The contemplative life and a life of contemplation: The cases of Thomas Keating (1923-2018) and Henri J M Nouwen (1932-1996)

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In the Department of Religion and Theology

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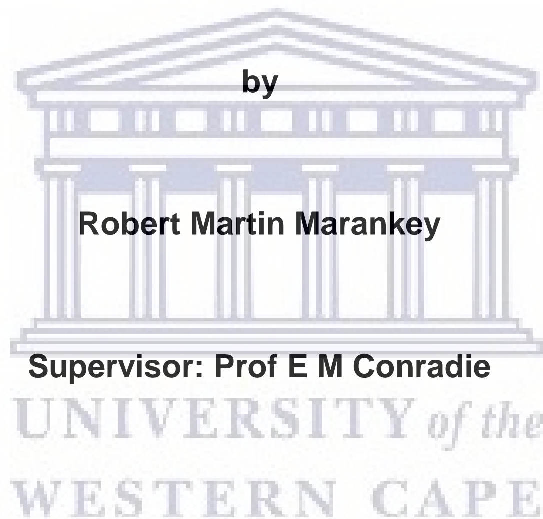

by

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Declaration

I declare that *The contemplative life and a life of contemplation: The cases of Thomas Keating* (1923-2018) *and Henri J M Nouwen* (1932-1996) is my own, unaided work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Western Cape.

Robert Martin Marankey

4 November 2020

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Dedication

Dedicated to my Saviour and Lord – *Christus heri*, *hodi et usque in sempiternum* – for ability and inspiration.

To the sacred memory of my parents, Martin Robert Marankey and Ida Marankey.

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Key words

Christian Spirituality

Contemplative Prayer

Consistency

Ecumenism

Henri Nouwen

Mysticism

New monasticism

Social Activism

Thomas Keating

Trappist

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Abstract

There has been an upsurge of interest in Christian spirituality in recent years. In this thesis I will provide a brief survey of the history and forms of Christian spirituality in order to sketch the background against which this study will be situated with specific reference to the history of contemplative spirituality. Beginning with the life and teachings of the Desert Fathers it will show that contemplative prayer is firmly rooted in the ancient Christian tradition. More specifically, I will focus on two contemporary exponents of the contemplative tradition of spirituality, namely Thomas Keating (1923-2018) and Henri Nouwen (1932-1996).

The study is based on the observation that spirituality and biography are often intertwined. Although the lives and practice of both Thomas Keating, a "cloistered contemplative" and Henri Nouwen an "uncloistered contemplative" encapsulate the notion of prayer as action there are, however, significant differences in their respective approaches. In this thesis I will explore the question whether and to what extent their life of contemplation is consistent with their view on the contemplative life. In the case of Keating the emphasis will be on "A life of contemplation" whilst in the case of Nouwen the emphasis will be on "A contemplative life". Such a comparison invites further reflection on how the tradition of contemplative spirituality is expressed within the South African context.

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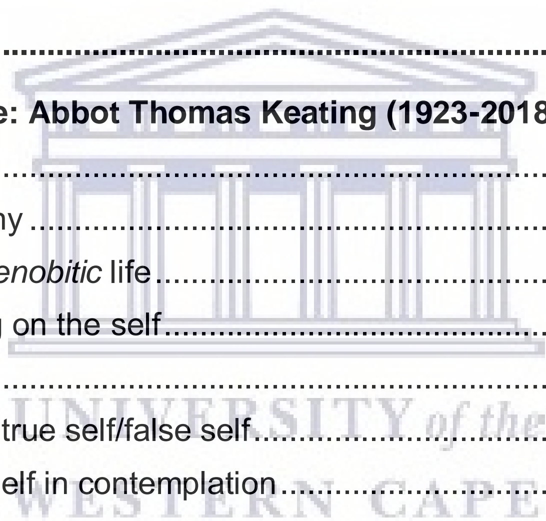
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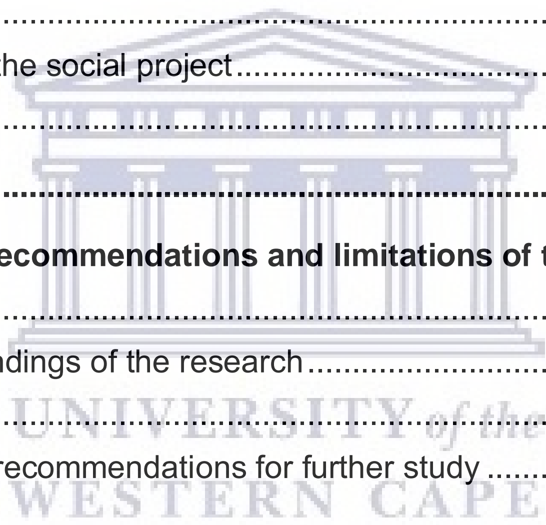
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Chapter 1:

Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction and methodological clarification

This study is situated in contemporary discourse on Christian spirituality. The latter has developed as a specialised field of study in the early twentieth century and typically focuses on spiritual (or mystic) experience, spiritual disciplines and different forms, traditions and sources of spirituality. In contrast, academic discourse on Christian spirituality builds on a long history that includes diverse traditions such as the Desert Abbas and Ammas, Benedictine monasticism, Franciscan spirituality, the Carmelite tradition, Ignatian spirituality, the Rhineland mystics and many others. Contemplative Christian spirituality is embedded in this wider tradition but typically focuses on a complete withdrawal from public life in order to contemplate union with God. The main classic exponents – and *loci classici* – of such contemplative spirituality include St Benedict, Dona Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada (St Teresa of Avila), Juan de Yepes y Alvarez (St John of the Cross)., St Thérèse of Lisieux, Bernard of Clairvaux and Dame Juliana (or Julian) of Norwich.

There are many contemporary expressions of the tradition of contemplative spirituality such as Christian Listeners, L'Arche, Taizé, the Center for Action and Contemplation, the Northumbria Community and Pilgrimages of Prayer and Presence. However, a different expression of contemplative spirituality emerged after World War II in which the withdrawal from the public sphere is regarded as a strategy that is indeed necessary but only in order to re-engage with public concerns in a way that would be not only distinctively Christian but also fruitful. Proponents of this form of contemplative Christian spirituality include Evelyn Underhill, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Thomas Keating, Roger Schutz-Marsauche and Jean Vanier.

The present study explores the expressions of contemplative spirituality of two of these figures, namely Fr Nouwen and Fr Keating. Nouwen was a Dutch Roman

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Catholic priest who gave up a promising academic career to join the L'Arche Community in Toronto for intellectually disabled adults. Even though he professed the need to re-engage with public concerns the thrust of his contemplative lifestyle found its greatest expression within the boundaries of the L'Arche community. Keating was the Abbot of St Joseph's Monastery, but resigned to live as an ordinary monk in the community of Snowmass, Colorado. He retreated into the Snowmass community to contemplate his outreach ministry albeit that this outreach focused on spirituality and not so much on public concerns.

In essence, this study investigates the question whether or not the views of Thomas Keating and Henri Nouwen on the contemplative life are consistent with their own lives of contemplation. This will require an overview of contemporary expressions of the contemplative tradition in which both situate themselves. It will draw on available material on their personal biographies and will entail a detailed analysis of their writings on contemplative spirituality in order to address the question as stated above. The study will then offer a comparison of the views of these two exponents of contemplative spirituality in order to explore the inevitable tension that underlies any strategic withdrawal from public life in order to re-engage with public concerns for the sake of justice and equitable transformation in society.

1.2 Context and situatedness of the study

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The twentieth century has witnessed a recovery and a creative revival of the ancient *apophatic* way of praying. In the Christian tradition such a way of praying is usually termed contemplation whereas the non-Christian traditions of the East, terms it meditation. This reawakening and recovery has more than one source. One is historical research (including a re-reading of the Desert Fathers) and the opening of Vatican II to "the full participation of the laity in the mission of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* IV), one aspect of which is the contemplative dimension. The other aspect is that worldwide, Christians are being confronted with the great spiritual traditions of the East. [1]

According to Jack and Betty Cheetham (1976:6) we can trace the origin of the new interest in Eastern mysticism to the 1960s when churches focussed on social issues.

