

**Meditation
in Buddhist-Christian
Encounter**

A Critical Analysis

edited by
Elizabeth J. Harris and John O'Grady



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*This book is dedicated
to all those who work
for understanding
between the different
religious traditions of our world
especially in locations of conflict*

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This is the seventh volume that EOS has published in cooperation with ENBCS and we hope that there will be more.

Our hope is that this work will contribute to understanding and cooperation between Buddhists and Christians.

March 2019

Elizabeth J. Harris and John O'Grady

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MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION:
TWO BASIC TYPES OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES
WITHIN WESTERN EUROPEAN CHRISTIANITY

Karl Baier

Abstract

The paper begins with terminological clarifications that are followed by an investigation of the ancient roots of Christian meditation and contemplation and the main strands of their development within Western Europe until the end of the Quietist controversy. Special emphasis is laid on the changing meanings of these terms in various periods, the growing differentiation between meditation and contemplation, and the ways in which they were correlated to each other. The role of meditative and contemplative exercises within different Christian groups and churches as well as their respective cultural and theological contexts are highlighted. The concluding part of the paper investigates the renaissance of contemplation that took place in two waves, the first one from around 1900 until the 1930s, and a second one from the late 1960s until the present day.

Keywords: Catholic spirituality, *oratio*, *Devotio Moderna*, Victorines, Quietism, mysticism, infused contemplation, Evelyn Underhill, John Main, centring prayer, Thomas Keating, *lectio divina*

Introduction

This paper deals with two forms of Christian practice that emerged in the Greco-Roman world and have survived up to the present day, undergoing many transformations. During the last century, the term 'meditation' (and to a lesser degree also 'contemplation') became part of the vocabulary of comparative religious studies.¹ Moreover, both are used within religious communities and currents all over the world insofar as they are using European languages to articulate themselves. For these reasons it may be interesting to take a look at the historical roots of these concepts—and not only with regard to the history of Christian spirituality.

In the first part of the paper, Christian terminology concerning prayer, meditation and contemplation will be clarified. Thereafter, the origins of meditation and contemplation in the patristic period and their development until the end of the seventeenth century will be examined. Meditation and contemplation will be carved out as ideal types of religious practice and different ways to relate the two will be described. The Quietist controversy (1675-1700) that ended with the suppression of contemplative forms of prayer within the Catholic Church also merits some discussion. The closing section thematizes the renaissance of contemplation from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

My home base, as it were, is the history of Catholic spirituality. But I am, of course, aware of the fact that Western European spirituality from the sixteenth century onwards has been an ecumenical phenomenon. The role of meditation and contemplation within the Protestant Churches has to be considered as part of this entangled history. As both the Hesychast tradition of the Eastern churches and meditation/contemplation as a medium of the Buddhist-Christian encounter are treated within other chapters of this volume, these topics are left aside.

¹ For this see the respective entries in dictionaries like *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) or the German *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (1998).

Terminological Clarifications

Since the times of the Church fathers, the term 'prayer' in its most basic sense denotes an existential opening towards the ultimate reality that Christians call God. As John of Damascus (d. 754 CE) put it: *Oratio est ascensus mentis in Deum* (prayer is the elevation of the mind towards God).² Accordingly, every inner attitude, thought, decision, emotion, verbal utterance or deed deliberately or subconsciously oriented towards a greater proximity to or union with God can be called prayer. A modern representative of this view is Karl Rahner. 'But what is prayer actually?', he asks and continues: 'First, let's say something quite simple about prayer, something very self-evident which is at the very beginning of prayer and which we usually overlook: in prayer we *open* our hearts to God' (1997, 2-3, Rahner's emphasis). Within Christian theology, prayer as this kind of initial opening and the whole range of specifications that derive from it are usually understood as a response to the self-disclosure of the mysterious ultimate reality that Christians call God.

In the narrow sense of the word, the term 'prayer' stands for a verbal addressing of God (may it be inaudible or spoken aloud) in different speech-acts such as greeting, thanksgiving, petitioning, paying homage to God, vowing, praise, lament, blessing, intercession, consecration and invocation. This rich variety of articulated ways of prayer mirrors the diversity of situations in which the opening towards ultimate reality takes place.

The understanding of prayer as a speech-act also dates back to patristic texts. According to a frequently quoted passage from Augustine's interpretations of the psalms, *oratio est locutio ad Deum* (prayer is talking to God),³ which contrasts with reading the Bible understood as listening to what God has to say to the reader. Cassiodorus (d. ca. 585) substantiated this understanding

² John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 3.24. An example for the reception of this definition within medieval theology is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 83, a. 1, 3: 1841b.

³ St. Augustine, *Ennaratio in Psalmos*, 85, 7 (CCL 39, 1182).

with an (incorrect) etymological interpretation. For him prayer (*oratio*) is spoken reason (*oris ratio*).⁴ Prayer in the sense of a speech-act has often been narrowed down further by assessing petition as the paradigmatic form of prayer in the strict sense.⁵

Although Christian meditation and contemplation often include prayers in the strict and strictest sense, they should be distinguished from them. What makes the difference? Meditation and contemplation are ritualized, methodical exercises of self-cultivation aiming at transforming the practitioner's mind to deepen the relationship with God. They are thus specifications of prayer in the broader sense. Traditionally, they have often been labelled as 'mental' or 'interior' prayer. However, these designations are not very useful as every kind of silent prayer could be called 'mental' or 'interior'.

In the course of history, many philosophers, monastics and theologians did not draw a rigorous distinction between meditation and contemplation. Time and again they were (and still are) used interchangeably. Based on patristic theology, from the twelfth century onwards, increased attempts have been made to distinguish the two and to define them in a more systematic manner. With only few exceptions, contemplation has been seen as the superior form, with meditation being a kind of preparation for it. Only in modern times has the term 'meditation' become a synonym for what, in earlier ages, was conceived of as 'contemplation', or is used as an umbrella term for both meditation and contemplation in the traditional sense.

4 See Cassiodorus, *In Psalterium Expositio*, 38, 14 (PL 70, col. 285).

5 The English 'prayer' and the French 'prière' as well as the Italian 'precario/preghiera' are derived from Latin *precari* (ask, beg, entreat). A major reason for the importance of petition within Western European Christian conceptions of prayer is the outstanding role it plays in the Bible. The Lord's Prayer, which to the present day is considered to be the Christian prayer par excellence as, according to the New Testament, it has been taught by Jesus Christ himself, is a supplication.

Roots and Ramifications

1. Meditation

The contemporary English terms 'meditation' and 'to meditate' are derived from the Latin *meditatio* (care, attention, exercise, practice, study, consideration, rehearsal) and *meditare* or *meditari* (to consider, to ponder, to exercise), words that were used as translation of the Greek *melētē* and *meletāō*. In the Greek and Latin translations of the Bible, the Septuagint and Vulgate, the verbs *meletāō/meditare* are used as translation of the Hebrew *hagah* (to murmur, to speak, to recite and to ponder). The most famous and influential example of this is Psalm 1:2: 'Blessed is the one [...] who meditates on his [the Lord's] law day and night.'⁶

Hagah in this context denotes the practice of murmuring texts (Stordalen 2013). Accordingly, in the days of the early Christian ascetics one of the foremost meanings of *melētē/meditatio* was the loud or half-loud chanting of the Bible and of other spiritual teachings as well as the constant repetition of short *sententiae* (sayings of the fathers, key sentences) or prayers like 'Son of God, have mercy on me' that recall the later Jesus prayer. Thus, the practice of *ruminatio* (repeated reading or recitation) was one of the main meanings of *meditatio* (Ruppert 1977). The original sense of *ruminatio* is 'digesting food through repeated chewing'. Its metaphorical use indicates a process of personal interiorization of the read or recited subject matter.

The Greek and Latin terms for *hagah* add the emphasis on exercise and learning to the original meaning. Additionally, under the heading of *melētē/meditatio*, several other spiritual exercises were taken from the Greco-Roman philosophical culture. As Pierre Hadot has demonstrated, the Stoa, neo-Platonism and the Epicurean school had a therapeutic dimension and developed a wide range of practices for the cure of their followers' souls.

6 Translation according to the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. The Vulgate translates *Beatus vir qui... in lege [Domini] meditabitur die ac nocte*.

Taken from these sources, the methodical practice of ‘paying attention, taking care about oneself’ (*prosochē*) became particularly significant for Christian monasticism (Hadot 1995, 126-144). It included the regular *praemeditatio mortis*, the meditative realization of one’s own death and mortality as well as the examination of conscience at the beginning and/or end of each day.

Within the Hellenistic schools of philosophy and rhetoric as well as within Christian asceticism, the training of memory (*mne-me, memoria*) in the sense of the ability to recall the learnt and accepted philosophical and religious principles within the times of spiritual practice and the changing situations of daily life was of crucial importance. ‘The purpose of the verbal *melētē/meditatio* is to make the *sententia* a constant habit of mind, or to implant the precepts into one’s self, so as to have them constantly at hand. The aim is a state of “preparedness”, when confronting impressions and future events’ (Johnsén 2013, 103).

