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Contemplation of the Body¹

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Abstract

Contemplation of the Body

In the tradition of Christian contemplation, we find much encouragement to both contemplate nature and how we can discover God the Creator through it and how His love is imprinted on it. St Ignatius, however, in his Contemplation for the Achievement of Love, invites the praying person to contemplate not only creation, but also himself and his body. Since there is little research or literature on contemplation of the body, the author pays special attention to it in this article. He argues that the Triune God wants to reveal Himself to every man, not only through the book of nature and the Bible, but also through his body, and that contemplation of his body can be of great help to him in this. In the first chapter he briefly defines the meaning of contemplation and then turns to an understanding of the human body in the light of Scripture and spiritual theology. In the last part, he gives various examples of how we can contemplate the body and its various parts to allow the active presence and love of the Triune God to be revealed to us.

Keywords: contemplation, body, Triune God, Christian spirituality

Abstrakt

Kontemplacja ciała

W tradycji kontemplacji chrześcijańskiej znajdujemy wiele zachęt do kontemplowania przyrody i tego, jak dzięki niej możemy odkryć Boga Stwórcę i Jego miłość, która jest na niej wyciśnięta. Natomiast św. Ignacy w Kontemplacji dla osiągnięcia miłości zachęca modlącego się do kontemplowania nie tylko stworzenia, ale także siebie samego i swojego ciała. Ponieważ nie ma zbyt wielu badań ani literatury na temat kontemplacji ciała, autor poświęca jej szczególną uwagę w tym artykule. Przekonuje, że Trójjedyny Bóg pragnie objawić się każdemu człowiekowi nie tylko poprzez księgę przyrody i Biblię, ale także poprzez jego ciało, a kontemplacja ciała może mu w tym bardzo pomóc. W pierwszym rozdziale krótko definiuje znaczenie kontemplacji, a następnie przechodzi do zrozumienia ciała ludzkiego w świetle Pisma Świętego i teologii duchowości. W ostatnim rozdziale podaje różne przykłady, w jaki sposób możemy kontemplować ciało lub jego poszczególne części i pozwolić, aby objawiła się nam czynna obecność i miłość Trójjedynego Boga.

Słowa kluczowe: kontemplacja, ciało, Trójjedyny Bóg, duchowość chrześcijańska

Most people find refreshment and peace in the beauty of nature. Many in listening to the voice of nature today are looking for a way to hear their true inner voice and thus to the discovery of authentic existence². Many also find God through it and glorify Him most easily in and through it. We can find examples of this in many psalms (e.g. Ps. 23; 120; 139, etc.). The Apostle Paul asserts that no human being is justified in not believing in God³, “for since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Rom. 1:20). In the tradition of Christian contemplation, we can find encouragements to contemplate nature and thus discover God the Creator and his love through it. Pope Francis, faithful to this tradition, encourages us in his encyclical *Laudato sí* to enter into a contemplative wonder of things, as found in St Francis of Assisi⁴. For him, nature, according to the teaching of the Bible (e.g. Wis. 13:5), was a beautiful book through which God speaks to us in love and “communicates something of his beauty and goodness through it”⁵.

Ignatius’ contemplation for the attainment of love⁶ is also intended to help everyone who enters it to be able to grasp and respond to God’s love as deeply and fully as possible. The Contemplative is first invited to recall the goodness of creation, salvation and special gifts received. Then, in the spirit, he “observes” how God dwells in things and in him with His goodness, how He gives him to be, to live, to feel and to know,

2 Cf. B. Žalec, *Religija in narava v luči Rosove teorije resonance*, “Poligrafi” 26 (2021) no. 103/104, p. 15.

3 Paul’s emphasis that both Jews and Christian believers share a common faith that justification is solely God’s work. Cf. M. Matjaž, *Občestvo kljub različnosti. Pavlovo razumevanje koinonije v Pismu Galačanom (Gal 2,9)*, “Edinost in dialog” 74 (2019) no. 1, p. 177, <https://doi.org/10.34291/Edinost/74/Matjaz>.

4 Cf. Francis, *Laudato sí*, Vatican 2015, 125, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (11.01.2022).

5 Cf. Francis, *Laudato sí*, 12. Maria Carmela Palmisano, on the basis of the sources she has studied (in particular the Book of Proverbs, the Book of Sirach and the Book of Wisdom), observes that, through the development of wisdom literature, personified wisdom, in addition to justice, acquires new dimensions, and the focus of its presentation shifts somewhat from the semantic field of justice to the semantic field of love (Cf. M. C. Palmisano, *Dimensioni di giustizia in alcuni testi sapienziali biblici*, “Edinost in dialog” 75 (2020), p. 42–48).