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[1] Keating (1999a:55) refers to those who, in the 1960s and 70s, looked to the East and then returned to the mainline denominations as "alienated Christians". The term is in reference to the negative reception they received on attempting to reintegrate into the churches.

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It was, they surmise, “a time when going to church was like witnessing a replay of the 6 o’ clock news. *People experienced a spiritual hunger*” (my emphasis). This confrontation with Eastern mysticism poses a challenge as to what our methods of spiritual advancement might be. Seddon (1996:1), for example, is critical of the notion that the Christian rise in the interest of contemplative spirituality had coincided with a general secular and ‘New Age’ interest in spirituality over the last 40 years.

Another tributary has been the Orthodox tradition which itself has undergone a remarkable burgeoning. Fresh and radical writings have emerged from Mount Athos by young Abbots, who both stand in the ancient tradition and who are also well-versed in modern philosophy. One of the best writings emanating from Mount Athos is Olivier Clément’s *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (1993). Another important contribution is Tomas Spidlik’s *The Spirituality of the Christian East* (1986) that shows, although there is no direct convergence between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, at least there is a common return *ad fontes*.

Dom Edward Cuthbert Butler OSB (1927:323-324) argues that “There is a strong current running in these days along the way of return to the old tradition”. St Louis Sister, Una Agnew SL (2017:123), is therefore right in asserting that “We journey in an inherited stream, knowing that, in our collective unconscious, we have a rich treasury of mysticism, ritual, dogma and scripture”. Franciscan, Brennan Manning OSF (1996:149) perceives this journey of recovery of the Christian contemplative tradition as one where:

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> Today it appears that God is calling many ordinary Christians into [the] rhythm of loss and gain. The hunger I encounter across the land for silence, solitude and […] prayer, is the Spirit of Christ calling us from the shallows to the deep.

For Fr Laurence Freeman OSB (2005:5) the recovery of the contemplative tradition has its origin in “a thirst for being” within the modern contemplative seeker. This recovery has given rise to various movements and a proliferation of books on the tradition. With the recovery came a shift in understanding of contemplative prayer.

Proponents of this new understanding of the *Contemplative Way* have consciously and deliberately viewed contemplative prayer as engagement with our fractured world rather than retreat from it. They advocate a call to integrate contemplation and action in a life of service. By implication, asserts Merton OCSO (1973b:10, 25) “the

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[contemplative] withdraws from the world temporarily in order to listen more keenly to the deepest and most neglected voices" thereof. In this understanding, contemplation personifies "a self-confrontation which prevents us from becoming alienated from the world" (Nouwen, 1982b:125). Jesuit scholar Fr William Joseph Sneck SJ (1997:1), aligning himself with the Ignatian formula, disagrees with this description of contemplative prayer as "withdrawal from the world", even if only temporarily. Sneck (1997:1) and Florentini (1994:20) view it instead as *etiam in actione contemplativus* (learning to be a contemplative, even in the midst of activity).

Nouwen (in Garvey, 2006:58) concurs with this in stating that, "It is indeed in the usual, normal and ordinary events that we touch the mystery of human life. It is precisely in the moments when we are most human, most in touch with what binds us together that we discover the hidden depths of life." Abbé Michel Quoist (1971:154) explicates that, "If we knew how to listen to God all life would become prayer."

Following the time in prayer, contemplatives re-enter daily life to translate into positive action everything they have learned. For them action stems from the knowledge of their inter-relatedness with other people in God for, in the "desert" we are stripped of the false self and transformed into the new people we were meant to be. Keating (1996:83) postulates that entering true solitude is a way of joining every human being at the deepest level. Keating perceives this as our potential for union with God, manifested by a hunger for wholeness. It is in solitude and silence that we recognise the deeper needs of others and begin to discern the voice of the *anawim* or *marginales* (the poor or marginalised). For James Finley (2000:13) silence and solitude "provides the antidote against alienation". According to Finley (2000:14), "alienation stems from the ego or false self. It is this part of one's consciousness that divides and separates, thereby setting up an illusory dualism." For Finley, this egoic self hinders most profoundly our ability to live in contemplative awareness of our connectedness with the entire cosmos and respond creatively to it.

I propose, in line with Merton, cited in Burton *et al* (1975:296), that "our real journey in life is interior; it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts." According to Keating (1996:67) it is a life characterised by "an inner attraction for prayer, solitude and silence – to be still and wait upon God with loving attention." Such is the beginning of

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contemplation attests Merton (1989:118), "dark and secret at this stage, but which, to repeat the words of John of the Cross, enkindles the soul with the spirit of love… with yearnings." [2] It is a new journey of faith which signals a great change in the life of grace. This journey has often been perceived as "the process of a second conversion" maintains Dominican Père (Fr) Reginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange. For Garrigou-Lagrange (1938:33):

> It is not, however, something completed, but is rather an opening onto the whole landscape of the mystery of God […] over which we are meant to travel with even purer faith, being called and led onward to a further and greater communion in the divine life. On this way there will be deeper suffering, due to […] the wound of the longing for God, and to the extreme aridity arising from the sense of his seeming remoteness as even the depths of the spiritual self are thoroughly purified.

Out of this interior struggle we are able to respond in creative ways to the needs of the world.

Keating (2008a:36) correctly argues that modern-day problems should be dealt with creatively "… in light of the globalization of world society now taking place." It is therefore not strange that the renewed interest in Contemplative Spirituality would be experienced in South Africa as well. Denise Ackermann, Dominican priest Fr Albert Nolan OP, Christo Lombaard and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, among others, have documented this renewed interest extensively in books, scholarly articles in journals, and in papers they delivered at colloquiums. This study, however, will not concentrate on their contributions although we might make reference to them in passing.

This renewed interest is further evident from the proliferation of Schools of Prayer, Silent Retreats, Quiet Days, Ignatian Days, Days of Recollection, as well as Intensive and Post-Intensive Retreats. One example is the introduction of Contemplative Outreach to South Africa in 1991 by Winnie Young (first national chair) following her visit to St Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass. Contemplative Outreach South Africa was launched in May 1997 following a visit by Fr Carl Arico in April 1997. Another example is the establishment of the Institute (now Centre) for

[2] Merton is quoting from *The Dark Night of the Soul* Book 1, Ch. 10, No.6, here (See Kavanaugh *et al*, 1966:318).

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Christian Spirituality in Cape Town, in 1983, under the leadership of Fr Francis Cull, its spiritual director and founder.

I conclude with two final comments. Firstly, in contemplative terminology, the concepts Ultimate Reality/Ultimate Mystery, Numinous, Immanence, the Unknown, Holy Other and the Transcendent all refer to God; and in particular in reference to *unio mystica* (fruitive or mystic union with God). [3] Secondly, I am using the concepts *anawim, hombré unitil*, *marginales*, the vulnerable, 'the poor and suffering' interchangeably to refer to the poor, marginalised masses as a distinctive category which provides the context for social activism by active-contemplatives.

1.3 Delimitation and statement of research problem

1.3.1 Two contrasting approaches to contemplative life

The classical meaning of Contemplative Prayer for the 2nd to 6th centuries has been interpreted by critics as a withdrawal from the world (see À Kempis 1981; Dame/ Mother Julian 1961; Merton 1968a; Br Lawrence 1980). Withdrawal was perceived as the most authentic response to the gospel. It was understood as a deliberate act on behalf of contemplatives to divorce themselves from the world and its claims upon their life, time and interaction with the world. For Keating (1992, 2014, 2016a) and Merton (1948, 1949, 1950, 1958), the contemplative life was perceived as purely inward-looking (with its focus on *interior consolation*). It was understood as a journey of the heart. Its spirituality was marked by the language of *pilgrimage*. The real work was seeking God in love, perceived as a result of the spiritual indigence of the contemplatives.