Philosophical and Christian meditation practices shared the interest in the cultivation of memory with the discipline of rhetoric, whose methods influenced European meditation from the very beginning (Carruthers 1998). Meditation methods and rhetoric often intermingled. From Late Antiquity to Ignatius of Loyola’s famous *Spiritual Exercises*, rhetorical methods have been used to structure the thought processes within the practice of meditation and to deepen the impact of the meditated topics on the persons meditating.⁷

In medieval times the practice of meditation shifted from murmured rumination to methodical thinking.⁸ *Meditatio* now stood for the interpretation of biblical and other authoritative texts and theological topics with exegetical and logical means,

7 The influence of rhetoric on Stoic, Epicurean and Christian methods of meditation as well as the continuity of this influence within the Christian era have been pointed out in the seminal study Rabbow 1954. For the relationship between rhetoric and meditation see also Butzer 2001.

8 See Guigo II. *Epistola de vita contemplativa* (Scala Claustralium) 84, 32-38: *Meditatio est studiosa mentis actio, occultae veritatis notitiam ductu propriae rationis investigans* (Meditation is the studious activity of the mind which searches for the hidden truth guided by its own reason).

and especially with the rhetorical techniques of *inventio* (methods to discover points and arguments) and *amplificatio* (techniques to heighten the cognitive, emotional and moral importance of a subject in order to motivate attitudinal and behavioural changes). Moreover, from Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) onward, the term ‘*meditationes*’ was also used to denote a genre of devotional literature that dealt with emotional self-examination and introspection in the context of prayer (Bestul 2012, 158-160). Many books of this genre, influenced by the ancient *soliloquium* literature, were written to provide models for personal practice, although instructions by spiritual guides were considered to be indispensable.⁹

Within Hellenistic rhetoric, the visualization of certain situations was used for the preparation of speeches in order to intensify an orator’s performance. The renaissance of rhetoric, and in particular the rhetorization of prayer within the monastic culture of the high and late medieval age, probably contributed to the booming of visualization in this period. The method of so-called affective meditation centred around the imagination of biblical scenes. ‘The goal was to meditate the events of Christ’s life, *sicut praesens*, as though one were actually present at the scene’ (Bestul 2012, 162). The imaginations not only consisted of visual elements, but included all senses. They aimed at the creation of pious emotions and the cultivation of virtues.

In order to elicit compassion and love for the suffering son of God, the imagination of the passion of Christ became especially widespread.¹⁰ Historical research has shown that mainly women were drawn to this practice and that the male theologians who wrote about it, and thus promoted the spread of affective meditation throughout Western Europe, were influenced by female piety. Caroline Walker Bynum explained this by referring to late medieval gender ideology (Bynum 1986). Women were considered to

9 A related type of literature that has existed since antiquity and is also connected to the tradition of the *soliloquium* but in a less devotional way is the philosophical *meditatio*. Within the scope of this article it is not possible to treat this interesting genre and its relation to the devotional *meditationes*.

10 For the early stage of this development see Fulton 2002.

be more ‘carnal’ than men and therefore were expected to focus their meditations on the incarnated Christ. Moreover, on a symbolical level the suffering body of Christ was thought of as feminine and this could have also motivated women to identify with it. Referring to the legal concept of ‘marital affection’ (*maritalis affectio*), Sarah McNamer has convincingly argued that an even stronger motive for nuns and female recluses to cultivate compassion with Christ via visualization practices has been to become a ‘true’ spouse of Christ—in this life and for all eternity (McNamer 2010). In accordance with the appreciation of visual elements, the use of devotional images to support this dimension of meditation became quite common.

From the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century, the reform movement *Devotio Moderna* (New Devotion) triggered an advanced systematization of practice. The steps to be taken within each meditation became more differentiated and were put in a methodologically reflected order that should one by one activate the Augustinian faculties of the soul, namely *memoria* (memory), *intelligentia* (intellect) and *voluntas* (will and emotion).¹¹ Additionally, training programmes (*exercitia*) were developed that covered larger spans of time in which a sequence of topics should be meditated. During this period of spiritual reform, many religious orders introduced daily meditation to their schedule. Influenced by the methods of *Devotio Moderna*, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) finally combined several forms of meditation in his *Exercitia Spiritualia* (1548), which in their long version last for one month. Ignatius’s spiritual exercises became a paradigm of Catholic retreat culture and meditation practice. In the context of this paper, I would only like to mention his ‘meditation with the three faculties’ (*meditación con las tres potencias*). Since the late sixteenth century, this form has become the most prominent and influential Jesuit method of meditation. The more contemplative ways of meditation that Ignatius had integrated into his *Exercitia* have been downplayed or even forbidden, mainly because of the

11 For meditation practices within the *Devotio Moderna* see Baier 2009a, 58-70; Staubach 2011.

persecution of the *alumbrados* and the Quietism debate (see below). The scheme of this kind of meditation goes as follows:

Preparatory Prayer

Prelude 1: visualization of a biblical scene or of a scene with symbolic meaning fitting to the topic of the meditation

Prelude 2: asking of God what one wishes in this exercise

Points:

1. memorizing central points concerning the topic
2. pondering them
3. moving emotions and will according to the results of point 2

Colloqui: conversing with Jesus Christ, Mother Mary (both visualized), or God

Concluding prayer

During the seventeenth century, a widespread interest in meditation manifested itself in a growing number of devotional books that explained meditation methods and gave examples that should inspire readers. Within the Catholic Church, the practice of meditation was propagated for all Christian estates (monastics, priests, lay people)—not least as a counter-reformatory weapon against the spread of the new Churches. Concurrently, Protestant theologians adopted Catholic meditation techniques as a means to reform the religious life within their own communities (Sträter 1995). Half a century after Luther’s death, a growing number of critical theologians called for a renewal of the Protestant denominations. They integrated meditation and contemplation in their reform programmes. A main reason for the new emphasis on meditation was the ‘crisis of the sermon’. Many Lutherans expressed serious doubts about the effectivity of preaching with regard to the transmission of faith. Meditation as a way of intellectual as well as emotional interiorization of the word of God seemed to offer a solution to this problem.

In 1606, the leading Lutheran theologian, Johann Gerhard, published the *Meditationes sacrae*, a bestseller among the devotional books of the seventeenth century that has been reprinted

in more than two hundred editions in at least twelve languages, thus becoming the most successful Protestant meditation manual ever (Sträter 1995, 43). The Latin version was used as a handbook within academic theological studies.

In the preface to his book, Gerhard uses the language of spiritual alchemy by comparing Jesus with the philosopher's stone and the medical processes within the physical body with the purification of the spiritual body. Due to this, the *Meditationes sacrae* were appreciated by Paracelsists and had some influence within alchemical circles (Steiger 2000, 50). The meditative and contemplative exercises of spiritual alchemists, Rosicrucians and radical pietists, who were sometimes also influenced by Kabbalist practices, are a highly interesting strand of Western European spirituality and would deserve further investigations that cannot be undertaken here.

In Gerhard's *Schola Pietatis* (1622), meditation again was of central importance as a tool prescribed by the Holy Spirit to gain, retain and enhance the true Christian life (Sträter 1995, 49-52). Another tradition of Protestant meditation was established in England. There, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the interest in meditation was growing as in many other European countries. The first available meditation handbooks were translations of Catholic sources. Joseph Hall, bishop of Exeter and later of Norwich, pioneered the fusing of Catholic meditation techniques with Calvinist theology. He published two important books on meditation: *Art of Divine Meditation* (1606) and *Occasional Meditations* (1633). One of Hall's innovations was the distinction between deliberate meditation (of the Bible) and spontaneous occasional meditation that emerges at different occasions, such as listening to the singing of a bird, smelling the scent of a rose, or the encounter with a crying child.¹² His occasional meditations are structured according to what was then the common scheme of meditation. The perception of the object of meditation is followed by an analytical part with pondering. The exercise is completed with an emotional prayer or exhortation.

¹² For Hall's writings on meditation see Frank Livingstone Huntley 1981.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, translations of English literature on meditation (Joseph Hall, Lewis Bayly) influenced Lutheran practice and contributed to the emergence of the German Pietist movement that emphasized spiritual practice (Taubner 2014). With the decline of Pietism in the nineteenth century, the practice of meditation became almost forgotten within the Lutheran Church and the same seemingly happened within other major Protestant churches.¹³ It was the US-American Mind-Cure movement (also known as New Thought) that reintroduced meditation practices together with contemplation into Protestantism at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Independent of New Thought approaches, in the mid-1930s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer tried to revitalize Martin Luther's meditation of the Bible within his underground seminary for the Confessing Church at Finkenwalde that was closed down by the Nazis in 1937. He created a ritual of meditative reading and pondering the meaning of biblical texts with regard to their significance to the readers' lives in the style of the old *lectio divina* (Baier 2009, 672-673).¹⁵

¹³ In the mid-nineteenth century, the Lutheran theologian Löhe wrote: 'Eine Übung und Aeußerung des inwendigen Lebens ist bei uns ganz verloren gegangen, nämlich die *Meditation*...' (There is a certain exercise and expression of the inner life that has become completely lost among us, namely *meditation*) (Löhe 1852, 122; Löhe's emphasis).

¹⁴ It was William James who first highlighted the key role of the Mind-Cure movement for the renaissance of Protestant meditation and contemplation. See James 1902, 406: 'It is odd that Protestantism, especially evangelical Protestantism should seemingly have abandoned everything methodical in this time...It has been left to our mind-curers to reintroduce methodical meditation into our religious life.' In a typical modern way, James uses 'meditation' as an umbrella term for what was traditionally distinguished as meditation and (acquired) contemplation.

¹⁵ In a letter written in 1936, Karl Barth criticized Bonhoeffer for his attempt to establish meditation as a separate discipline distinct from scientific theological reflection. He felt disgusted by the 'flair of monastic eros and pathos' of Bonhoeffer's experiment. Obviously, Barth had been ignorant of the long tradition of Bible meditation within the Protestant churches and only repeated obsolete anti-monastic and anti-Catholic prejudices (see Bonhoeffer 1996, 945).