6 Cf. Ignatius of Loyola, *The spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius*, Chicago 2021, no. 230–237.

how He makes him His sanctuary. Then he is invited to contemplate and reflect on how God strives and labors for him in everything created on earth. Finally, he is invited to “look” at how all the goods and gifts come from God. As he sees and tastes all this, he can gradually grasp more and more how he is indeed immeasurably loved and freely gifted. All that he is and all that he has is a gift. When he allows all of this to speak to him inwardly, to move him and to take him over completely, he cannot remain cold without desiring to become like God, the Giver, and to be a gift to others together with Him. That is why he freely puts himself at His disposal and wishes to cooperate with Him in his daily life.

Saint Ignatius invites the prayerful person not only to contemplate creation, but also to contemplate himself, his own body. This is what we want to give special attention to in this article, because there is little research and little scientific and spiritual literature on this subject. We hold that the Triune God wants to reveal Himself to every man, not only through the book of nature and the Bible, but also through his body, and that contemplation of the body can be of great help to him in this. In the first section we will briefly define the meaning of contemplation. We will then turn to an understanding of the human body in the light of Scripture and spiritual theology. In the last section we will show various examples of how we can contemplate the body or its various parts and allow the active presence and love of the Triune God to be revealed to us.

1. Contemplation

The word contemplation means: to look for a long time with admiration and wonder. It is made up of two Latin words: *cum* and *templum*. *Cum* is translated as with and means simultaneity and concurrency, connectedness and unity. *Templum* is a celestial space, the space of the sky that is captured by the gaze, or a temple dedicated to a deity. Together the words mean dwelling in the heavenly space or temple of God⁷.

Most authors agree that contemplation is particularly distinctive among the various forms of prayer. It is primarily about a personal re-

⁷ Cf. M. Herraiz, *Contemplazione*, in: *Dizionario di Mistica*, eds. L. Borriello, E. Caruana, M. R. del Genio, N. Suffi, Città del Vaticano 1998, p. 338–339.

lationship or experience through intimate union with God. It is a direct awareness of God, not as He is in Himself, but as He is present through His gifts of grace, through His being in man and through the infused virtues (faith, hope and love). It operates on the principle of faith, although it is also a loving contemplation, which also involves the will and charity. It is certainly primarily a passive prayer, and therefore the gifts and the infused virtues do not play a primary role in it⁸.

For Aumann, contemplation is an unconditional and totally gratuitous (unmerited) gift of grace, so it is not essential for salvation, nor can it be the result of one's own will and power. In his thorough comparative study on the understanding of contemplation, Joseph de Guibert makes a very clear distinction between "infused" contemplation, which he also calls "mystical prayer", which is a pure gift of God, and "achieved" contemplation, which is the fruit of God's grace and man's cooperation; in the latter, man can also take the initiative⁹. This division is not new. It dates back to the 17th century and was shaped by the influence of the Carmelite school of contemplation. As such, it is an intermediate state between asceticism and mysticism, or it is the apex of asceticism. One prepares for it by faith, love (charity) and purification¹⁰.

Until the 12th century, contemplation was usually associated with *lectio divina* as its last stage: reading (*lectio*), meditation (*meditatio*), prayer (*oratio*), contemplation (*contemplatio*). It is a certain elevation of the mind above the self, a resting in God, a savouring of the joy of eternal sweetness, and a direct ecstatic (rapturous) encounter with the divine¹¹. The author describes his experience of the loving presence of God as sweetness (*dulcedo*), which is a very common term for such states in medieval monastic literature that refers to Ps. 33:9. The step from meditation to contemplation is made by the one who begins to practice prayer in wordless silence, filled with God's love, with undivided attention to the

8 Cf. J. Aumann, *Contemplation*, in: *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 42, Washington 2003, p. 203, <https://cvdvn.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/new-catholic-encyclopedia-vol-4.pdf>.

9 Cf. J. de Guibert, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice: A Historical Study*, Chicago 1964, p. 606.

10 Cf. J. Aumann, *Contemplation*, p. 207.

11 Cf. Guigo II, *Scala claustralium - Epistola de vita contemplativa*, www.santuariodellavittoria.it/File_PDF/Lettera_sulla_VITA_contemplativa.pdf (07.01.2022).

meaning of individual words or things, and without any discursive mental activity (mental acts). The author of the book *The Cloud of Unknowing* assures us that contemplation is a simple and quick way to God, with the assumption that God's grace ignites the flame of love in the prayers of the one who prays¹².