In contrast to this position there are those mystics for whom contemplation leads to just and compassionate action. According to them, one contemplates God and "share with others the fruits of one's contemplation" (Aquinas OP, 1485; see 2012, *Summa Theologiae*, II Q. 188, A. 6) As Merton (1975:26) asserts, "Christian contemplation seeks the perfection of love, which inevitably leads to action." Contemplation thus occurs within the process of social transformation.

Consequently, contemplation helps one to respond to surrounding needs in

[3] In chapter sixty-seven of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the mystical author encourages the reader to form and deepen an intimate relationship with God, even to the point of *unio mystica* with God "in spirit, in love and in oneness of desire" (Johnston, 1973:134-135).

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appropriate ways; what Phileena Heuertz (2010:3) terms “contemplative activism” and Fr Thomas Green SJ (1990:39) terms a “contemplative-active vocation”.

Since contemplatives live and practice their prayer life from within a particular context, it is inevitable that their spirituality and life are intertwined. This understanding is important within the school of contemplative spirituality that seeks to re-engage with public life. This raises the question whether a person's life of contemplation is consistent with his or her views on the contemplative life. There are proponents of both the classical understanding of contemplation as withdrawal and those who teach that withdrawal is only for the purpose of re-engagement with society. The most prominent recent examples of contemplative Christian spirituality include Father Louis Thomas Merton (1915 - 1968), Frère Roger (1915 - 2005), Jean Vanier (1928 - 2019), Henri Nouwen (1932 -1996) and Thomas Keating (1923 - 2018).

Fr Louis, the Cistercian monk and solitary of the austere Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, was born on 31 January 1915 at Prades, France. Fr Louis, better known as Thomas Merton was aguably one of the great spiritual fathers of our time. By the time of his death on 10 December 1968 in Bangkok, Merton – Abbot and Master of the Novitiate – had established himself as one who was reaching out to other spiritual traditions and to the world beyond the monastery. For Merton (1973b:27), ‘prayer, silence and solitude are moments of grace which can awaken us to the contemplative side of our being’. Merton (1964:106) intimates that we are called to *ascesis*, not of restraint, but of response to the world in need.

Frère Roger Louis Schutz-Marsauche was born on 12 May 1915 in the Zürcher Unterland in Switzerland. Br Roger founded a monastic community in Taizé, Saône-et-Loire, near the ruined monastery of Cluny in Burgundy, France. Br Roger and his *compagnions* would welcome those who had come to Saône-et-Loire to be a discerning, challenging and questioning presence to the world. One of the aims of the community is to give renewed hope to those who are discouraged as a sign of the communion of the *Corpus Christi* (José González-Balado, 1981:1). Taize’s spirituality, we are informed by Sister of St Joseph Amy Hereford CSJ (2013:60, citing Schutz-Marsauche/Br Roger, 1972:45), “means abandoning a purely individualistic search for salvation to desire the salvation of all.”

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Jean Vanier, a Canadian Catholic philosopher and humanitarian, was born on 10 September 1928 in Geneva where his father was a diplomat in Switzerland. In 1964 he founded L'Arche Community in Trosly-Breuil, near Compeigne, France, an international federation of communities situated in over 37 countries for people with differing intellectual disabilities – the "developmentally delayed" – (Goodall; 2020:xv-xvi, 32) [4] and those who assist them. Information garnered from *The Communities of Faith and Light* (1986) indicates that he co-founded *Foi et Lumière* (Faith and Light) with Marie-Hèléne Mathieu in 1971. (The community works among people with developmental disabilities, their family and friends in more than 80 countries). *Foi et Lumière* was born out of a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1971 led by Vanier. According to Vanier (1991:7) "The heart of *Foi et Lumière's* spirituality is linked to a meeting with Jesus [contemplation] hidden in the hearts of those who are weak, poor, lonely and suffering [action]."

As an Anglican Priest-Religious who has been a member in a Franciscan Order since 2009, a Companion of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd since 1999, and a member of the *Confraternitie de Sancti Petrie* since 2006, I am under vows to follow a *Rule of Life* and participate in retreats of various forms and formats. My experience in these retreats suggests that participants do not always reflect critically on their own teachings and practices. There is a danger that they ignore the demands of the "social gospel" [5] and that contemplative prayer becomes an individualistic practice.

This begs the question, "How can renewal of faith and practice take place so that the participant is challenged to go out to struggle with the outward world?" This research was prompted by such personal experiences and reflections. It also personifies my life and journey as a contemplative; one that personifies a conscious decision, in line with Kathryn Spink (1993:249), "not to be cloistered but to be religious in the midst of the world". My vocation as an active-contemplative finds its expression in *Breadbasket Compassionate Ministries* with its motto "Broken, Blessed and Given in Service", an organisation founded by my wife, Penelope, and me in February 1986

[4] Renowned paediatrician Janet Goodall (2020:xv-xvi,7) highlights the suffering and pain experienced by developmentally wounded children and their parents, and the hope that the events of Good Friday offer to all those who carry demanding personal crosses and undergo their own mini-crucifixions. Goodall's (2020:35) related concept of "beloved children with difficulties" harks back to Nouwen's (1992, 1994) theme of 'the beloved' and 'belovedness'.

[5] According to Kara Rogers (2016:1) the term "social gospel" originated with Charles Monroe Sheldon (1896) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1907).

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on our return home from training as cross-cultural missionaries.

1.3.2. Primary research question

Given the context of the present study, where we explore the inter-relatedness between contemplation and action the primary research question can be formulated as follows:

> Are the views of Thomas Keating and Henri Nouwen on the contemplative life consistent with their own lives of contemplation?

1.3.3. Secondary research question

Since this study is situated in South Africa, such a comparison inevitably invites further reflection on how the tradition of contemplative spirituality is expressed within the South African context amidst the enormous social challenges symbolised by poverty and unemployment, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, water and food scarcity, state-capture scandals, social housing and the extra-judicial call for land expropriation without compensation. The secondary research question can be formulated as follows:

> How can renewal of faith and practice take place so that active-contemplatives in South Africa are challenged to go out to "struggle with the outward world"?

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This will be dealt with in chapter 7.

1.3.4 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study can be stated that's, "contemplation leads to action". Here I hypothesise that our contemplation of God in the inner cloister should move us to leave this time of encounter with God and encounter the "other" in creative activism. This premise is in line with the *leitmotif* of this study.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 introduces the purpose of the study, provides the delimitation and statement of the research problem. It also highlights the two contrasting approaches to contemplative life. These contrasting approaches can be summarised as a focus on world-renunciation and self-abnegation on the one hand, and action for the sake of others, on the other hand. The former is evident in the lives of contemplative

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monks and nuns. The latter is practiced by contemplative activists who are involved in social action on behalf of those who exist on the margins of society. Their action flows from, and is complementary to, prayer. It implies maintains Finley (2000:173), “a radical and profound experience of finding one’s contemplative community, in being contemplatively awakened to one’s ineffable communion with the all-encompassing totality the present moment manifests.” The chapter also provides the context in which the study will be conducted and highlights its situatedness.

In chapter 2 I discuss the classic forms of Christian spirituality. I trace the development of Christian spirituality, evident in its diversity of forms that had developed over the last twenty centuries. Taking the Desert Fathers as point of departure, I trace this development along a linear line to contemporary forms of Christian spirituality which culminates in a brief discussion of contemplative spirituality. This paves the way for a more comprehensive discussion of contemplative spirituality in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 encompasses a discussion of the varieties of Contemplative Practices (3.2), chiefly contemplative prayer, centering prayer and *lectio divina*. A further category is that of Contemplative Institutions and Movements (3.3). Here I explore three contemplative institutions or movements, i.e. New Monasticism, the Center for Action and Contemplation, and the Northumbria Community. The purpose of these explorations is to show that through their social activism these movements demonstrate support, through compassion and action, for the damaged members of society. Thus they are living in solidarity with people who are in need of ‘compassionate justice’ (Christopher D Marshall, 2012:155). [6]

Chapter 4 focuses on the two contrasting approaches to contemplative life. These contrasting approaches can be delineated into divine contemplation (*divinae theoriae*) and social and/or contemplative activism. Monastic contemplation has been, and continues to be, practiced by monks and nuns; whether as solitaries or in a contemplative community. This hidden life finds expression in the language of the desert (particularly the *interiora deserti*), with concepts such as silence and solitude, encounter and communion reoccurring. The practice of contemplative *silence* and

[6] Marshall’s use of the term compassionate justice is partly based on the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. According to Marshall it is incumbent upon those who are aware of the plight of the poor, and have the means to intervene meaningfully, to provide appropriate relief.