During the interwar period, the physician, psychotherapist and spiritual director, Carl Happich, from Darmstadt, Germany, introduced new methods to meditate on and contemplate visual symbols and imaginary scenes for the members of the protestant reform movement, Berneuchener Bewegung, and the Michaelsbruderschaft, a brotherhood, which eventually emerged from this movement. After the war Happich's methods influenced the therapeutic use of meditation and contemplation within humanistic and transpersonal psychology. They were practised within the Michaelsbruderschaft at least until the 1960s (Baier 2013).

In the Catholic Church, traditional meditation survived albeit in rather formalized and petrified ways (compared with the creativity of the seventeenth century) and had a final heyday within the context of the so-called retreat movement from the beginning of the twentieth century until World War II.

2. Contemplation

The English term 'contemplation' is a loan from the Latin *contemplatio* (the act of looking, gazing attentively, consideration) that was used as a translation of the Greek *theōria* (watching, beholding). *Theōria* has had different meanings that derived from the basic sense of 'beholding'.¹⁶ In ancient Greece, it denoted a civic institution: the pilgrimage of someone (the *theōros*) to a religious festival or an oracle to witness sacred events and spectacles (Nightingale 2004). 'This sacralized mode of spectating was a central element of traditional *theoria*, and offered a powerful model for the philosophic notion of "seeing" divine truths' (Nightingale 2004, 4). In Greek philosophy, *theōria* could also mean the investigation of truth for its own sake in a more general, not only a religious sense; and last but not least, a way of life dedicated to these meanings of *theōria*: the *bíos theōretikós* (*vita*

16 An overview of the different meanings of contemplation in Greek philosophy and Christian theology is given by Nef, 2005. For the pre-Christian Greek tradition of contemplation see McGinn 1992, 24-62.

contemplativa) as opposed to *bíos praktikós* (*vita activa*).¹⁷ Josef Pieper summarized the major meanings of *theōria* and *contemplatio* in a lucid way:

Theoria and *contemplatio* devote their full energy to revealing, clarifying, and making manifest the reality which [sic] has been sighted; they aim at truth and nothing else. This is the first element of the concept of contemplation: silent perception of reality. A second is the following: Contemplation is a form of knowing arrived at not by thinking but by seeing, intuition. It is not coordinate with the *ratio*, but with the *intellectus*, with the capacity for 'simple intuition'. (Pieper 1998, 73-74; Pieper's emphases)¹⁸

Pursuing the second element that Pieper mentions, medieval epistemological texts connect the studying of texts and meditation in the sense of methodical discursive thought with tedious labour whereas contemplation is seen as an effortless and joyful consummation of what reading and meditation are searching for:

Thinking [*cogitatio*], [scattered thought driven by passions and mostly based on phantasies, KB] crawls; meditation marches and often runs; contemplation flies around everywhere and when it wishes suspends itself in the heights. Thinking is without labor and fruit; in meditation there is labor and fruit; contemplation continues without labor but with fruit.¹⁹

Along the lines of this tradition, referring to Sirach 32:15-16 in the prologue to his early commentary on Boethius's *Heb-*

17 For the different concepts of the relationship between active and contemplative life from early Greek philosophy to the Church father see Vogl 2002 and Bénatouïl, Bonazzi 2012.

18 For the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* that can be traced back to Aristotle see Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 59, a. 1, ad 1: Sed intellectus et ratio different quantum ad modum cognoscendi, quia scilicet intellectus cognoscit simplici intuitu, ratio vero discurrendo de uno in aliud (Intuitive insight and discursive thought are different according to their modes of knowing; because intuitive insight knows by a simple gaze, whereas discursive thought has to run to and fro from one to another).

19 Richard of St. Victor, *Benjamin Maior* (*De arca mystica*), Ch. III, quoted according to Richard of St. Victor 1979, 155-156.

domads, Thomas Aquinas recognizes an essential relationship between the delight of contemplating divine wisdom and play (*ludus*). As Mary Carruthers already has pointed out, the meaning of the term *ludus* is not identical with the usual monastic leisure, *otium*, but adds some aspects to it, namely, uselessness and delight (Carruthers 2014, 76-77). Why does he consider *contemplatio* to be a kind of play? 'First, because play is delightful and the contemplation of Wisdom possesses maximum delight...Second, because things done in play are not ordered to anything else, but are thought for their own sake, and this same trait belongs to the delights of Wisdom' (Aquinas 2001, 5).

For Neoplatonic authors like Plotinus (205-270), whose religious philosophy heavily influenced Christian concepts of *theoriā/contemplatio*, contemplation culminates in a unitive experiential knowledge of the divine source of all being, an experience that transcends the usual seeing of someone or something:

No doubt, we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there are no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it: centre coincides with centre. (Plotinus, *Ennead* VI, 9.10, trans. by Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page)

Explaining the ascent to 'mystical contemplation', the Christian theologian, Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth-sixth century), adopted Plotinus's advice to let go of everything (*aphele panta*; see Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 3, 17, 38) in order to unify the soul and the Divine One.²⁰ 'For, by the unceasing and absolute renunciation of thyself and all things, thou shalt in pureness cast all things aside, and be released from all, and so shalt be led upwards to the ray of that divine darkness that exceedeth all existence' (Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Mystica Theologia* I, 1000A, trans. by C.E. Rolt).

20 According to Bouyer 2004, 177-78, the term 'mystical contemplation' (*mystikè teoriā*) was already used before Pseudo-Dionysius by Gregory of Nyssa (335-394).

Following Bernard McGinn, two conceptions of contemplative union exist, broadly speaking, within the Christian traditions: union with God through a bond of love that emphasizes the distinction of creator and creature, and a union of indistinction in which God and man merge into a simple oneness. 'There was a considerable variety of ways of conceiving these modes of union, and many mystics used language and images expressing both forms' (McGinn 2012, 204).

Similar to the case of *hagah/melētē/meditatio*, the Greco-Roman semantics of *theoriā/contemplatio* interacted with biblical vocabulary:

A whole assembly of biblical words whose root meanings center on the notion of resting in God – *quies, otium, vacatio, sabbatum* – constitute the second linguistic field. These terms were often employed synonymously with *contemplatio* and its cognates, though each word also has its own semantic resonance. (McGinn 2004, 139)

Contemplation became a term for 1) states of mind that transcend all words, rational discernments and images and 2) practices that were meant to bring about these states. Different names were given to the *locus*, the 'place' of contemplative encounter and union with God beyond the ordinary faculties of body and soul: *acies mentis* (edge, sharpness of the mind, keen gaze), *apex mentis* (peak of the mind), *apex affectus* (peak of love), *abditum mentis* (hidden depth of the mind), *scintilla animae* (sparkle of the soul) or *radix animae* (root of the soul).²¹

John Cassian (360-435) who pioneered the transfer of early Christian monasticism from Palestine and Egypt to Western Europe explains in his famous tenth *conlatio* (*Conlationes* 10, 10-11) how one should perform the continual recollection of God that leads to contemplation. As synonyms for *contemplatio* he uses 'purified prayer', 'perfect prayer', or 'glowing prayer'. Cassian recommends the steady repetition of the *spiritualis theoriae*

21 The historical background and dissemination of these terms are investigated by Ivánka 1990, 315-385 and Reiter 1992, 84-282.

formula (formula of spiritual contemplation): 'God, come to my rescue. Lord, hurry to help me' (Psalm 70:1, ISV). The continuous recitation of this formula should culminate in a prayer beyond images and words. The mind's attentiveness should be set ablaze and called forth in an 'unspeakable ecstasy of the heart' that transcends 'all feelings and visible matter'.

Here we have the case of a very short and simple standardized prayer used to develop a contemplative state of mind. After Cassian, this kind of practice of preparing the mind for a non-conceptual encounter with God became a widespread exercise among monastics and recluses. Under the name 'prayer of the heart' or 'Jesus prayer' it is often thought of as an exclusive heritage of the Orthodox Churches but it has been also practised throughout the history of Western European Christianity.

One example for this is the well-known *The Cloude of Unknowyng*, written in the late fourteenth century.²² The anonymous author of this treatise describes contemplation as a 'special prayer' that exceeds all other forms of praying. To contemplate would mean to cultivate a wordless inner silence filled with the love of God. In order to unfold inner calmness, the author recommends an undivided attention on single monosyllabic words, especially 'sin' and 'God', without any discursive mental acts.²³ With the concentration on these words, two major topics of meditation are transferred to a higher level of understanding. Intellectual reflections and other activities of the soul except a pure selfless love of God are left behind in a 'cloud of forgetting' and with his or her 'point of spirit' (*apex mentis*) the practitioner enters the 'cloud of unknowing'. One becomes immersed in 'a nothing' that is 'all' because within this cloud one learns to comprehend all things at once without discriminative knowledge.²⁴ Within this nothingness, God and the soul are revealed in their oneness.

22 In the following I refer to the critical edition of the text provided by Hodgson 1982. For a more detailed analysis of practices described in the *Cloude of Unknowyng* and their historical context, see Baier 2009, 101-109.