From a psychological point of view, contemplation is a special psychological state characterised by mindfulness and openness to awareness. For Gerald G. May, an expert in the field of behavioural psychology, it is "a direct, immediate, open-eyed encounter with life as-it-is"¹³. When this encounter with reality is directed towards a relationship with God, this psychic state of contemplation becomes the spiritual event of contemplative prayer. It is important to be aware of this difference.

In this study we will understand it in the sense given by St. Ignatius of Loyola. His way of contemplation, which we also call Ignatian, spread among Christians through his Spiritual Exercises, which were approved by the Pope in 1541.

For Ignatius, contemplation means an imaginative presence in the Gospel mystery or the biblical story that articulates the action of God in human history¹⁴. In this form of prayer, the praying person enters into the event of the Gospel mystery through imagination (imagining and living it) so that he or she becomes a part of the action. For Christ is risen, and all the mysteries of His life are present in His eternal now, and become realistically present for the praying person. In the same way as in the liturgical celebration of the mystery of salvation, all the contemplated biblical mysteries are present in prayer and can be tasted, felt and experienced by the praying person as if they were actually happening to him. God reveals Himself to the praying person through imagination as he enters into an ever more personal dialogue with Him, responding to all that is given to him in contemplation. In Ignatian prayer, then, we can see two fundamental movements: (a) the praying person enters

¹² Cf. K. Baier, *Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe*, <https://homepage.univie.ac.at/karl.baier/texte/pdf/Meditation-Contemplation.pdf> (05.01.2022).

¹³ G. May, *To Bear the Beams of Love: Contemplation and Personal Growth*, "The Way Supplement" 59 (1987), p. 28.

¹⁴ Cf. J. F. Wickham, *Ignatian Contemplation Today*, "The Way. Supplement" 34 (1978), p. 35-44.

into the mysteries by means of imagination and becomes open to what is happening; (b) God, who is present in the mysteries, actively enters into the depths of the praying person by communicating His life to him¹⁵.

Ignatian contemplation also allows for a deeper seeing, tasting and perceiving of things from the past and in the present, an inward tasting of the active presence of the triune God and of the goodness with which He pervades them. Such contemplation enables man to find the Triune God in all things and to become His interlocutor and co-worker¹⁶. Of course, he cannot find Him directly in all things, but he is able to contemplate the goodness of all that has been created and, in the light of faith, to see the presence of the triune God who creates and continually gifts it all¹⁷.

As with all prayer, contemplation requires that the praying person surrender to it, or surrender himself to a relationship with the Triune God, whom he is always seeking, visiting, and in whom he is already actually living (cf. Acts 17:28). Indeed, man is often prone to want to keep even the imagination under control in order to arrive at the desired result¹⁸. But it is only when he lets it happen and it is given to him within contemplation that it can truly operate in all its creative power¹⁹. Then the Holy Spirit can also use it and through it bring to life in the praying person the redemptive and salvific mission of Jesus Christ, making him God's interlocutor and co-worker.

2. The Human Body

The Old Testament account of human creation makes it abundantly clear that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and that both male and female are fully in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26–27) and are not prevented from doing so by their biological and physical limitations. For the apostle Paul, the body (soma) is man himself.

¹⁵ Cf. J. F. Wickham, *Ignatian Contemplation Today*, p. 34–44.

¹⁶ Cf. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, no. 230–237.

¹⁷ Cf. I. Tomlinson, *The Contemplation to Attain Love*, "The Way" 50 (2011) no. 4, p. 74.

¹⁸ Cf. D. Kraner, *Vpliv socialnih reprezentacij o katoliški Cerkvi v Sloveniji na družbene napetosti*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 78 (2018) no. 2, p. 613.

¹⁹ Cf. J. Vodičar, *Živa metafora kot možna pot do transcendence*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 77 (2017) no. 3–4, p. 574.

It is not only the form of man, not only some part of man, but the whole man, and at the same time something that stands opposite to man (cf. Rom. 12:4; 1 Cor. 12:14–26). Man is a body insofar as he can become the object of his own action or the subject of some action²⁰.

The body is therefore not something external, an appendage to man, but “man is man insofar as he realizes, expresses, acts in his corporeality; or even more radically: if we look at man in his existential depths, the body is man’s being insofar as it is concretized in corporeality”²¹.

Man perceives his corporeality as a constant and inner constructive factor of his spiritual person. Man’s spirit is necessarily bound to the body, and thus also to time and space²².