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solitude is to learn non-verbal ways to be present, to *encounter* God; “a time to sweep away the words in order to allow for the possibility of *communion* at a deeper level” aver Friends of Silence (*Letter to Friends*, November 2018). An active-contemplative life practiced by those in holy orders (secular or religious) and by the laity, presupposes love in action on behalf of the dispossessed and alienated.

According to Quoist (1971:22), “Man [sic] is not condemned to live as ‘an exile’ in this ‘valley of tears’; he is invited to participate, as a friend and a brother, in the mission entrusted to Jesus by the Father.” Therefore, the more we engage in silent contemplative waiting, the more we can give in our active life, for our interior life constantly shapes our exterior life. Here contemplative prayer (inner life) and social activism (outer life) are held in creative tension. This encounter with God, in silence, paves the way for seeing things from “the perspective of those who suffer” (Bonhoeffer, 1972:17). Francis Nemeck, Oblate of Mary Immaculate, and Marie Coombs, hermit, (1982:138) point out that, “There is no contradiction between action and contemplation when Christian apostolic activity is raised to the level of pure charity. On that level, action and contemplation are fused into one entity by the love of *God and of our brother in Christ*” (my emphasis). Merton, writing in *Life and Holiness* (1963:88-89) legitimises Nemeck’s OMI and Coombs’s position by intimating that:

> Christian charity is meaningless without concrete and exterior acts of love. The Christian is not worthy of his name unless he gives from his possessions, his time, or at least his concern in order to help those less fortunate than himself. The sacrifice must be real, not just a gesture of lordly paternalism which inflates his own ego while patronising ‘the poor’. *The sharing of material goods must also be a sharing of the heart, a recognition of common misery and poverty and of brotherhood in Christ. Such poverty is impossible without an interior poverty of spirit which identifies us with the unfortunate, the underprivileged, the dispossessed. In some cases this can and should go to the extent of leaving all that we have in order to share the lot of the unfortunate* (my emphasis).

Quoist (1971:20), following Merton, warns active-contemplatives against being “present in the world, but not committed to the world”; a call similar to Julie Polter (1995:10) who instructs us to “help the people who are hurt when … society turns away.” Action and contemplation, therefore, only become dynamic in so far as each

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interacts with the other.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 I explore the life, teaching and contemplative practice of Keating and Nouwen respectively. In these chapters there is a more thorough exploration of the juxtaposition of contemplation and action; i.e. an exploration of “The Two Lives” (*Per Duo de Vita*). I have chosen Keating and Nouwen because their spirituality underscores the notion of contemplation for the sake of “the other”. In Keating we encounter the tension of the monk practicing a life of mystical silence in the monastery (*vita contemplativa*) and action in the world (*vita activa*). As a contemplative monk, Keating is expected to practice the *cenobitical* life. This presupposes a marked leaning towards *anchoritism*, or disengagement with the world.

Merton (1953:7), Fr Hugh SSF (1961:20) and Urban Tigner Holmes (1980:30), drawing insight from the Desert Fathers, explain that there are two forms of anchorite life, i.e. *eremitical* (from the Greek *eremos* which means desert), which is life totally in solitude, and *cenobitical*, where the participants gather in community from time to time. Keating’s life and practice lean more towards the latter; in former times referred to as “the contemplative-communitarian strain” (Lewandowski, 2009:2 citing Cyprian Davis, 1972:175).

For Nouwen, contemplation cannot be viewed as something apart from the common life, but rather as a fundamental way of constructive living; i.e. as a mode of being-in-the-world for others. Consequently, for Nouwen, prayer begins when our hearts are open in compassion to the world around us, and we respond to the conditions of the time. Nouwen practices a contemplative-active vocation in which apostolic works (social activism) and formal prayer (contemplative waiting) complement and balance each other.

Chapter 7 is an exploration of contemplative spirituality in the South African context. I commence with an introduction (7.1) which sketches the prevailing social conditions in the country which calls for creative responses to alleviate the plight of the suffering masses. This is followed in section 7.2 where I highlight the present discourse among, and practice within, contemplative communities in South Africa. I hypothesise that the members’ contemplative stance displays a tendency which leans towards an inward-looking, individualistic and insular practice.

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Throughout the ages mystics like Underhill (1922, 1937 and 1941), Weill (1943, 1973) and Merton (1955, 1973) for example, warn that contemplation without the fruits of action might deteriorate into passivity. Likewise, action lacking the firm roots of listening (in quiet contemplation) to God, might lose its direction and become mere activism. Subsection 7.3 explores how this new transformed or "transfigured" awareness, shaped and informed by the ascetical dimension (Keating) and the active contemplative dimension (Nouwen), could inform the practice of contemplative activists, contemplative communities or networks in addressing the social ills in South African society in the third Christian millennium. This two-fold engagement à la Merton (1963:67) presupposes "personal encounter with others and participation in the ongoing trials, fears and struggles of the dispossessed." I propose that action has to be rooted in the encounter with God in silence; the fruit of which issues in creative activism in the world.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, draws the thesis to a logical conclusion. I commence with an introduction (8.1) followed by a summary of the thesis's findings with regards to the life, teaching and contemplative practice of Keating and Nouwen (8.2). The chapter concludes (8.3) with the limitations of the study and foregrounds recommendations for further study, followed by a final conclusion (8.4).

I present this thesis in the understanding encapsulated in the Dominican motto, *Contemplari et Contemplata aliis tradere*. Here the operating principle is that of a *semi-contemplative* apostolate as opposed to a *strict* life of contemplation.

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Chapter 2

Classic forms of Christian spirituality

2.1 Introduction

There are probably as many definitions of Christian spirituality as there are scholars working in this field. It is therefore impossible to define and confine what Christian spirituality entails. This situation may be the result of the rich diversity of forms of Christian spirituality that has developed over twenty centuries. Any contemporary contribution to the study of spirituality has to take cognisance of this history. The same applies to this study on contemporary forms of contemplative spirituality. For some the focus is on the experiential rather than the doctrinal. For others spirituality is about a sense of mysticism. Some seek to situate spirituality in experiences of what is natural. For others, the focus has to turn away from the world in order to contemplate God's identity and character. Accordingly, the goal of all spirituality is the mystical *visio Dei* (vision of God).

A brief survey of the history and forms of Christian spirituality could proceed along the following proposed continuum:

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1. Spirituality in the Patristic period
2. Spirituality in the Eastern tradition
3. Spirituality in the mediaeval Western tradition
4. Spirituality in the wake of the 16th century Reformations
5. Spirituality in an Age of Modernity
6. Pietist, Methodist, Evangelical and Pentecostal Forms of Spirituality
7. Twentieth Century Forms of Spirituality: The rôle of Ecumenism
8. Contemplative Forms of Spirituality

The scope of this study does not allow for an extensive discussion of all these periods. For the purpose of this study therefore, I shall offer a brief overview of Spirituality in the Patristic period (which references the monastic tradition), Twentieth Century Forms of Spirituality: The rôle of Ecumenism and, lastly, Contemplative

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Forms of Spirituality (which references the active contemplative tradition) in order to sketch the background against which this study will be situated.

2.2 Spirituality in the patristic period

Most of what follows was garnered from Bradley Patrick Holt (1997), although Sr Benedicta Ward SLG and Fr Norman Russell (1980:52-117), Fr Hugh (1961:20) and Merton (1953:20) also have extensive entries on the Patristic Period.