23 See *Cloude* 40,15-44,14.

24 See *Cloude* 67,37-68,21.

Some teachers like Teresa of Ávila or Miguel de Molinos recommended reduced forms of concentration on Jesus Christ to bridge the gap between the usually Christocentric meditations and the complete emptying of the mind in contemplation. After having been trained in meditating on the details of Christ's life and death, one should switch to see his humanity 'by a simple act of faith [i.e. without imaginations and discursive thoughts, KB], loving it, and remembering that he is the tabernacle of divinity, the beginning and end of our salvation...' (Molinos 2010, 97).

Another exercise to develop inner silence and a non-conceptual opening towards God was the practice of Pseudo-Dionysian negative theology as spiritual exercise. Referring to Pseudo-Dionysius, the anonymous *Tratado de oración y contemplation* that dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century and was attributed to the Carmelite Tomás á Jesu (1564-1627), explains two kinds of knowledge of God on which two ways of contemplation are based, the affirmative and the negative.²⁵ Affirmative contemplation considers God as wise, powerful, good, etc. The negative way is described as follows:

The soul, placed in prayer,...after it is habituated to know God in the contemplation of the attributes and divine perfections...it raises itself to God saying interiorly, 'God bless me! God is more than being, more than substance, more than goodness, more than wisdom, more than everything we can understand; then what is God? God bless me! What will be this God who is so great?' And searching here for what He is, it finds nothing that is comparable to God. It finds itself placed in an abyss where it loses its footing, grows weak, and is submerged, and the will [in the sense of love, KB] is enkindled and is inflamed, and the affect holds vigil,

25 Actually, all forms of Christian contemplation finally come down to the practice of apophatic theology as spiritual exercise. Nevertheless, contemplation guides do not often refer to Pseudo-Dionysius as master of the *via negativa* as explicitly and theoretically reflected as in the case of Tomás á Jesu. In popular instructions to the prayer of silence one often finds the simple advice that one should trust in the presence of God, surrender to his will, and stay in silence without thinking anything special; just upholding pure faith and love.

although the understanding shuts itself off; and the soul loves what it does not know with particular and distinct knowledge. (Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, ms. 12398. Book 1, Chapter 4, f. 64^r – 64^v, translation quoted from Arraj 1999, 63)²⁶

Apart from this kind of exercise, Tomás á Jesu is more known for having introduced the term ‘acquired contemplation’ into the vocabulary of Catholic spirituality. It was used for all exercises that skip the schemes of meditation in order to prepare the practitioner for the higher states of union caused by infusion of Divine grace (passive, infused contemplation). Additionally, acquired contemplation was the name for the states of inner calmness, emptiness and loving attentiveness to the divine presence that are produced by these practices and therefore were not considered to be the results of extraordinary Divine grace.²⁷

The attitude towards disturbances and temptations during contemplation differs from meditation. A long line of spiritual teachers that ended with Miguel de Molinos and Madame Guyon taught that no active fight against evil thoughts, demonic temptations and carnal desires should take place in contemplation:

When dealing with impertinent, importunate, and lewd thoughts in the time of recollection, know that God values the peace and resignation of your soul more than good propositions and grand sentiments. The very force you use to resist these thoughts is an impediment and will leave the soul more unquiet. What is impor-

26 From the last important Victorine theologian, Thomas Gallus (1190-1246), onwards, the Pseudo-Dionysian distinction between affirmative and negative theology has often been related to the polarity of *intellectus* in the sense of rational understanding and *voluntas/affectus*, i.e. love that alone would lead to the superintellectual union with God. Tomás follows this current.

27 The centuries-long discussion on the validity of acquired contemplation and its relation to infused contemplation can be broken down to the question whether or not silent non-discursive awareness in general and especially the contemplative openness towards God is a human capacity, a skill that can be trained by certain practices. See Sherman 2014, 12. Like Sherman, I would argue that besides theological and philosophical arguments, our knowledge of the history of religions as well as modern empirical research provide a strong evidence base for conceiving acquired contemplation as a skill.

tant is to scorn them gently, to know your misery, and to offer the disturbance to God. (Molinos 2010, 82)

Among other points that will be mentioned in the next section, this attitude became a problem, especially when contemplation started to spread outside the monasteries and became a popular practice.

The Democratization of Contemplation and its Suppression

Similarly to meditation, but to an even greater degree, for almost one and a half millennia contemplation has been the privilege of monastics and hermits, and at least a few aristocrats or other members of the upper classes who had the interest and leisure to engage in spiritual exercises. Starting from the fifteenth century, monastic reform circles (often associated with groups of lay people) in Spain, Italy, the Low Lands and finally in France propagated contemplation as something that every Christian should practise rather than religious specialists alone (Sluhovsky 2007, 97-137). Devotional books started to praise contemplation as an art easy to learn and more suitable for accelerating spiritual progress than any other practice. Uneducated believers were now praised for being more gifted for contemplation than the arrogant academic theologians. Subsequently, different forms of contemplative prayer became relatively widespread (Sluhovsky 2007, 100). Comparatively, the democratization of meditation practice has been rarely attacked, as it basically complemented quite well the usual forms of prayer, the Christian rites including confession and the messages conveyed in the sermons of the priests. By contrast the dissemination of contemplation soon became highly controversial.²⁸

28 Nevertheless, the spread of meditation techniques also had to face attacks from Catholic theologians and church officials who connected it with a dangerous upgrading of individual experience (especially of lay persons) over against the salvific value of the sacraments, the official teachings and the hierarchical order of the Church. See Sluhovsky 2007, 100. I will come back to these points below. Because of their individualistic approach, even the

The persecution of the increasingly popular contemplative practices and the groups whose spirituality focussed on them started with a reformist movement that later was called *alumbradismo* (illuminism) by its adversaries. It arose among Franciscan circles in Castile, Spain in the 1510s. *Alumbradismo* was based on the cultivation of *dejamiento*, the total abandonment to the love of God. This kind of radical non-discursive opening was not dependent on sitting silently at a calm place. The *alumbrados* (i.e. ‘women and men illuminated by the Holy Spirit’) taught that *dejamiento* could and should be performed everywhere, at all times, and by all people (Hamilton 1992, 30-31). This claim refers to an important form of contemplation that has not yet been touched – one that is worth dwelling on briefly.

Contemplation has been often conceptualized as a retreat from worldly affairs, the closing of the corporeal and exterior senses and a turning inwards to focus on God who dwells within the depths of the soul. According to this understanding, a tension between contemplation and action exists that can at most be overcome by very advanced practitioners who have already experienced an ecstatic union with God and are capable of keeping a steady attention towards him while also being actively engaged within the world. On the contrary, *dejamiento* and similar models conceive contemplation from the very start as a mode of everyday existence that should be cultivated as such. The central exercise then is to radically let go of one’s self-centredness and submit oneself to God irrespective of whatever one does during the day. Longer sessions of silent, motionless contemplative prayer are replaced by this form of radicalized everydayness or are used as supplement and source of inspiration for it.

Day-to-day contemplation, the exercise to search and find God in all things, thus becoming a contemplative in action as the Jesuit J eronimo Nadal (1507-1580) took it, time and again had its devot-

Ignatian exercises were sometimes accused of being crypto-Protestant. On the other hand, the Protestant opponents of meditation understood it as a typically Catholic practice based on a theological synergism that would undermine the principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. See Str ater 1995, 29, 52.

ed proponents and charismatic teachers within the history of Western European spirituality. In medieval times, Master Eckhart was a strong advocate of the unity between contemplation and action. One of the most remarkable masters of this path in early modern times was Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (c. 1614-1691), a cook and shoemaker who worked as a lay brother (i.e. servant) in a Carmelite monastery in Paris and taught the practice of being aware of the presence of God within each and every moment. He instructed his followers to do whatever they would do with diligence and care. ‘We must perform all our actions carefully and deliberately, not impulsively or hurried, for such would characterize a distracted mind’ (Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection 1994, 38). Additionally, he recommended small exercises to support the awareness of divine presence: short spontaneous prayers during the day and the practice of stopping whatever one is actually doing for a few moments to reconnect with the God within: ‘During our work and other activities... – and I emphasize, even during our religious exercises and vocal prayers – we must stop for a moment, as often as possible, to adore God in the depth of our hearts, to savor him, even though in passing and stealthily’ (Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection 1994, 38-39). In a similar way, the *Treatise on Abandonment to Divine Providence*, written by an unknown eighteenth century author and erroneously attributed to Jean-Pierre Caussade (1675-1751), develops a spirituality of abandonment to the divine providence within each present situation.²⁹

Returning to *alumbradismo*, the movement attracted Franciscans and other clerics, educated and semi-educated laity, and especially women, some of whom held leading positions (Montoya 2010, 13). Many of its members descended from second-generation *conversos* (Jewish converts). This made the *alumbrados* even more suspicious. With its doctrine still in the making, *alum-*

29 Both Brother Lawrence and the *Treatise on Abandonment* were steeped in the Quietist tradition. The twentieth century renaissance of their kind of contemplative awareness via philosophers and theologians like Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Romano Guardini, and Simone Weil is treated in Baier 2009, 695-813.

bradismo was first detected by the Inquisition in 1519. In 1524, its leaders were imprisoned. In the following year, the inquisitors published an edict in Toledo that condemned forty-seven propositions attributed to the *alumbrados*. Several propositions explicitly refer to questions of prayer. The inquisitors rejected the claim that mental prayer should replace vocal prayer and that meditation was of no use as it depended on sentiments and thoughts that would cause undesirable effects, whereas contemplation was wholesome (Sluhovsky 2007, 107). The central Proposition 12 asserted:

Alumbrados: Having abandoned themselves to God, such people did not have to work, in order not to block whatever God wished to accomplish. They could withdraw themselves from all created things. Even to meditate upon the humanity of Christ hindered abandonment to God (*dejamiento en Dios*). And such people could refuse all thoughts that occurred to them, even if the thoughts were good, because they should look to God alone. They thought refusing such thoughts was virtuous. Being in that spiritual state of quietude (*estando en aquella quietud*), they even thought it was a temptation to remember God in order not to be distracted.