In Christianity, the highest valuation of the body is seen in the conviction that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). According to Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ is the Creator of the body and its Redeemer, and therefore it rightly belongs to Him (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13). It is the body that makes it possible to belong fully to Christ (cf. Phil. 3:21; Gal. 2:19–20).

For Paul, then, it is essential that his faith be completed in the fullness of the embodied life, to which also belong the thoughts and feelings. To give oneself in the body is the most perfect possibility of service. This gives it a real and special Eucharistic dimension, which is at the same time a further and definitive proof that the body is not merely a visible or external aspect of human life, but the whole of man²³.

At creation, man, together with all creation, is proclaimed to be very good (cf. Gen. 1:31). This goodness of everything, including man in his bodily limitations, is finally confirmed in all its fullness in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the second person of God, the Son of God (cf. Jn. 1:1–17). Because of the incarnation, the Word of God is expressed and re-

20 M. Matjaž, Klic v novo življenje: Prevod in komentar Pavlovega Prvega pisma Korinčanom, Ljubljana 2015, p. 191.

21 V. Truhlar, Leksikon duhovnosti, Celje 1974, p. 625.

22 Cf. Đ. Pardon, Zemlja: dar, kušnja i zadaća. Biblijska teologija zemlje u Knjizi Postanka 1–11, Zagreb 2014, p. 380.

23 M. Matjaž, Klic v novo življenje, p. 192.

vealed not only through man's intellect and spirit, but also through his body (bones, blood, muscles, hair, etc.)²⁴.

The Incarnation is an expression of God's immeasurable love and mercy for man, His creature. He does not only want to be close to him in that he is His image, His child, but also wants to share with him His way of life, with all its limitations and vulnerabilities. Man does not therefore need to reject his physical limitations or to overcome them in any way, but only to accept them in freedom and to live them in the way of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit given to him through the Father²⁵. Moreover, the Triune God wants to express Himself in and through the human body by permeating it with His rhythm, peace, harmony, openness, relaxation and transparency. The more one allows oneself to be guided by the sense of the absolute and tries to remove the obstacles that oppose this devotion, "the more this corporeality becomes the 'material' in which the personal centre expresses itself with its absolute"²⁶, which is the Triune God. The human body is therefore called to harmonize with Him, becoming ever more supplicatory for His living presence and activity in it²⁷.

Man feels his body as something that is imbued with the experience of the triune God²⁸. In fact, he longs for that which he already possesses in some way in his centre, in his greatest depth. This longing for the infinite is evidenced by his sharing in "the infinite in the depth of being"²⁹, since he is the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

The senses are also a great help in entering into a personal relationship or dialogue³⁰ with God. They open him up to the environment around

²⁴ Cf. M. A. McIntosh, *Trinitarian Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, in: *The Blackwell companion to Christian spirituality*, ed. A. Holder, Oxford 2005, p. 183–185.

²⁵ Cf. T. Stegu, *Transhumanizem in krščanska antropologija*, "Bogoslovni vestnik" 79 (2019) no. 3, p. 689–691, <https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2019/03/Stegu>.

²⁶ V. Truhlar, *Temeljni elementi duhovne teologije*, Celje 2004, p. 59.

²⁷ Cf. Đ. Pardon, 2020. *Čovjek i stvoreni svijet (Post 1–2)*. *Biblijsko-teološki izazovi suvremenoj kršćanskoj antropologiji i ekologiji*, "Bogoslovska smotra" 90 (2020) no. 2, p. 434.

²⁸ V. Truhlar, *Leksikon duhovnosti*, p. 224.

²⁹ V. Truhlar, *Temeljni elementi duhovne teologije*, p. 72.

³⁰ The biblical author, in the account of creation (Gen. 1:1–2:2), emphasizes that God created man "in his own image" (Gen. 1:26). He emphasizes this thought four times, which means that he finds it very important. This idea is expressed with a special phrase, con-

him and also to himself, which he experiences in his own body. They enable him to respond to the most basic needs of life, so that he can live and sustain his life at all. He who does not feel is, so to speak, dead. Likewise, the senses are the basis of man's symbolic activity and with them he can also respond to his spiritual needs³¹.

Truhlar encourages a more integrated view of man, for only in this light do the senses acquire their true value. All choices that are freely and integrally made necessarily involve the sensuous level. If it is not involved, the inner balance, the harmony, is lost; disunity and tension arise within³². And this inner harmony is especially presupposed and needed by every healthy spiritual maturation. In the same way, in man's experiential life everything is spiritually "felt"³³.