Carol Brooks (2008:2) points out that Christian monasticism – derived from the Greek *monos* – "dates from the early part of the fourth century and sprang up almost simultaneously in the Scete desert of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor." The point of departure was to follow Christ through *fuga mundi* (flight from the world) into a life of austerity and prayer). Their flight to the desert was an attempt by these men and women to "live out more fully the ascetical life" they longed for (Holt, 1997:51). Among the first of these was St Anthony of Egypt/St Anthony the Great (about 250-353). Anthony's life encapsulates not only the ascetical dimension but also service. He not only lived the hermitical life, but also advised and encouraged those who sought his help. As many historians contend, Anthony did not so much escape from the world […] as engage the enemy of humankind in spiritual combat.

According to Holt (1997:55) initial experiments with communal monasticism, as opposed to the individual or anchorite type practised by Anthony, were introduced by Pachomius. Holt (1997:56) maintains that "the most influential founders of this type of monasticism were Basil of Caesarea (330-79) in the East, Greek-speaking part of the empire, and St Benedict of Nursia (480-547) in the West, Latin-speaking part of the empire". Holt (1997:56) further contends that Basil's belief in the superiority of communal monasticism led him to write rules for monastic life on study, prayer and work. For Basil the whole of life was thanksgiving. He laid emphasis on "the importance of obedience in attacking self-will" (Holt, 1997:56).

In the West, in Italy, St. Benedict of Nursia (ca 480-547) founded the Benedictine Order at Monte Cassino, Italy. After a period of solitude and discernment during an extended stay in a cave above Lake Subiaco, Benedict developed a system of monastic governance which gave the abbot a great deal of authority while insisting on mutual discussion and debate. His *Regula Benedicti* or *Rule of St Benedict* (composed from 530-540, see 1931) is rather brief and non-legalistic. One of the

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fundamental spiritual principles of his understanding of monastic rule is the incorporation of physical labour with prayer – as expressed in the motto *ora et labora*. It is understood that the *Rule* teaches salvation and sanctification through asceticism. Common worship, work, rest and silence form the basis of the monastic life. Holt (1997:56) points out that the norm for Western monks up to the present consists of “the rhythm of prayers seven times a day, interspersed with physical labour, eating and sleeping in moderation.”

Among the early Christian spiritualities, the Celtic tradition has gained much prominence in present-day practice. Sr Elizabeth Rees OCV (2003:225-226) Fay Sampson (2000:1-123), Thomas O’Loughlin (1999) and Rebecca Friedlander’s 2013 film, *Celtic Pilgrimage* provide comprehensive accounts of Celtic spirituality. St Patrick (389-461) is widely acknowledged as the greatest exponent of this tradition. He had been captured and sent to Ireland where he laboured as cattle-herd. A life-changing encounter with God resulted in the call to return to Ireland as a missionary. O’Loughlin (1999:41) perceives Patrick’s life in Ireland as “first as a slave to a man, then as a slave to the gospel.”

At the outset monasticism was important within the Celtic tradition. The Coptic monks of Egypt directly influenced monasticism within the Celtic tradition. The *Life of Anthony* was well-known within Celtic Christianity. The church was headed by abbots rather than bishops. ‘Double’ monasteries were founded, including both men and women, and sometimes headed by women (e.g Whitby founded by Hilda). The most famous of the women saints of Ireland, Brigid (Bride, Bridget or Ffraid) was an abbess. Irish Christians emphasised the concept of the *anam ċhara* or ‘soul friend’ in their spirituality (see O’Donohue, 1996). One was not alone in the Christian walk, but the close companion could encourage and correct one along the way. The relationship presupposes counsel, confession and support.

Religious orders in Ireland originated in the ninth century and were extremely strict in their asceticism. Rees (2003:124) indicates that groups of monks who called themselves *Céli Dé* (Servants of God) encouraged a return to solitude and the rigorous ideals followed by monks of earlier times. Peter Macdonald highlights the practice of self-exile from one’s home or monastery. According to Macdonald (2008:1-2) it became common for Irish monks to leave home as Abraham was called to do and live far from the community that had nurtured and sustained them. *Celtic*

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Daily Prayer's (2002:8) additional information concludes that St Columba (521-97) was among the group of exiles who landed on the Scottish island of Iona in 563. Iona became a mission station and might be the location of the *Book of Kells*. At present Iona is the home of an ecumenical Christian community (Northumbria Community) founded in the 1930s which emphasises Christian loving in one's calling, including prayer, meditation and social service.

One of the well-known sources of our knowledge of Celtic Spirituality is a compilation of prayers by Alexander Carmichael (see 1900) in the late 1800s called the *Carmina Gadelica*. It is the oral tradition preserved in the Outer Hebrides islands. Holt (1997:58) points out that the attractiveness of this spirituality for the modern era is due to three factors. The first is its unifying character as a style of spirituality with direct links to the Middle East. Secondly, it is a spirituality which affirms the glory of God in the natural world. Finally, it is a spirituality which affirms women.

2.3 Twentieth century forms of spirituality: The role of ecumenism

As necessary background for this study it is important to comment on the impact of the ecumenical movement on Christian spirituality. The word ecumenism is derived from the Greek words *oikoumenê* (the inhabited world) and *oikos* (household). Daniel Kasomo *et al* (2012:1) point out that "[the] modern, comprehensive meaning of 'ecumenical' [is]: the entirety of the church, which, looking back to its common original tradition and looking forward to its hope, seeks a commonality in doctrine and in the life of faith."

Wakefield (1983:126) contends that ecumenical spirituality focuses on the life of worship and prayer for unity, with "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" an important event among mainstream churches. The ecumenical movement gained prominence in the twentieth century, but its historical roots are to be traced to the sixteenth century. For Wakefield (1983:126), "The nineteenth century became the launchpad for specific movements in areas of Protestant life and thought that were to usher in an interdenominational movement with a global reach." These, in turn, became the stimulus for a number of organic church unions.

The first international gathering of missionaries for fellowship and discussion took place in New York and London in 1854. The authors of *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2017:1) postulate that the International Missionary Conference held at

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Edinburgh in 1910 marked a turning point in ecumenical history. According to *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2017:1), "Protestants began to use the term ecumenism to describe the gathering of missionary and evangelistic endeavours and unitive forces."

A fuller entry in the *Encyclopædia* (2017:1-2) summarises the movement's evolution as stemming from the convergence of three gatherings, 1) International missionary conferences beginning with the Edinburgh Conference (1910) and taking shape as an institution in the International Missionary Council (1921), 2) The Faith and Order Conferences (on church doctrine and polity), commencing in the conference at Lausanne (1927), and 3) The Life and Work Conferences (on social and practical problems), beginning with the Stockholm Conference (1925). *Encyclopædia* (2017:2) further indicates that, at the Oxford Conference of Life and Work in 1937, proposals were drawn up to unite Life and Work with Faith and Order. The World Council of Churches was inaugurated in Amsterdam in 1948 with the International Missionary Council joining the World Council of Churches in 1961.

According to Williston Walker (1986:686) the Roman Catholic Church abstained from participation; particularly in view of "[the declaration in] the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928) that the only way in which the unity of Christianity could be engendered would be 'by furthering the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it'". Walker (1986:686) further points out that Pope John XXIII established the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity in 1961 whilst the Eastern Orthodox churches created the Pan-Orthodox Conference. During and after Vatican II (1962-1965), the Catholic Church used ecumenism to refer to the renewal of the whole church, undertaken to make it more responsive to 'separated churches' and to the needs of the world.

According to *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* (2017:2) and Don E Saliers there is no single form of spirituality entrenched in the ecumenical movement as its key feature is the mutual recognition of the variety of spiritual traditions. There is, however, a stronger sense of Christian unity that is articulated in the form of spirituality. Saliers (1989:520, 527) points to the growth of "The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity" (18-25 January) which was started in 1908, and approved by Pius X in 1909. Protestants understood Roman Catholic ecumenism to mean that they should "come home" to

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Rome. Saliers (1989:527) points out that Abbé Paul Couterier (1881-1953), [1] a bridge-builder between French Catholics and Reformed churches, convinced Protestants to adopt the “Week” for the purpose of prayer for unity. Since 1966 Vatican and the World Council have planned and promoted the “Week” together.

