bear authentic witness? No, it is not. Beside mysticism, there is a complementary, philosophical and non-religious way to enhance the certitude of Christian faith, and thereby strengthen testimony given by Christians—a way whose name is 'contemplation'.

Let us use the words of Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange to explain what kind of contemplation we need to support our faith. He writes:

Contemplation in general, such as may exist in a non-Christian philosopher, for example, in Plato or Aristotle, is a simple, intellectual view of the truth, superior to reasoning and accompanied by admiration, *simplex intuitus veritatis*, as St. Thomas says

---

<sup>22</sup> Daniel J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Philosophy: Perennial Principles of the Classical Realist Tradition* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1992), Chapter 28: "Uncreated Being." Available at: <https://books.google.pl/>.

<sup>23</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1917), 9.

(Summa II-II, q. 180, a. 1, 6). An example of this contemplation is the admiring knowledge of that supreme truth of philosophy, namely, that at the summit of all composite and changeable beings there exists absolutely simple and immutable being itself, the principle and end of all things. It has not received existence; it is of itself existence, truth, wisdom, goodness, love, just as, in the physical order, light of itself is light and has no need to be illumined; just as heat of itself is heat. Reason by its own strength, with the natural help of God, may rise to this contemplation.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, contemplation refers “to a total devotion to revealing, clarifying, and making manifest the nature of reality,” its “focus is the pursuit of truth, and nothing less.” As Josef Pieper clearly discerns, “the first element of the concept of contemplation is the silent perception of reality. This, he claims, is a form of knowing arrived at not by thinking but by seeing,” by intuition which “is without doubt the perfect form of knowing. For intuition is knowledge of what is actually present; the parallel to seeing with the senses is exact.”<sup>25</sup>

To conclude, I would like to formulate a hypothesis that it is exactly the contemplation of the nature of reality which can effectively help us overcome the weakness of Christian testimony. For contemplation can give our faith a certitude similar to that given by mystical visions. And even though St. Thomas Aquinas would say that “the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors,”<sup>26</sup> it does not mean that knowing God by contemplating His works is not possible. This possibility—although requiring a lot of work and

---

<sup>24</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, trans. Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. (St. Louis, MO., & London, W.C.: B. Herder Book CO., 1937), 221–222.

<sup>25</sup> B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1947), <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum003.htm>.

commitment—seems to be an open doorway for doing philosophy that we Christians need most.

---

**CONTEMPLATION: IF IT MAKES FOR PEACE,  
WHY NOT FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS TOO?**

SUMMARY

The author attempts to answer the following question: Why does Christian witness need contemplation? He claims that Christian witness needs contemplation, because contemplation reveals the truth about the nature of reality; it is this truth which is one of the factors that constitute the foundation of Christian faith. In a sense, contemplation is analogical to mysticism: as mystical visions make Christian belief grounded on the immediate experience of (meeting with) the Truth, so the contemplation of the creatures makes Christian belief based on the indirect experience of the Truth (i.e., the meeting with the traces left by the Creator in the world).

KEYWORDS

contemplation, Christianity, witness, testimony, Ketman, mysticism, philosophy

REFERENCES

- Austenfeld, Thomas. "Josef Pieper's Contemplative Assent to the World." *Modern Age* 42:4 (Fall 2000): 372–382.
- Garrigou-Lagrange, Reginald, O.P. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*. Trans. Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P. St. Louis, MO., & London, W.C.: B. Herder Book CO., 1937.
- Głuszak, Tomasz. "Rola i zadania chrześcijan w procesie budowania etosu Europy [The Role and Tasks of Christians in the Process of Building the Ethos of Europe]." *Spoleczeństwo* 14:3 (2004): 527–537.
- Hundert, E. J. "Augustine and the Sources of the Divided Self." *Political Theory* 20: 1 (1992): 86–104.
- Jaroszyński, Piotr. "Ketman." *Punkt.ca* 7–8 (2007): 1.
- Johnson, F. Ernest. "Do Churches Exert Significant Influence on Public Morality?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 280 (1952): 125–132.
- Majewski, Mieczysław. *Katecheza permanentna [The Permanent Catechesis]*. Kraków 1989.
- Mannisto, Jessie L. "Restoring Contemplation: How Disconnecting Bolsters the Knowledge Economy." *OITP Perspectives* 2 (March 2012): 1–12.
- Miłosz, Czesław. *The Captive Mind*. Trans. Jane Zielonko. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.
- Paul VI. *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Rome, Dec 8, 1975.

- Pieper, Josef. *Happiness and Contemplation*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1998.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1917.
- Struk, Alexander. "The Hermeneutics of Testimony: Ricoeur and an LDS Perspective." *Aporia* 19: 1 (2009): 45–57.
- Tarasiewicz, Pawel. "Between Politics And Religion—In Search of the *Golden Mean*." Trans. Jan R. Kobylecki. *Studia Gilsoniana* 1 (2012): 117–131.
- Tarasiewicz, Pawel. "State vs. God: On an Atheistic Implication of European Statism." *Studia Gilsoniana* 4: 3 (2015): 333–342.
- The Activist's Ally. Contemplative Tools for Social Change*. Northampton, MA: The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, 2011.
- Wallace, B. Alan. *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

#### The Internet Sources

- Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Available at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/>
- St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/sum003.htm>.
- Sullivan, Daniel J. *An Introduction to Philosophy: Perennial Principles of the Classical Realist Tradition*. Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 1992. Available at: <https://books.google.pl/>.