True and transforming prayer is holistic, integral³⁴. It takes place through the outer senses, the bodily postures, and the awareness of sensations and breathing. It then engages the psychic layer: memory, intellect and will. After that, it penetrates into man's deepest spiritual world, where the heart feels, tastes, sees and hears, and touches the spiritual, divine reality, where the spirit is enlivened by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, where "water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). Such meditative-contemplative prayer begins to transform the person within, so that outwardly from its depths it radiates joy, it radiates peace, and it spreads around it the pleasant fragrance of God³⁵.

sisting of two words: *selem*, image, and *demut*, similarity. What do these terms mean in the Bible? With the first expression the author wanted to emphasize that man is indeed like God, man is *theomorphic*. According to some interpreters, the second term, *demut*, was added to weaken the first expression's material meaning or material similarity: man is the image of God, but not material, but "the image of similarity". This similarity is man's capacity for dialogue, i.e. man's capacity for personal relationship with his Creator. Cf. S. Skralovnik, Jakob Aleksič: Poklicanost človeka k dialogu, "Edinost in dialog" 76 (2021), p. 124–125, <https://doi.org/10.34291/Edinost/76/Skralovnik>.

31 Cf. V. Truhlar, *Leksikon duhovnosti*, p. 101–102.

32 Cf. *Ibid*; Đ. Pardon, *Zemlja: dar, kušnja i zadaća*, p. 390.

33 Cf. A. Weber, *Biopoetics: Towards an existential ecology*, Dordrecht 2016, p. 27.

34 Cf. W. Zyzak, *Zdrowie człowieka w kontekście chrześcijańskiej duchowości holistycznej*, "Psychoonkologia" 22 (2018) no. 1, p. 38.

35 Cf. V. Truhlar, *Leksikon duhovnosti*, p. 313–315.

In reflecting on the importance of contemplation of the body, it is also necessary to take into account John Paul II's theology of the body, which he often stresses:

The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible the reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it³⁶.

Man cannot grasp the great mystery of his body by reason alone. He can only know its workings and benefit greatly from them. But the body is not only biological, but also theological. Only if we can hear, see and grasp what it "says" to us theologically too, can we truly understand ourselves and know how the triune God is livingly and actively present in us, know the language of "gift" and "self-gift"³⁷ which He inscribed in us and is still inscribing in us. The body bears witness to creation as a fundamental gift and consequently bears witness to its desire to love as the Love from which it proceeds³⁸.

Our body is therefore, according to Pope John Paul II, a *topos*, a place of encounter between the Triune God and us in a very concrete way³⁹. It "remembers" its Creator, the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit⁴⁰, and calls each one of us to become aware of Him and to live into the Triune Love that is imprinted in it and in all its functions. Contemplation of the body is one way that can enable us to fulfil this.

3. Contemplation of Different Parts of the Body and its Functions

Just as Jesus encourages us to learn from the lilies of the field and birds of the sky how the Father cares for us, so we can say that He also encour-

³⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, no. 19, Boston 2006, p. 203.

³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, no. 4, 111, p. 576–578.

³⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, no. 111, p. 574–581.

³⁹ Cf. Ch. West, *Teologija telesa za začetnike*, Ljubljana 2014, p. 3–8.

⁴⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, no. 11, p. 169–172.

ages us to learn from our body and its functions how the Father cares for us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. We will look at what contemplation of certain parts of the body and its functions can lead us to. For any contemplation, it is important to first choose what we are going to contemplate and prepare ourselves for it.

First, we find a place where we can be in silence and stillness for at least twenty minutes. Then we choose the posture (e.g. sitting, standing, kneeling, walking, lying down, etc.) that will be most helpful for us to be able to concentrate and surrender to the action of the Triune God in this contemplation.

If we choose the sitting posture, we sit. We find a position that is comfortable for our body. We surrender to the sounds of the environment and the sensations in our body. We sit relaxed and upright. Hands on the knees. Close our eyes. Breathe. Focus on the sensations in the body, from the top of the head down to the soles of the feet. It is important to notice the sensations in each part of the body for a few moments, to stop at them, accept them and allow them to be with us. In this way, we are always more and more within who we are.

When we are at peace with our whole being, we awaken in ourselves the desire to enter also into the awareness of the presence of the Triune God. We can do this by making the sign of the cross. Slowly raise the right hand to the forehead, saying "in the name of the Father". We remain in this posture for a few moments to perceive the eternal and loving kiss of the Father. Then we move our right hand towards the center of the body, calmly pronouncing "and of the Son" and stopping at our center. Let us surrender to the presence of Jesus Christ in our spiritual center. Then slowly raise our right hand towards the left shoulder and touch it. Calmly pronouncing "and the Holy Spirit", move our right hand towards the right shoulder, where we pause for a few moments in the touch⁴¹. We surrender to the presence of the Holy Spirit, who unites and opens us, and ask Him to guide our contemplation, to remind us and to teach us. Let us also ask Him for what we want to be given to us through it. Then we enter into contemplation of what we have chosen at the beginning.