Inquisitors: This proposition is false, erroneous, scandalous, and heretical. (Quoted from Montoya 2010, 87)

In the next century, other edicts followed against groups that the inquisitors identified as *alumbrados* in various parts of Spain. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century, the term *alumbradismo* and its derivatives (like ‘illumination’) were used here and there across Western Europe as an accusation by theologians and the Inquisition, whereas on the other hand, contemplative groups felt the need to distance themselves from it. Nevertheless, in the second half of the seventeenth century, yet another heresy became the major target of the opponents of the contemplative current within Catholicism.

During this period, the dissemination of contemplation gained momentum again through reformist groups and spiritual guides in Italy and France. Their thoughts and practices now were labelled ‘quietism’ (from ‘prayer of quiet’, a then well-known synonym of contemplation). The Spanish Jesuit, Miguel de Molinos (1628-

1696), who was a very famous priest and spiritual director in Rome—well connected with the Roman nobility and the highest levels within the Vatican’s hierarchy—became the leading representative of the movement. Together with other works from Quietist authors, his *Guia espiritual* (The Spiritual Guide), a widely read manual of meditation and contemplation published in 1675, sparked a controversy about the doctrinal validity of the Quietist practice that had become a kind of religious fashion:

The theological question at the heart of the debate concerned the proper place of meditation in the spiritual life. For Molinos, meditation was a necessary and important practice for spiritual beginners, but it was ultimately incompatible with the immediate practice of ‘pure faith’ that he prescribed for those advanced on the spiritual path. (Baird 2010, 9)

The critics of Molinos, especially a group of Jesuits led by Paolo Segneri (1624-1694), in his time the most celebrated Jesuit preacher in Italy, understood his teachings as an attack against the usual meditation techniques centred on the humanity of Christ (Baird 2010, 9). He was accused of being theologically too innovative and of following the heretical tradition of *alumbradismo*. In 1687, the papal bull *Coelestis Pastor* condemned the *Guia espiritual*. The condemnation not only referred to his published work but also to manuscripts and letters that were found in Molinos’s house and to his verbal teachings. He was sentenced to life and died in prison in 1696. Compared to earlier works on contemplation, Molinos does not offer great surprises. Nor did the sixty-eight propositions of the bull reveal anything new about the views of those who acted as the defenders of orthodoxy against contemplative groups. But the long-term effects of his condemnation surpassed earlier prosecutions of contemplative practice.

Three years before Molinos’s death, the infamous French Quietist controversy began, the last theological debate that aroused great public interest within Western Europe.³⁰ It ended in 1698

30 For the history of this debate, see Heppé 1875. The theological significance of Fénelon’s thought is investigated by Spaemann 1963.

with the condemnation of François Fénelon's *Explication des maximes de saints*. In this popular book, Fénelon (1651-1715) defended Quietism and Jeanne Marie Guyon du Chesnoy (1648-1717) – the already mentioned Madame Guyon, a charismatic quietist, spiritual guide and writer whom he admired and who influenced his theological thought. Between 1695 and 1703, Madame Guyon was imprisoned in the Bastille. She spent the last years of her life in a village near Blois, surrounded by a small ecumenical contemplative community of disciples from different countries and Christian denominations.

One could sum up the arguments that were articulated against Quietism as follows. Because of their focus on inner experience, the Quietists would neglect Christian doctrine as taught by the Magisterium and reject the hierarchy of the Church as well as its redemptive rites, i.e. the sacraments. The passivity of contemplation would downplay the importance of works of charity and other good deeds thus undermining the cultivation of Christian virtues. It would furthermore invite attacks of demons in the form of delusions and evil phantasies. The practitioners would be inclined to think that whatever comes into their minds in the state of contemplation is inspired by God and therefore good, even if it would be against the moral rules proclaimed by the Church (Sluhovsky 2007, 116). Consequentially, the Quietists would use contemplation to justify sin and especially sexual immorality. The practice of pure love of God for God's own sake, rather than out of fear of punishment or hope for rewards, would disarm fear as a means to leading a pious and virtuous life (Bruneau 1998, 143-144). Additionally, from the angle of pure love, common religious practices like prayers of petition and methodical meditation would be discredited as mere expressions of selfish love (Sluhovsky 2007, 131).

Some of these arguments may have been valid with regard to isolated cases of abuse and separatism. Others simply mirrored the power interests of the Catholic Church apparatus *in toto*, as well as of special groups within it. They seemed to be afraid of the subversive potential of contemplation. Although contemplation

has never been totally rejected as a legitimate Catholic practice, it ceased being a recognized form of prayer due to the oppression and final collapse of the Quietist movement. Even within contemplative orders like the Carmelites the respective writings of their founders were censored. Public expressions of Quietist thought and practice became almost impossible. A long-lasting phobia of contemplative prayer emerged. Its practice survived only in small, mainly monastic circles. It took two hundred years until a revival of contemplation occurred from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

The Protestant Reception of Quietism

The suppression of Quietism and particularly the fate of Miguel de Molinos, as well as the controversy about Fénelon, inflamed the interest of German Lutherans. In 1687, the year of Molinos's condemnation, August Hermann Francke published a Latin translation of the *Guía espiritual*. A German edition by the radical Pietist, Gottfried Arnold, followed in 1699. Arnold also dedicated a chapter of his *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (1729) to the Quietists.³¹ In 1704, the Huguenot pastor, philosopher and theologian, Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), published an anthology of the writings of Madame Guyon called *Opuscules spirituels* that additionally comprised several other Quietist writings.

A good example of the influence of Quietist contemplative spirituality within Protestantism is the aforementioned Brother Lawrence.³² Already in 1701, his works had been translated into German together with those of Madame Guyon and with a preface written by Gottfried Arnold. The writings of Brother Lawrence exercised decisive influence on Gerhard Tersteegen, the famous Pietist theologian and poet, whose major theological topic, the presence of God, was inspired by the Carmelite lay brother.

31 Arnold's relationship to Quietist contemplative spirituality is treated by Marti 2002.

32 For Brother Lawrence's international influence, see Salvatore Sciorba 1994, xxxiv-xxxvi.

Tersteegen probably came to know Brother Lawrence through the edition of his works published by Pierre Poiret in 1710 under the title *La Théologie de la Présence a Dieu*. In the second volume of his *Außerlesene Lebensbeschreibungen Heiliger Seelen* (Selected Biographies of Holy Souls) from 1785, Tersteegen devoted a comprehensive chapter to Brother Lawrence and thus made him known in Germany and the Low Countries. Gottfried Arnold later published a biography of Brother Lawrence.

John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of Methodism, made him known in the English-speaking world. In more recent times, William James (1842-1910) rediscovered Brother Lawrence and quoted him at length in an article on *The Gospel of Relaxation* (1899), thus connecting the emerging modern culture of relaxation with Quietist everyday contemplation. ‘The simple-heartedness of Brother Lawrence’, he writes, ‘and the relaxation of all unnecessary solitudes and anxieties in him, is a refreshing spectacle’ (James 1911, 77). In today’s globalized contemplative culture, an edition of Brother Lawrence presents him as a ‘Christian Zen master’ and publishes his sayings along with quotations from different famous Buddhist teachers.³³

Similarities between the Quaker Movement and Quietism existed from its very beginning, as the founder, George Fox, underlined the importance of approaching the Godhead in silent contemplation. Historians of Quakerism pointed to parallels between the early Quaker theologian, Robert Barclay (1648-1690), and Quietist positions. Their historical relationship has not been sufficiently clarified yet. The third period of Quakerism, which lasted from the end of seventeenth until the first years of the nineteenth century, is usually called Quietist Quakerism because of

33 See Brother Lawrence 2011, 11: ‘In this book, you will find modern-language paraphrases from *The Practice of the Presence of God*, paired with writings from many different Buddhist teachers, divided into sections based on common themes. These couplings are not meant to demonstrate a one-to-one correspondence, nor are they intended to prove that Zen Buddhism and Christianity (or at least Brother Lawrence’s version of it) are one and the same. They are not. But one can shine light on the other’ (emphases in the original text).

the strong influence of continental Quietism and especially the writings of Molinos, Fénelon and Madame Guyon.³⁴

Meditation and Contemplation as Opposite Types of Practice

According to the ‘classical’ Western European conceptualization of spiritual exercises that began to emerge in antiquity, became established in the medieval age, and survived until modern times, the term ‘meditation’ relates to practices for the development of self-knowledge and the knowledge of God that engage ritualized reading or reciting, thought, imagination, emotions, willpower and sometimes bodily gestures as well. These elements are used to deepen the understanding of the redeeming relationship to God via Jesus Christ, overcome vices and attain the virtues necessary to move forward on the Christian path. A major point in meditation is the analysis of one’s own sins, to regret them, to activate the will to minimize them and to ask God or Jesus Christ for mercy. A second major point is to develop insights into the message of the gospel, with a focus on the realization of God’s love and compassion through meditation on the life and death of Jesus Christ. Meditation is used as a means to create and deepen the bond of love between the practitioner and Jesus Christ.