Other centres of dialogue, common prayer and work have contributed to the deepening of such an ecumenical vision. These include Taizé (France), Iona (Scotland), *Al Minuto de Dios* (Colombia) and Groupe des Dombes (France). These centres help to establish networks of faith communities committed to Christian transformation. All these centres seek to help ordinary, lay Christians with what may be called ‘the prayer of silence’. This prayer is characterised by Vanier’s (1979:81) notion of “Opening to God in adoration and opening to the poor in service”. [2]

2.4 Conclusion

In the preceding sections of this chapter I pointed out that contemplative prayer has representatives in every age stretching from the Desert Abbas and Ammas to twentieth century forms of Christian Spirituality. The constraints of length did not allow me to explore all these periods. As a result of this constaint I concentrated on three periods which directly impact the present study. These periods were, Spirituality in the Patristic period, Twentieth Century Forms of Spirituality and Contemplative Forms of Spirituality.

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[1] The Roman Catholic ecumenical movement was led by Abbé Paul Couturier in the mid-1950s. According to Brian Frost (2001:1) church history might show that the movement originated even earlier to the Malines Conversations in Belgium between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and to the work of the ‘Sword of the Spirit’ during World War II when Cardinal Hinsley and Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, cooperated on joint work.

[2] This study was completed in 2019. I only discovered in May 2021 when it was pointed out to me that media reports indicated that Vanier had been found guilty of sexually abusing six women who had sought advice, guidance and spiritual direction from him at Taizé (see for example https://www.bbc.com>news>world-51596516 and https://.www.washingtonpost.com.>religion>2020/02/23 as well as https://cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/larche-founder-jean-vanier-1.5472616).

These are morally unacceptable behaviours in one so highly respected internationally. Such a revelation warrants the removal of all references to him. However, I met Vanier in July 2003 when he was on a visit to Cape Town (16-19 July) where I interacted with him at a Clergy Conference and later in a one-on-one session. I found him to be intelligent, alert and very empathetic, caring and concerned about those who are suffering in society. The references in this thesis all highlight the positive contribution he has made to society. In view of this, I have chosen to retain the references to him in this thesis. As Jacques Dufresne (2017) proposes in his paper, it is “Coming to Terms with Jean Vanier: Beyond Conventional Admiration”. We should not infer that my retention of Vanier in the thesis is either an indication that I condone his actions or that I want to preserve his now-tarnished reputation. It is my hope that his inclusion in this thesis will not cause offense and further trauma in his victims. As such I apologise unreservedly to all concerned.

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I will unpack the concept “Opening to God in adoration and opening to the poor in service” in chapter 3 next. The chapter focuses on three varieties of Contemplative Practices, followed by a discussion of Contemplative Institutions and Movements where contemplative spirituality has found a home.

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Chapter 3

Contemplative spirituality in the 20th century

3.1 Introduction

Over the last twenty centuries various ways of cultivating contemplative prayer as a discipline in Christian Spirituality, have evolved. Keating (1992) points out that they have been called by diverse names corresponding to the various forms they have taken. "Thus", according to Keating, (1992:2), "we have Pure Prayer (Cassian), Prayer of Faith, Prayer of the Heart (Keating, Nouwen), Prayer of Simplicity/Prayer of Simple Regard (Bossuet), Prayer of Recollection (Teresa of Avila) and "practicing the presence of God" (Br Lawrence of the Resurrection)." Further initiatives have been launched by the Trappists, Discalced Carmelites and Jesuits to renew the contemplative orientation of their founders and to share their spirituality with the laity. The English-Irish Benedictine, Dom John Main OSB (1981), revived "Christian Meditation" as a method of cultivating contemplative prayer; the origin of which he attributed to John Cassian of Marseille (365-435).

Recent years have witnessed a proliferation of methods and practices of prayer. This resurgence appears to be creating "a Spirit-awakened hunger for deeper prayer, together with a marked resurgence of interest in contemplative prayer and its practice", according to Thelma Hall RC (1988:1). Nemeck and Coombs (1982) point out that for contemplatives, "it is important to listen to the voice of God (in *silence* and *attention*), to try to discern and distinguish the voice of God amidst the conflicting voices around and within us." It is also important to "listen to the voices of the world, particularly the hidden, neglected voices" as theologian and activist Fr Kenneth Leech (1992:195) attests to. "Silence", writes Mother Mary Clare of the Sisters of the Love of God (1981:24) "is the doorway into the need of the world."

À Kempis (see 1981:37), among others, intimates that in the Judeo-Christian tradition "the place where God spoke was called the desert – 'The great and terrible wilderness' (Deut. 1:19)". For Fr William Johnston SJ (1984:3), one discovers that the vast and empty desert is not only "'out there'; it is also 'in here' because for mystics the desert existed wherever one prayed and listened to God. One enters the

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inner desert [*interiorem solitudinem*] to contemplate God." Sister Ednée SLG (1999) offers sage advice with regards to the purpose of contemplation. According to Sister Ednée (1999:7), during contemplation we are asked to open ourselves to God's activity in us; "[to cultivate] an attitude of attentiveness, of vigilance and above all of listening." Sr Ednée (1999:1) intimates that in withdrawing, the contemplative,

> [M]ight for a few hours taste the quality of life which regards silence as one of its chief privileges, and so return refreshed to the natural clamour of a world which cannot be organized with silence as its keystone to the same extent.

Sr Ednée (1999:1) surmises correctly that silence in *prayer* and silence in *action* may be distinct, but they are one in being. They are united by the silence from which both true prayer and true action emanate. Nouwen (1982b:105), reasoning along the lines of Sr Ednée, maintains that "the discipline of prayer makes us stop and listen, wait and look, taste and see, pay attention and be aware" of the move of God's Spirit. For Nouwen (1982b:105):

> To listen patiently to the voice of the Spirit in prayer is *radical displacement* which at first *creates unusual discomfort*. But when discipline keeps us faithful, we slowly begin to sense that something so deep, so mysterious and so creative is happening [...] (my emphasis).

Drawing from the Jesuit priest-paeleontologist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's SJ (1955) concept of God, people and the world, Fr Robert T. Sears SJ (1983) proposes four components for an apostolic (active contemplative) life in our time. Sears (1983:75-76) maintains that:

1. The first aspect is a Christian outlook; this is a reflex, intellectual faith-vision of the world. *The way a person understands God, people and the world will have a profound influence on their whole spirituality*.
2. The second aspect of any spirituality must be *finding or seeking God in formal prayer*. This is raising the heart and mind to God in meditation, contemplation and liturgical prayer. It is an *interior* exercise of prayer. It can be used to foster and enrich one's faith-vision; it may be a means of finding God's will, *a time for discernment*; *and it is ordered to the service of God and action for the kingdom of Christ*.
3. The third aspect of the spiritual life is finding God in activity, i.e. to find

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God's will is to find God, and to do God's will is to be united with God. *Total active dedication to God's will in a spirit of loving obedience will presuppose and actually involve a thorough-going asceticism*, *a self-denial geared to service*.

4. The last aspect is finding God in *an experiential awareness of the presence of God*. This is a sense or perception of God's operative presence in the world or in oneself (quoted verbatim, my emphases throughout).

According to Sears (1983:79), by locating the "still point" within; that place where one's heart meets God, the individual is revitalised for liberating work in the world.

Continuing this theme of *stillness* Ryan Holiday (2002:6), following St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, observes that contemplative prayer is "the prayer of still-ness, of waiting, of 'loving regard'. It is the flowering of all our natural senses, set in a framework of silence. Contemplation is seeing, *in silent awe*, the invisible God. It is hearing, *in silent listening*, the word from the eternal Word" (my emphasis). This understanding finds a reverberation in the *Rule of the Sisters of the Love of God* (1996:26) which concludes in these powerful and challenging words:

> While the spirit of silence serves to separate each individual life unto God, the spirit of love must ever be binding all together in God, that in the unity of the Spirit, *all may seek their perfection by holy charity* (my emphasis).