⁴¹ Cf. I. Platonvjak, J. Roblek, *Moliti s telesom, dušo in duhom: Molitveni priročnik*, Ljubljana 2005, p. 56–57.

If we are distracted, we refocus on the object of our contemplation and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us, teach us and remind us of what the Father wants to say to us through Jesus Christ.

A few minutes before the end of the contemplation, let us reflect on what has happened during the contemplation. In our own words, we share with Jesus Christ and, through him, with the Father what has happened and what we feel especially now within ourselves, as with our most intimate friend.

In conclusion, we say the Our Father or simply Glory to the Father and slowly, gratefully, we make the sign of the cross. We move our head, our shoulders and our whole body and become aware of the space we are in. Slowly we open our eyes and allow what has happened to resonate within us.

After each contemplation, it is necessary to take time for reflection. We try to see and articulate what has happened within us. In this way we learn to perceive the thoughts and feelings within us and to discern the presence, action, teaching, and guidance of the Triune God in our lives. At the end, we also write down briefly in a spiritual journal what has happened.

3.1. Contemplation of Breathing

If we choose the contemplation of breathing, we ask the Holy Spirit, after the initially entering into it, for the gift of being moved by the gift of breathing and by the presence of the self-giving love of the Triune God in and through it. Then we focus on the breath. Let us open ourselves to it. Let us surrender to it. Let us immerse ourselves in it. Let us unite ourselves to it. We try to perceive it as fully as possible, to feel it. Gradually, the realisation can happen within us: the breath comes by itself, it does not depend on us. Someone is breathing in us⁴².

We can also focus on the lungs and what is happening in them. As we observe their functioning as we breathe, we see and know the foundations of our relationship to God. The lungs know to breathe and obey the laws of breathing. They are obedient to what they were created for

⁴² Cf. M. Laird, *V tiho deželu: vodnik h krščanski kontemplativni praksi*, Ljubljana 2016, p. 45–53.

and given to man to do. When they are deprived of air, of oxygen, they breathe. Because they love purity, oxygen, they breathe out everything dirty, carbon dioxide. So we can see in the dynamics of breathing how important it is to be obedient, poor and pure. The Gospel's sacred virtues are, as it were, imprinted in their very action: obedience, poverty, and purity. As long as we observe the whole process of breathing, we can live. So as long as we live, we can also pray, praise and worship the Triune God by the very act of breathing, as the last line of Psalm 150 proclaims: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord". Thus, breathing is the most intimate and precious dialogue between man and the Triune God!

Since God gives us every breath, He also deserves our every breath, which becomes a thanksgiving to Him, that is, the breath of surrendering our life to Him through His breath of the Spirit. The more we are aware of this, the more we become people of prayer and of giving our lives to others.

When the Apostle Paul speaks of Christian identity, he says: "Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit [the breath] of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal. 4:6) At the core of our breathing, we can see this very crying out to the Father, which is as essential and continuous as our breathing. We can also enter consciously into this prayer of invocation, saying in the rhythm of our breathing in the spirit: Fa (inhale) – ther (exhale).

To breathe is to live. This is the gift that the Triune God has been giving us from minute to minute since the first moment He created us. This is also our fundamental prayer. We pray when we are breathing.

3.2. Contemplation of the Being of the Heart

If we choose contemplation of the being of the heart, after entering into it, we ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of being moved and of perceiving God's immeasurable gift of love, which is bestowed on us in every heartbeat, so that we may love the Triune God even more and live His love.

(If we do not feel the pulse, we "look for it" in the wrist or the jugular vein. This way we can be in touch with the pulse until the end of the prayer. If we no longer feel it during the contemplation itself, we do not get confused. We calmly find it again and continue contemplating.)

All attention should be on the heartbeat. Let us surrender to it. Let us be aware of it. The heart beats within us without our willing it. It is a constant and sure happening to which we contribute nothing. And yet our life and action depends on it. Let us repeat within ourselves, “Every – beat – is – Your – gift”.

Words express what is actually happening. The Father’s gift flows through our heart into our whole being, which lives every moment from this beat. We experience how we are constantly being created and given to ourselves. It is in this that we can come to know the love of the Father which gives the heart to beat for us. In a spirit of wonder, we see how the Trinitarian self-giving love is “imprinted” on the heart. As we listen to the beating of the heart, we listen to the “beat” of God’s love, the beating of God’s heart for us and for the whole world⁴³.