The term ‘contemplation’, on the other hand, is used for forms of prayer in which the activities of the faculties of the soul are soothed or even transcended—and also the body is quietened. To practise contemplation means to cultivate inner calmness and recollection that should lead to the experience of a void or nothingness, an annihilation of the egocentric self through which the awareness of the presence of God arises. Accordingly, the attitude towards disturbances, temptations and one’s own sins differs from meditation. The active aiming for self-improvement is superseded by a gentle detachment from importunate thoughts. Higher stages of contemplation are thought of as graces that one cannot deliberately achieve.

34 For Quietist Quakerism, see Healey 2013.

The polarity between the two paths of practice can be typologized in the following way:

MEDITATION	CONTEMPLATION
Practices that activate and direct the faculties of the human being (the senses, gestures, discursive thought, imagination, emotion, will) to serve religious purposes	Practices that calm down the activities of the different faculties, recollect the mind and open the practitioner to a non-conceptual awareness of the presence of God (acquired contemplation) and union with him (infused contemplation)
<i>Focus on</i> 1. The human nature of Jesus Christ, his life, suffering and death. 2. Arousal of pious emotions, insights and moral acts through discursive reflections and visualizations 3. Fight against temptations, evil thoughts and vices	<i>Focus on</i> 1. The divine nature of Jesus Christ. 2. Cultivation of inner calm and recollection, the pure love of God without selfish interests 3. Passive detachment from temptations, evil thoughts and vices 4. Deeper levels of union with God that are not achievable deliberately (infused contemplation)
Trend towards differentiated methods, multiple topics and lengthy programmes	Trend towards simplified methods or even the negation of methodical practice except the maintenance of inner silence and a simple non-discriminative awareness of the formless and imageless God
Usually thought of as stabilizing and strengthening the established religious regime	Time and again thought of as subverting the established religious regime

Ways to Correlate the Two

As already indicated at the beginning of this paper, from the High Middle Ages onwards, attempts were made to clarify the relationship between meditation and contemplation. In the twelfth century, the Carthusian abbot, Guigo II, developed a hierarchical system of spiritual exercise (*spirituale exercitium*).³⁵ According to his influential *Scala Claustralium* (The Ladder of Monastics, i.e. the ladder whose rungs lead from earth towards heaven), the individual spiritual practice of monastics should start with careful ritual reading or listening to the recited texts of the Bible and supplementary scriptures (*lectio*). Meditation then focusses on certain passages or sentences, particularly those that impress the reader. One reflects upon their meaning with special regard to one's own life (*meditatio*). Afterwards, one turns to and asks God to remove what is evil and to grant what is good (*oratio*) according to the results of meditation. The highest level of practice is reached when God interrupts the flow of prayer to reveal Godself. The practitioner's mind is then elevated above itself to enjoy a foretaste of the joys of eternity (*contemplatio*). *Contemplatio* here is understood as a state of mind that spontaneously arises caused by God's grace (infused contemplation according to the terminology of later centuries) not as a form of practice.

Guigo II interlocks these stages in a systematic manner. He points out that meditation needs to be directed by reading to avoid errors, whereas reading without meditation remains fruitless. Prayer would be too lax without meditation. Conversely, meditation would only in exceptional cases be able to lift the mind to the heights of contemplation. Whenever the prayer that builds upon meditation is really devout, contemplation would

³⁵ Guigo II 1970. For a detailed analysis and comparison with Buddhist practices see Baier 2013a. From the late medieval times onwards the *Scala Claustralium* has been translated into vernaculars. It ceased to function as exclusive manual for monastics and became a spiritual guideline for lay people as well.

happen quite regularly and with ease. Guigo II concedes that the different steps may not always be taken in the proposed order, and that, according to the situation and level of the practitioner, their significance may change.

As has been showed above, in the following centuries, meditation and contemplation became two independent forms of mental prayer. Thus, the question of how they should be related to each other assumed new urgency. In the following I will sketch some typical answers.

In most of the treatises I am familiar with, meditation is thought of as preparation for contemplation. The intensity of practice and the value given to meditation differ, and certain groups or spiritual guides may have even thought that sometimes it would not be necessary to practice meditation before one starts with contemplation. However, I could not find any evidence of a complete rejection of meditation. At the other end of the scale, scepticism towards contemplation, as well as systems of practice that at least implicitly exclude contemplation, can be easily found.

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* considers long-time meditation practice as essential for achieving the perfection of religious practice, namely contemplation. He appreciates the potential of meditation to reshape emotional life and the faculty of imagination that have been distorted through sin. On the other hand, he warns against the dangers of meditation, such as deceptive visions and overblown emotions, which cause exaggerated forms of pious behaviour. One should start with contemplation as soon as meditation becomes dry and one feels drawn towards contemplative states, either spontaneously or inspired by books or spiritual guides.

In later times, refined sets of criteria were elaborated to enable practitioners and their spiritual guides to evaluate if the time was ripe to proceed from meditation to contemplation. The theory of the three signs created by Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591) probably became the most influential of these attempts. His criteria for starting with contemplation are:

1. The practitioner is no longer able to gain satisfaction from meditation, as no new insights and inspirations appear
2. Nevertheless, there is no desire to fix attention on non-religious matters
3. The practitioner experiences an inner silence and rest during practice that he/she feels inclined to, even if there is still a wish to stick to the familiar meditation techniques.

With criteria two and three, Juan de la Cruz wants to rule out the inability to meditate being caused by the craving for earthly things or by a pathological disinterest that we today would call depression. He emphasizes the danger of overlooking these three signs and encourages his readers to follow the call to contemplation. If the signs appear, then one should end meditation and instead spend the time in mental prayer by simply abiding in quietness and loving attentiveness for the presence of God without active imagination or thought (see St. John of the Cross 2017, 189-191).

Some important authors within this discourse look at the correlation between meditation and contemplation from a Christological point of view. This line of thought is represented in Chapter 49 of the classic *Ejercitatorio de la vida espiritual* (Manual of exercises for the spiritual life) compiled and partially written by García de Cisneros and published in Montserrat, Spain, in 1500. The chapter is taken almost verbatim from Gerard Zerbold van Zutphen's *De spiritualibus ascensionibus* (On the spiritual ascensions), a major work of one of the leading theologians of the Devotio Moderna (Terence O'Reilly 1973, 316-321). In line with Zutphen (1367-1398), Cisneros distinguishes three ways of contemplation. The word 'contemplation' here is used as an umbrella term for exercises that function as stages on the mystical ascension towards union with God. The Christological argument runs as follows: Because Jesus Christ shares two natures, the human and the divine, he is able to mediate between the ultimate reality, namely God, and the world of human beings. Taken step by step, three levels of spiritual practice reveal Jesus Christ as the doorway towards the experience of God:

1. Ruminating on the earthly life and death of Jesus Christ to learn from his virtues and to intensify one's admiration, love, and devotion for him as an exemplary man (meditation on Jesus as a human being).
2. Learning to conceive the life and death of Jesus as disclosure of God (meditation on Jesus as human being and God).
3. Developing a loving knowledge of the ever-lasting light of the Godhead (contemplation in the strict sense focussing on the Divinity of Jesus Christ, i.e. the loving God that he reveals through his life and death).

In this way, a theocentric Christology is used to differentiate and relate different forms of mental prayer and to substantiate the superiority of contemplation. In a similar vein, Miguel de Molinos argues that although the humanity of Jesus Christ is the most perfect means to reach God and the ultimate channel by which the faithful receive all the good they hope for,

nevertheless humanity is not the summit of goodness, which consists of seeing God. And just as Jesus Christ is greater according to his divinity than according to his humanity, so he who always thinks of and looks at God always thinks of and looks at Jesus Christ (since in Christ divinity is united to humanity). This is especially true of the contemplative, in whom faith is the most simple, pure, and practiced. Means always cease when one reaches the end. (Molinos 2010, 58)

Naturally, those who supported the absolute superiority of meditation on the life and death of Jesus Christ took a different stance. With his *Vita Christi* (after 1348), one of the most widespread devotional books of the late medieval ages, Ludolph of Saxony became one of the foremost teachers of imaginative meditation. Although he was unable to give rational reasons for the superiority of this kind of practice over imageless contemplation, he preferred it because of the pleasurable emotions raised by the devotion to Jesus Christ's humanity:

Oh good Jesus, how sweet you are in the heart of one who thinks upon you and loves you...I know not for sure, I am not able fully to understand, how it is that you are sweeter in the heart of one who loves you in the form of flesh than as the word, sweeter in that which is humble than in that which is exalted...It is sweeter to view you as dying before the Jews on the tree, than as holding sway over the angels in Heaven; to see you as a man bearing every aspect of human nature to the end, than as God manifesting divine nature, to see you as the dying Redeemer than as the invisible Creator. (Quoted from Duffy 2005, 237)

After the suppression of Quietism, discursive meditation became the unquestioned summit of mental prayer in Catholic spirituality. Contemplative forms of meditation that would encourage the transition from meditation to contemplation still had a place within theories of prayer, but they had been downplayed as transient side effects of practice. It was considered to be presumptuous to strive for the higher stages of contemplation. Meditation became increasingly formalized and it was functionalized in order to support the official trend within Catholic spirituality to focus on the emotional devotion of Jesus Christ as sent from God to suffer for the sins of mankind, as well as on the moral conclusions that one could draw from his life and death.