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Any discussion of contemplative spirituality must take into account the two elements that are endemic to contemplative spirituality, namely 1) different contemplative practices, and 2) institutions and contemplative movements where these practices are contextualised or "enfleshed". Contemplative spirituality in the 20th century is understood within the context of (communal) contemplative practices such as Contemplative Prayer, Centering Prayer, *Lectio divina*, Pilgrimages of Prayer and Presence (e. g. *el Camino Santiago de Compostela*), and the variety of organisations and movements within which contemplative spirituality is situated.

In the following sections I offer a brief discussion of each practice followed by three movements or organisations. These embody what Underhill (1941:11) defines as "the contemplative attitude to existence". Underhill (1941:13) contends that, "mystical consciousness does not wrap its initiates in a selfish and otherworldly calm, [nor]

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isolate them from the pain and effort of the common life." For Underhill (1941:13) their action in the world stems from "'mystical compulsion', [their] intensely practical energies [are] the flowers of a contemplative life." Writing from within the British context, Underhill (1941:14) surmises that:

> [T]he thoughts … are now turned … towards the most concrete forms of action – struggle and endurance, practical sacrifices, difficult and long continued effort – rather than towards the passive attitude of self-surrender which is all that the practice of mysticism seems, at first sight, to demand (my emphasis).

Here Underhill touches upon the concepts of "passivity", "contemplation" and "action" thus revealing the interconnectedness between contemplation and action – the *leitmotif* of this study. This study subsequently proposes, in line with Underhill (1937:81, 86), that a contemplative, reflective approach is a *de rigueur* element of any sustained social action. This is the guiding principle of contemplative practices, contemplative organisations or institutions and contemplative movements to which I turn now.

3.2 Varieties of contemplative practices

3.2.1 Contemplative prayer

The anonymous author of the perennial mystical classic The Cloude of Unknowyng (The Cloud of Unknowing) defines contemplative prayer as "a nakid entent [naked intent] stretching into God" (Johnston, 1973:49). In Chapter three of The Cloud of Unknowing (Johnston, 1973:48) the mystic theologian – who advocated *via contemplativa* as the highest form of the Christian life – states his method of contemplation briefly. The contemplative must lift up his heart in love to the Lord, with a gentle stirring of love desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts.

In his treatise the author of the Middle-English work states he is writing for the 'skilled' contemplative whose prayer is prayed at "the sovereinneste pointe" of contemplation (Johnston, 1973:46). His argument rests on the paradoxical statement that, on the one hand, God cannot be known and, on the other hand, He can be known by unknowing. *The Cloud of Unknowing* develops the picture of the soul suspended in prayer between two *clouds*. Below is the cloud of forgetting, the cloud which hides created concerns and lesser loves. Above is the cloud of unknowing, the darkness of God which can be passed through only by "the dart of

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longing love" The "treading down of the thought of all creatures and holding them under the cloud of forgetting" is a work of human beings, by the grace of God. In contrast, "the devout stirring of love that is wrought in the will" is the work of God alone (Underhill, 1922:78).

The author further impresses upon the soul:

> For at first time when thou dost [this work], thou findest but a darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing, thou knowest not what, saving that thou feelest in thy will a naked intent unto God (Underhill, 1922:64).

The author's injunction to *the soul in pilgrimage* is to,

> Let your longing relentlessly beat upon the cloud of unknowing that lies between you and your God. Pierce that cloud with the keen shaft of your love (Johnston, 1973:63).

Merton (1957a:115) acknowledges that this "definite and more personal [being or] 'Presence', the one hidden in a cloud", is God.

There is a remarkable congruence between the teaching of the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and St John of the Cross. Like St John of the Cross' "dark night", the "cloud of unknowing" is a symbol both of the transcendent God who cannot be grasped by the conscious mind and of the blind, trusting intuition which reaches out to him. The anonymous author maintains in chapter 3 that it is quite right that, "in contemplation God should be loved for himself alone above all created things, for as we have said already, this work is fundamentally a naked intent, none other than the single-minded intention of your spirit directed to God himself alone […]" (Underhill, 1922:64).

In explaining the concept of "darkness", the mystic maintains:

> For when I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing [knowledge]. And for this reason it is not called a cloud of the air [sky], but a cloud of unknowing, that is betwixt thee and thy God (Underhill, 1922:73).

Thus the author calls for "supraconceptual knowledge" – the state in which the mind rests in quiet, devoid of thoughts of God – found in negation (Johnston, 1985:57). Being supraconceptual, God's illumination is "obscure" or "dark", i.e. "not clear and distinct" (Johnston, 1985:57, 60).

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These elements, as expounded above, are replicated in Keating's teaching on Centering Prayer.

For Keating the theological underpinning of contemplative prayer is "the divine indwelling". Keating (2006:4, 2011:1) avers that "contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation, a relationship initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union." Bruce Demarest (1999:24), borrowing from Keating (1986:99), defines Contemplative Prayer as:

> […] a prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted […]. Contemplative Prayer is the opening of […] our whole being to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words and emotions. We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us […] closer than consciousness.

Pennington (1998), following Keating (1999a), contends that "contemplative prayer, rightly understood, is the normal development of the grace of the regular practice of *Lectio divina* (divine reading)" (Pennington, 1998:46). Raymond Bernard Blakney (1941:83), on the other hand, likens contemplative prayer as "… an opening of ourselves to the central silence in the core of our soul." Blakney (1941:83) cites Meister Eckhart for whom "The Central Silence is there where no creature may enter, nor any idea, and there the soul neither thinks nor acts nor entertains any idea of itself or of anything else." Rohr, in turn, distinguishes between "the prayer of words" and "the prayer of silence". For Rohr (1999:149), "While the prayer of words is an attempt to *express to ourselves* our dependence on [God], the prayer of silence… is to *experience* that dependence."

Merton's definition of contemplative prayer is helpful in the context of the present study. For Perry Le Fevre (1981:116-117), paraphrasing Merton (1975:96), Merton differentiates between infused prayer and ordinary prayer. Infused prayer is perceived as contemplation in the strict sense. Ordinary prayer, Merton's "active contemplation", includes all the traditional practices of the *interiorem vitae* (i.e. vocal prayer, meditation, mental or silent prayer, meditational labour and *Lectio divina*). According to Merton (1975:96), "the progressive levels in *Lectio divina* are experienced as a unified interior movement which reaches the object of its desire fully only in the final active contemplation."

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Keating (1992:6-7) contends that, "… the *goal* of contemplative prayer is not so much the emptiness of thoughts or conversation as the emptiness of *self*" (my emphasis). For him, "[I]n contemplative prayer, one ceases to multiply reflections and acts of the will." Experiencing God as "'present' frees us from making ourselves or our relationship with God the centre." Arico (2002:25) goes one step further and distinguishes between "concentrative contemplation" and "receptive contemplation". For Arico (2002:25), "in *concentrative* acquired contemplation we are active; in *receptive* acquired contemplation we are primarily receptive – the initiative is always God's. In concentrative acquired contemplation if you receive an insight you hold onto it, you remember it, you employ your imagination – you are the active agent. In receptive acquired contemplation you become receptive, you don't try to understand – you surrender, you consent."

Keating (1992:73) further postulates that, "the daily encounter with Christ and reflection on his Word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust and love. The encounter gives way to communing or 'resting in God'". [1] This idea of "rest" also occurs in St Augustine of Hippo's (see 1977) prayer, "Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! *We were created for Thee*, *O Lord*, *and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee*" (*Confessions*, X. 27.38, I.1) (my emphasis). Basil Cardinal Archbishop Hume OSB (1984:39) of Westminster provides a similar yet different dimension in his assertion:

> So here I am a pilgrim through life, restless indeed, looking, searching all the time for that which will make me truly and fully myself.