In the beating of the heart I can also hear the knocking of Jesus Christ who says: “I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20). He is knocking and will keep on knocking until we open to Him.

3.3. Contemplation of the Heart, Blood and Lungs

If we choose the contemplation of the action of the heart, blood and lungs we ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of being moved and of perceiving the ongoing birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in us and for us.

First, let us surrender ourselves to the awareness of the workings of the heart, which is our most precious inner organ. It beats constantly for us. It beats some 86,400 times in a day. It beats without ceasing. Without rest. Almost every second, it propels the blood, which spills over the whole organism to invigorate it, to enrich it with oxygen and all the substances necessary for life.

The heart is the image of the Father⁴⁴. He is in us, though we are often not aware of it, just as the heart is not. Invisible, discreet, modest. The Father “gives us an impulse”. At every moment He pours out of Himself the blood, “His Son”. Again and again, eternally, He gives birth to Him, He gives Him away. In this way, He gives of Himself completely. He keeps nothing for Himself, but gives everything to the Son, His whole

⁴³ Cf. I. Platovnjak, J. Roblek, *Moliti s telesom, dušo in duhom*, p. 39–41.

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Muszala, *Silent prayer*, London 2016, p. 12–13.

nature, divinity – everything. “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine” (Jn. 17:10).

The blood goes out again and again to every part of the body. It does not leave any cell, but penetrates them to die there. This means that it gives everything it has: oxygen, life-giving substances, mineral salts. It gives without keeping anything for itself, because it knows that this is what it is doing. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn. 10:10).

The blood is the image of the Son. He comes from the bosom of the Father to go to every man and to repeat in him what once happened on Good Friday: to give Himself without all things and to die in him in order to have life. The Son as the dying man says: “This is my blood, which is shed for you...” (cf. Mt. 26, 28).

Just as the depleted, dead, deoxygenated blood returns again to the heart – to the place from whence it came, so too the dead Son returns to the bosom of the Father. He hands Him over to the Holy Spirit to breathe life into Him again. Similarly, the heart pushes the “dead” blood into the lungs to be “revived” again, to be refilled with life-giving oxygen.

The lungs are an image of the pneuma – the Spirit who is above the waters. The Creator breathed it into man at creation, Jesus breathed it out on the cross and breathed it as the resurrected into His disciples. Just as the risen Christ returns to the Father, who sends him again to bring us life in its fullness, so the quickened blood returns to the heart, which sends it again to the cells to animate them and give them all that it has received. All of this happens without pause throughout life⁴⁵.

As we contemplate this constant action within us, we perceive more and more how Jesus Christ lives, dies and rises again in us without a break: when we sleep, when we work, when we rest, when we pray, whether we know it or not, whether we are aware of it or not. In the same way, the Father gives his sun to rise again and again over every man (cf. Mt. 5:45).

Let us allow this image of the spiritual reality, which is continually being realised in us, to take its grip on us and to happen in us. Let us allow ourselves to be touched through it by the living Triune God who

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Muszala, *Silent prayer*, p. 13–15.

wants to be our centre, our all, our way of looking at ourselves, others, the world and Him, and our way of living and acting.

3.4. Contemplations of Eating

If we choose the contemplation of eating, we first prepare the food to be eaten. Before we start eating and drinking, let us calm down. Let us try to become aware of our desire for it and to connect it with our desire to be with God the Father and Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. We can express our feelings of thirst for God with the psalmist: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:2).

I make the sign of the cross. I ask the Holy Spirit to perceive the presence of the Father and of Jesus at the meal and for the gift of being moved by God’s self-giving love, which I receive through food and through all that happens in my body as I eat and drink.

Let’s try to be with all our senses when it comes to food and liquid. Let us look respectfully and lovingly at what is in front of us and what we are allowed to eat and drink. Let us smell it, touch it and taste it in our mouths and when we swallow.

We allow ourselves to be moved, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, by how God the Father gives this food to feed and clothe us (cf. Mt. 5:6, 45), to “die” for us so that we might live. We are moved by His care for us (cf. Mt. 6:25–34), by His ministry to us through this food, by the possibility that we can eat and digest it, that it will provide us with all we need to live, and that our bodies will be able to put into practice what we freely choose to do.