The Renaissance of Contemplation

Over the last century a revival of contemplative prayer within and without the Christian churches took place in two waves (Arroj 1999, 185-229). The first one started around 1900 and was in full swing during the interwar period. It prepared the ground for the second wave that gained momentum in the late 1960s (Baier 2009, 543-583, 909-941). The reappraisal of contemplative prayer and its history has been connected with new insights from comparative religion, psychological approaches and the influence of South- and East Asian forms of practice.³⁶ The first wave the-

³⁶ The main representatives and currents of both waves are treated by Baier 2009, 543-941.

matized contemplation primarily within the context of a renewed theology of mysticism. Theoretical efforts to revive contemplative prayer dominated, although here and there also new forms of practice emerged. In the second wave the focus shifted towards the development and spread of contemplative exercises.

The reasons for the modern interest in mysticism are manifold. A widespread consciousness of the 'crisis of Western culture' and a critical look at the negative effects of industrialization and the modernization of society in general led to increased scepticism with regard to materialistic worldviews and the belief that modern science, technology and social change would lead humankind straight away into a golden future. World War I, of course, deepened this consciousness of crisis. At the same time, the hegemonic Christian Churches lost their self-evident and undisputed credibility—at least among the educated classes and the members of Marxist and socialist movements that differed from the older Christian forms of socialism and communism (Strube 2016).

The revival of mysticism was far from being a mere nostalgic traditionalist reaction against the modern times or an elitist response to the mediocre mainstream religiosity within the Churches. It shaped modern culture and the arts in a creative way, connected theology and religious studies with the latest achievements within psychology and philosophy, and inspired new developments within the broader religious field.

Many spiritual seekers looked for religious experiences and practices that would help them in building up a new religious identity. Additionally, more and more information about non-Christian spiritualities became available and especially the 'mysticism of the East' gained appeal:

The fin de siècle saw an upsurge of interest in elements that had all but disappeared from Christian orthodoxy and the development of an appetite for spiritual paths that were decidedly non-Christian. The new 'spiritual movement' looked instead to medieval and Renaissance Christian mysticism, heterodox inspirational neo-Christianity, and Eastern religions. (Owen 2004, 21)

In the course of the century, the number of teachers who disseminated meditative and contemplative practices with a Hindu or Buddhist background (usually under the umbrella term 'meditation') dramatically increased in the USA and in Europe. The Christian Churches perceived the growing interest in mysticism and contemplation and reacted critically or by reconsidering their own heritage in order to develop orthodox offers that would fit to the new religious needs and aspirations. Moreover, fascinating hybrids, like 'Christian Zen' or 'Christian Yoga', emerged within the second half of the century and brought with them controversies that are still ongoing today.

The revival of contemplation within the Catholic Church started in France with the publications of the Jesuit, Augustin-François Poulain (1836-1919), and Abbé Auguste Saudreau (1859-1946), a chaplain at the mother house of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Angers.³⁷ The books of these two founders of modern Catholic mystical theology were meant to be manuals for spiritual directors and practitioners but also became classics of the modern academic theology of mysticism. Both treated the traditional forms of meditation and contemplation in a historically well-informed and at the same time systematic way.³⁸ They rehabilitated the states of mystical union (passive, infused contemplation) and considered discursive meditation to be a prerequisite of contemplation.

According to Poulain, a profound gap exists between meditation as the most elaborate kind of ordinary prayer and infused contemplation. He compares ordinary prayer with the atmosphere that surrounds the earth. Thanks to it, the birds can rise above the earth:

But this atmosphere has its limits. Above, lie those vast expanses that stretch away to the stars and beyond. Try as they may, they cannot penetrate thither, *even by redoubling their efforts*. The eagle is as powerless as the rest. God alone can transport them to

37 See Poulain 1901 and Saudreau 1896, 1903. For a comparison between Poulain and Buddhist as well as Hindu sources, see Rose 2016.

38 They, however, still condemned the Quietist movement wholesale without any distinction.

this region; were He to do so, they would lie passive in His hand, there would be no further need to use their wings. They would have to discard their former methods of operation and adopt new ones. This upper region, where the wing no longer has any power, is a figure of the mystic state. It resembles it also by its peace, its silence. (Poulain 1928, 2; Poulain's emphases)

On its highest level, meditation becomes simplified to such a degree that 1) 'intuition to a great measure replaces reasoning' and 2) 'the affections and resolutions show little variety and are expressed in only few words' (Poulain 1928, 8). He calls this the 'prayer of simplicity' and identifies it with acquired contemplation (Poulain 1928, 11). According to Poulain, the prayer of simplicity tends to even further simplification:

The soul is then drawn to content herself with *thinking of God* or of *His presence* in a confused [i.e. non-discriminative, KB] and general manner. It is an affectionate remembrance of God. If this be consoling, the soul feels a sacred flame which burns on gently within her and takes the place of reasonings. (Poulain 1928, 13, Poulain's emphases)

This 'prayer of loving attention to God' or 'exercise of the presence of God' would be most recommended by all experts in the field of spiritual exercises (Poulain 1928, 13). For Poulain, it is closest to the states of infused contemplation. He thinks that many of those who practice mental prayer daily would arrive at this stage of practice, at least after some years, and that other people are from the very beginning of their practice more inclined to it than to discursive meditation, but does not give any detailed advice for its practice.

Saudreau, on the other hand, rejected the strict division between acquired and infused contemplation and emphasized that mystical contemplation is not a special grace but the common goal to which all Christians are called. He describes 'affective prayer' as an advanced form of meditation in which the emotional opening towards God becomes more important than discursive thought and moral introspection (Saudreau 1907, 249-265). He

recommends periods of inner silence within meditation in line with Brother Lawrence and Caussaude, whom he actually quotes. This practice should serve as preparation for contemplation even before the signs for the call to contemplation have become apparent (Saudreau 1907, 308-309). Therefore, these pauses for Saudreau have almost the same function as the prayer of simplicity for Poulain.

The discrepancies between the two are based on their different concepts of spiritual development that have been intensively discussed in the Catholic theology of mysticism in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Poulain, the heights of the mystical states of contemplation are only reached by a rapture of the mind caused by a special divine grace that is only given to a limited number of people. For Saudreau, spiritual life is a gradual ascent from usual prayer to increasingly concentrated forms of meditation and finally infused contemplation. For him, in a certain way, the whole path is already present within the first step. Despite these differences, they were quite close to each other with regard to the practice of meditation and contemplation.

The Brother-Lawrence-type of contemplation in daily life was revitalized within a current that I have called the 'school of recollection'. One can find a very elaborate version of this kind of spirituality in the works of theologian and philosopher, Romano Guardini (Baier 2009, 695-813).

On the Protestant side, one should first mention Evelyn Underhill, an Anglican poet, lay theologian with strong Catholic leanings, a prominent spiritual director and leader of retreats within the Anglican Church. Underhill herself practised meditation and contemplation on a daily basis. Today she is venerated within the Anglican and Episcopal Church as a holy person, and she is liturgically commemorated on special feast days. In her most famous book, *Mysticism* (1911), she interpreted the Christian mystical tradition in light of modern psychological, philosophical and theological concepts (Underhill 1999). She also taught the practice of meditation and contemplation. In her *Practical Mysticism* (1915), she teaches a spiritual ascent that starts with recollection, in the

sense of training the focussing of one's attention, and discursive meditation. The second step consists of a contemplation of the presence of God within God's creation and finally leads towards inner silence and the union with God through infused contemplation (Underhill 1915).

Besides the work of Underhill, the Protestant revival of mysticism was triggered by important liberal theologians of early twentieth century German Protestantism, such as Ernst Troeltsch, Friedrich Heiler and Paul Tillich.³⁹ In his *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Gruppen und Kirchen* (The Social Teachings of the Christian Groups and Churches), Ernst Troeltsch defines mysticism as a form of religion that focusses on the experience of the redeeming union between God and the individual. He distinguishes spontaneous mysticism from 'mysticism in the technical sense', the latter being an elaborate religious culture that combines theories about the path towards union with a system of religious practices. Mysticism in the technical sense comprises theoretical foundations, ethics of sanctification and perfection and 'techniques to gain and complete mystical experience' (Troeltsch 1912, 854-855).

According to Troeltsch, Christian mysticism found its most radical, individualistic expression within an early modern Protestant current known as 'Spiritualismus' (in the sense of 'spiritual religion') that he considered to be one of the historical roots of modern religiosity.⁴⁰ Romantic versions of this Protestant mysticism, which could be traced back to thinkers like the poet and philosopher Novalis and the theologian Schleiermacher, would be 'the secret religion of the educated people' of the present time

39 As one might expect the mystical turn within Protestantism unleashed intense debates. Karl Barth especially and other representatives of dialectic theology, like Emil Brunner, strongly criticised it.

40 'Spiritualismus' as Protestant historical current is not identical with spiritualism or spiritualism as religious movements that claim to communicate with the deceased. According to Troeltsch, Sebastian Franck, Valentin Weigel, Dirck Coornheert, and John Salmartsch are the most important early modern spiritualists, followed by Karlstadt, Schwenkfeld, and others. See Troeltsch 1912, 862.

(Troeltsch 1912, 931). Troeltsch thought that the integration of this kind of Christian religiosity into Protestantism would be of crucial importance for its future existence. But he did not refer to any of the traditional techniques of contemplation nor did he discuss what contemporary practice might look like.

Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) was an ecumenical Protestant theologian of Catholic origin, a scholar of religious studies, and leader of the High Church Movement in Germany. In 1918, he published his first major comparative study, *Das Gebet. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und religionspsychologische Untersuchung* (published in English as *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, 1932) based on his extensive doctoral thesis of 1917. Also in 1918, his important study on Buddhist meditation and contemplation, entitled *Die buddhistische Versenkung*, was released as a supplement to *Das Gebet*. In the latter, Heiler distinguishes several types of prayer within different religions (Heiler 1918). He generalizes the sequence of meditation–contemplation–mystical union by extending it to non-theistic mysticism:

The passion of the theistic mystic [Gottesmystiker] expressed in prayer wells up spontaneously at times from the subconscious depths, but most often it derives its emotional intimacy and fervour from religious meditation. Even the deep absorption of the mystic of infinity [Unendlichkeitsmystiker] cannot dispense with preparatory meditation. All mystical prayer and contemplation is nourished by meditation, purposely cultivated and practiced... Meditation sometimes is predominantly logical-discursive, but more often it is of an intuitive-imaginative type. Pondered religious truths, the meditator envisions them as vivid as possible. (Heiler 1919, 287)

Heiler rehabilitates mysticism and praises contemplation as the most sublime form of prayer. On the other hand, he follows Nathan Söderblom's distinction between mystic and prophetic (i.e. biblical and Protestant religion) and applies it to his topic. Finally, he considers prophetic prayer as verbal addressing of God centred around petition and intercession as superior to contemplative

mystical prayer (Heiler 1919, 409). In *Das Gebet*, this tension within his theology of prayer remains unresolved.

Heiler was not only a theoretician; he also experimented with liturgical worship, meditation and contemplation within the High Church movement. In 1933, he was one of the speakers at the first of the famous Eranos conferences in Ascona, Switzerland. The conference dealt with 'Yoga and Meditation in the East and the West' and Heiler presented several lectures on contemplation within Christian Mysticism (Eranos 1933). In addition to his talks, he conducted spiritual exercises for those in the Eranos audience who wished to engage practically in meditation and contemplation (Hakl 2013, 58-59).

In his Eranos lectures, Heiler no longer refers to the dichotomy of prophetic and mystical prayer. Instead, he emphasizes that, in spite of their prophetic-active character, already the Jewish roots of Christianity contained a strong contemplative element. Additionally, the contemplative dimension of Christian faith would have been strengthened by the influence of the Hellenistic mystery religions, Platonism and neo-Platonism. Heiler rejects the view of 'common Protestantism' that this kind of Hellenization has corrupted Christianity: 'The biblical-Christian and Hellenistic current merged and thus created the unprecedented richness of Christian-contemplative piety' (Heiler 1934, 254). The two main forms of this piety were the communal contemplation of the Christian cult and the individual contemplation that emerges from this spring. Very much like the innovative Catholic theologian, Romano Guardini, he connects the revival of individual contemplative prayer with the concerns of liturgical reform.

As already mentioned, the second wave of the revival of contemplation was more practically oriented than the first one. Unfortunately, the achievements of the earlier Catholic theology of mysticism, as well as the liberal Protestant approaches to mystical prayer, have more or less fallen into oblivion.⁴¹ The intellectual level of the modern Christian contemplative movement suffered

41 With some remarkable exceptions like Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle and Thomas Keating.

from this amnesia. At the same time, two other significant changes have taken place. First, the traditional ways of meditation have lost their former importance and have been increasingly replaced or at least altered by more contemplative forms. Second, the distinction between contemplation and meditation has been removed, with the word 'meditation' becoming an umbrella term for both types of practices with an emphasis on contemplative exercises.

The final section of this paper deals with two similar, popular schools of contemplative prayer that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century: 'Christian meditation' developed by the Benedictine, John Main (1926-1982) and 'Centring Prayer', introduced by the Trappist, Thomas Keating (1923-2018) in collaboration with other members of his monastic community.

Neither monk founded a new contemplative order nor focussed on the contemplative renewal of their respective communities only. They chose international non-monastic organizations to spread their practices. Keating's Contemplative Outreach Ltd. and John Main's World Community of Christian Meditation draw mainly on lay practitioners, although the founders and a significant number of the teachers are still monastics and/or priests. The Catholic background of both schools is evident, but nevertheless they are ecumenically oriented. As shown in this article, an ecumenical character and a growing lay-orientation could already be observed in much earlier phases of the popularization of contemplation and meditation.

Main and Keating concede the influence that Eastern practices had on the genesis of their methods and position their schools as decidedly Christian responses to the challenge posed by them. John Main calls the contemplative practice he teaches 'saying the mantra', probably because it was Swami Satyānanda, a student of Swami Sīvānanda and founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, who first taught him how to contemplate. A second reason is probably the fact that, in the second half of the twentieth century, the term 'mantra' had become part of everyday language and Main might have thought that it would be more attractive for his target audience than 'prayer'.

As an abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, Keating organized interreligious dialogue events with Christian, Buddhist and Hindu speakers. Additionally, Zen meditation took place in St. Joseph's Abbey. His experience with Asian practices motivated Keating to offer contemplative exercises as a way to prepare the mind for infused contemplation. He thus adds a new note to the old debate about acquainted contemplation:

Contemplative prayer raises an important question: Is there something that we can do to prepare ourselves for the gift of contemplation instead of waiting for God to do everything? My acquaintance with Eastern methods of meditation has convinced me that there is. There are ways of calming down the mind in the spiritual disciplines of both East and West that can help to lay the groundwork for contemplative prayer. (Keating 2004, 29)

By introducing the practice of Centring Prayer, Keating and his associates deliberately formatted Christian practice in a way that was to be compelling for modern people with an interest in Asian forms of practice.

Main recommends concentrating on the Aramaic phrase *maranatha* that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and in the *Didachē*, an early Christian church constitution from around 100 CE. *Maranatha* can be read 'Our Lord has come', a formula to express the presence of Jesus Christ within the Christian community, or as 'Come Lord!', a call for Jesus Christ to become present. Like many other exegetes, Main adheres to the second option. Accordingly, the meaning of *maranatha*, as he understands it, is similar to the aforementioned *spiritalis theoriae* formula of John Cassian, to whom Main explicitly refers as source of his practice (Main 2017, 57-61).

The 'mantra' should be repeated silently in a calm and steady rhythm while sitting in an upright position. It should be accompanied by calm and rhythmic breathing. The aim of this practice is to reach an inner silence in which the mantra itself disappears, and the practitioner enters a 'cloud of unknowing' as Main says, paying tribute to the late medieval text on contemplation. In this

cloud, the Holy Spirit would take over by speaking to the contemplating person from the depths of his or her heart. Main recommends a daily practice of about twenty to thirty minutes.

Centring Prayer is a kind of one-word contemplation that is even closer to the style of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. But in contrast to the old text, the practice of Centring Prayer is not bound to words that refer to traditional Christian meditation – and not even to a specific Christian tradition. The practitioners are free to choose their own 'sacred word'. Some words that Keating mentions as examples do have a strong Christian connotation like God, Jesus, Father, Spirit; but others, like Life, Peace, Love and Presence, do not. The 'sacred word' should in any case be a word one personally likes. Moreover, it should not only function as a tool for concentration but as a word that supports the intention of the practitioner of opening him or herself to the presence of God.

Like John Main, Keating recommends a regular practice of twenty to thirty minutes in a comfortable sitting position. He proposes starting with a few minutes of observing the breath to calm down the mental activities, but does not elaborate on the topic of breathing. Again, very similar to Main's method, the attention on the sacred word should lead to a 'resting in God' (a traditional term of Christian theology of mysticism) in which the word disappears and inner silence emerges. Referring to modern psychology, Keating argues that God dwells within the depths of the unconscious. The experience of his presence is buried under emotional entanglements that arise from early childhood onwards. He claims that Centring Prayer triggers a therapeutic process in which these affective patterns are disclosed and the practitioner is able to rediscover his or her divine source.

As has been shown in previous sections of this paper, the practice of concentrating on a single word or short phrase has been quite common throughout the history of Western European religion. Main and Keating are familiar with this tradition and draw primarily on the heritage of Christian practice with a clear focus on the Western European contemplation that they want to present in updated forms.

Contemplation is no longer bound to a preliminary stage of discursive meditation as it was in the first wave of the revival of contemplation at the beginning of the twentieth century, but has become a practice in its own right. Keating also introduces a contemplative form of *lectio divina* as a supplement to Centring Prayer, probably to connect the practitioners of Contemplative Prayer to a more bible-related spirituality. He reinterprets (and, from a historical point of view, misinterprets) the fourth stage of Guigo's *Scala claustralium* as methodical contemplative prayer (acquainted contemplation) and (historically correct) underlines its oppression in Catholic theology since the Quietist debate:

In practice I think we can teach people to proceed in tandem toward contemplative prayer, that is, to read and reflect on the word of God in scripture, make aspirations inspired by these reflections, and then to rest in the presence of God. This is how *lectio divina* was practiced in the monasteries of the Middle Ages. The method of Centering Prayer emphasizes the final phase of *lectio* because it is the phase that has been most neglected in recent times. (Keating 2004, 28)⁴²

The long and intertwined history of contemplation and meditation has finally reached a point in which, after a period in which it almost had died out, contemplative prayer can once again be learned and practised by every Christian who is interested in it. As the example of Keating's *lectio divina* shows, even if the different traditional kinds of meditation are a little out of fashion today, they still have good chances of not only surviving but of being renewed and reinvented in the spirit of contemplative silence.

42 Molinos, another protagonist of contemplation as methodical practice who tried to fit it into Guigo's scheme, historically wrongly identified the third stage (prayer) with acquainted contemplation and the fourth (historically rightly) with infused contemplation. See Molinos 2010, 187.

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