We remain in all this happening. Let us be aware of this food that we are eating, in all that we feel, experience, are given, with the body and all its functions, so that we can eat and drink and digest it all. Only in this way will there be a taste of the Father’s self-giving love and the desire to be able to give ourselves, together with His Son, to others, just as He has given Himself to us, even through this food and liquid which has “died” “in order that we might live and work. In this way we will be able

to become a gift to others in the power of the Holy Spirit, ready to “die” for them, so that we may live our lives more and more fully⁴⁶.

3.5. Contemplation of Walking

If we choose the contemplation of walking, we should think at the beginning about the purpose of the walk⁴⁷. After entering into it, we ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of being moved and perceiving the gift of walking, so that we can move in it, which gives our body the capacity to walk, to look, to listen, to smell, to perceive. We ask Him to remind us, to teach us and to guide us, so that as we walk, we may be able to be taught about God’s active love for us⁴⁸.

When we surrender ourselves in silence to the walk and to the awareness of its rhythm, it becomes a tool with which we enter into the present moment. In this way, we redirect the mind into awareness of what is happening now and into the presence of the Triune God in whom we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Thus, awareness of the rhythm of walking has a similar role to the awareness of the rhythm of breathing⁴⁹. In this way, we free ourselves from being trapped in constant ruminations or monologues, or in the various anxieties that often cause us restlessness and drain a lot of our life energy.

Let us get on the path and surrender to the road, the path, the earth, to the sensations of the body, its parts, the breath, the heartbeat, the walk. Let us become aware of our way of walking and our posture.

We do not think about the path and walking, we simply walk. Allow thoughts to come and go, as well as various sensations and feelings,

46 Cf. I. Platovnjak, *Food and Spirituality: Contemplation of God’s Love While Eating*, “*Studia Gdańskie*” 48 (2021), p. 89–91, <https://doi.org/10.26142/stgd-2021-005>.

47 Walking has been widely studied for its transformative effect. Cf. S. Brumec, N. Aracki Rosenfeld, *Primerjava življenjskih sprememb po romanju in po obsmrtnih izkušnjah*, “*Bogoslovni vestnik*” 81 (2021) no. 3, p. 696–703, <https://doi.org/10.34291/BV2021/03/Brumec>.

48 Cf. P. Roszak, *Camino de Santiago i devotio post-moderna. W poszukiwaniu tożsamości pielgrzyma w dobie ponowoczesnej bezdomności*, in: *Camino Polaco. Teologia—sztuka—historia—teraźniejszość*, t. 2, eds. P. Roszak, W. Rozynkowski, Toruń 2015, p. 222–236.

49 *Walking meditation*, <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/walking-meditation> (04.02.2022).

emotions and inner spiritual moods. Let's observe all bodily sensations, from the feeling of the foot touching the ground and rising up, to all the other sensations we experience in our moving body. Let us just notice them, accept them and allow what will happen through them to happen. It is necessary to be totally free, without preplanned expectations or desires. If our thoughts drift away, let us come back to sensing the feelings again.

Let us surrender to the walk, to the rhythm of the steps, to being gifted with them, which allow us to leave behind the old and move forward into the new. In this way, we can awaken to the awareness of how God the Father gives us always a new step. Let us allow ourselves to be moved by the Father who, through Christ, gives our body the possibility of walking, of having a way.

Conclusion

In this study, we have seen how the triune God reveals Himself to us through our bodies. He is waiting for us within it and seeking us through it, so that we may let ourselves be found by Him and allow Him to be even more vividly present and active in all our life and actions⁵⁰. We have seen how contemplation of the body, its parts and functions, is a great help in this.

We have briefly outlined just some of the possible contemplations. There are many others, from the different postures of the body (standing, kneeling, sitting, lying down, prostration) to the different postures of the hands and head, etc. In our time, when the female body is often devalued, contemplation of it and of its monthly cycle would be very deep and important. Also, because of the very one-sided view of sexual relations, spouses should be encouraged to contemplate their love-sexual relationship. Everything can be approached in a contemplative way: various forms of physical recreation (running, swimming, climbing, gymnastics, dancing, etc.), going to sleep, sleeping alone and waking up, washing and showering, etc.

50 Cf. L. Hardt, *In Favour of Dispositional Explanations. A Christian Philosophy Perspective with Some References to Economics*, "Scientia et Fides" 1 (2022), p. 241-259, <https://doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2022.012>.

I am sure that many Christians who are looking for spirituality in all of the above, but unfortunately do not find it in Christianity, go elsewhere. I believe that this is an area where the Triune God is still waiting for us to discover Him and to allow Him to be with us in this too, and to make it all a place and time for our personal and deeply transforming encounter with Him and a spirituality lived integrally.

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