Fr Herbert Edwin Slade (1975:7) holds that contemplating God is leading people not away from the world but into a relationship with God, the One who is engaged in an adventure of cosmic renewal in which we are invited to participate. Contemplatives subsequently long to take their experience of and with God into the world. "It is through the discipline of contemplation" surmises Merton (1973b:64) "that contemplatives bring the world into God's presence, and thus ultimately link themselves with His world." [2] Thus, maintains Keating (2002:3), "[the] *gift* of

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[1] Keating is here borrowing from Gregory the Great's phrase, "The contemplative life is clearly for rest" (*Moralities* VI. 61).

[2] Brackley (1988:18) points out that "in the Bible, 'the world' sometimes has a positive meaning, sometimes a negative one". In the book under discussion, 'the world' refers to the world insofar as it opposes the *proyecto de Dios* (God's project). The latter understanding of the world is also the

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contemplative prayer is a foundational and practical mechanism for confronting the heart of the Christian *ascesis*, while at the same time establishing the climate and dispositions for a deepening relationship with God."

Contemplative Prayer and contemplation is sometimes used interchangeably and ambiguously by the mystics, contemplatives and authors of mystical writings.

Contemplation is variously described by the mystics as a "resting in God", "a loving gaze" upon him, "a knowing beyond knowing" or "a rapt attention" to God.

An entry at https://books.google.co.za points out that "contemplation is often distinguished by early mystics as *kataphatic* and *apophatic*. *Kataphatic* is a derivative of the Greek *Kata* (meaning "down") and *phasis* (meaning "speech"). *Apophatic* is derived from the Greek *apophani* (i.e. negation, to define something by saying what it is *not*)." For Keating (1994:42), "the distinction, insofar as it suggests opposition between the two terms, is misleading." Keating (1994:42) asserts that *Kataphatic* contemplation should be perceived as the "preparation for contemplation. It is the affective response to sacred symbols and a disciplined use of reason, imagination, memory and emotion in order to assimilate the truths of faith and to foster a relationship with Christ." *Apophatic* Contemplation, maintains Keating (1994:42), "is a further stage in that relationship. It is resting in God beyond the exercise of singular acts, except to maintain a general 'loving attention' to God." The latter concept is derived from *Cloud of Unknowing*, (1957:103; 1973:63).

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Arico (2002:23) defines *kataphatic* as "a type of prayer that is made up of words, images and resolutions". Thus, infers Arico (2002:23) "we pray, paying attention to what is prayed, we have an [*examen of conscience*], which leads to a resolution to improve our lived experience. We leave the encounter with God and try to *live* our prayer by [encountering the 'other']. The spiritual goal of the *apophatic* way is the seeking of knowledge of God by way of negation; i.e. encountering God in absence and unknowing." For Arico (2002:23) *apophatic* prayer tends to be speechless or wordless. This is the approach of surrender to God, of losing one's centre to find it.

Marv and Nancy Hiles (2005:21) speak to Arico's contention in surmising that:

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point of departure of this thesis. This world that is estranged from God and his people becomes the locus for contemplatives to strive to be Céli Dé or what Johnston (1984:125) calls activists engaged in alleviating the "social suffering of the world".

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> We need to sit still, let our emptiness remain empty, and wait patiently. If we fill the foreground with busy questions, we will miss the God who is the silent, yet ever present horizon of the world.

William James (2002:453) and Merton (1973a:317) repectively describe this *apophatic* practice as "a denial made on behalf of a deeper yes" because "[i]t is the peculiar office of the monk in the modern world to keep alive the contemplative experience."

Thus, attests Alexander Peck (2012:4), "Contemplative prayer is a pilgrimage in which, in the depth of the heart, the Spirit speaks to our human spirit through our lifesituation and the Word of God. Our path in contemplative prayer is to enter the stillness and to wait for God there." It is "that infinite richness of total presence"; a "being there… freely for God" according to Quoist (1981:36, 37).

Butler (1927) distinguishes a further category, namely contemplative life. Butler (1927:322) maintains that, "'Contemplative life' has two meanings. It has an *objective meaning*: a manner of corporate life ordinated with the primary object of facilitating and promoting the exercise of contemplation, by removal or reduction of the usual obstacles. And it has a *subjective* or personal *meaning*, according to which, whatever be the external conditions, that *man is leading a comtemplative life who effectively practises contemplation*. In this sense, whatever be his calling or manner of life, a contemplative is leading a contemplative life […]" (my emphasis).

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These three concepts are fundamental to this study as a whole.

The next two categories (Centering Prayer and *Lectio Divina*) are of particular importance to the life, teaching and contemplative practice of Keating.

3.2.2 Centering prayer

Arico (2002), Ó Madagáin (2007), hermit-priest Cynthia Bourgeault (2004:19) and Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler (2001:59) all assert that Centering Prayer was revived by the Trappists, William Austin Meninger OCSO, M. Robert Basil Pennington OCSO and Keating OCSO out of the ancient mystical traditions of the Desert Fathers and the mediaeval mystics. Pennington gives a cogent explanation of the origin of Centering Prayer. Pennington (1982:14, 1988:58, 1999a:14-15) explains that the prayer developed in 1975 largely from the 14th century *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the teaching of John Cassian (1804, see 1983, *Conferences* IX – X). Pennington

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(1988:69) points out that the term was derived from Merton who asserted that:

> My prayer then, is a kind of praise, *rising up out of the centre of Nothingness and Silence*. It is not 'thinking about' anything, but a direct seeking of the Face of the Invisible (my emphasis).[310]

Keating classifies Centering Prayer as "an effort to renew the teaching of the Christian tradition on contemplative prayer." For Keating (1992:37), it is an attempt to present that tradition in an up-to-date form and put a certain order and method into it. Keating (1986:99; Personal Correspondence with Keating, 1986:3) further intimates that, "Through the process of resting in God, beyond thoughts, feelings, associations and commentaries, we are moving from the level of our physical faculties and their perceptions to the level of the spiritual faculties and their intuitions, and opening to the divine presence at a deeper level still." Thomas T Ward Jr (2001:16) sums up Keating's (1995:11-21; 2011:18-42, 120-128) teachings on Centering Prayer as "The movement attempts to translate the essence of monastic spirituality into a form that might appeal to the particular cultural circumstances of the day."

Pennington (1982:114), in turn, perceives Centering Prayer as "a way open to anyone who truly seeks God. It is a type of prayer experience that will ordinarily help one to make progress in the Christian life, to be purified and illumined, and to abide more integrally in union with God in and through all." Pennington (1982:217), in aligning himself with Keating (1992), further asserts that, "in Centering Prayer we let go of our own thoughts and feelings and join our hearts, our wills, with Christ's. We let his Spirit pray within us."

Keating (1999a:58), following Merton (1984), subsequently points out that "the movement toward interior silence triggers a phenomenon that might be called centering." Keating (1992:3, 2009:43) further intimates that Centering Prayer is away of "rejoining our consciousness or attentiveness to the general loving presence that we are calling God […]." According to him (1999a:58), it is "a way of moving from the first three phases of *lectio divina* to the fourth and final one of resting in God."

Meninger (1998:3), speaking to the concept "centre", cites chapter 3 of *The Cloud of*

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[3] According to Pennington Merton was purportedly reticent to discuss his prayer life. However, after much persistence from Abdul Aziz, a Sufi scholar, he wrote to him and explained his prayer practice. This letter was reproduced in a study on the life of Merton by Pennington in his book, *Thomas Merton, Brother Monk*: *The Quest for True Freedom* (1997); also cited in Michael Mott's biography, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (1984:433).

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Unknowing (Johnston, 1973:48) and affirms that in Centering Prayer "[we center] our attention and desire on Christ and to let this be the sole concern of mind and heart." Consequently, it is a call to the centre where God dwells.

According to Pennington (1988:58, 1999a:15) it was during a retreat of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and Women that La Salette Father Armand Proux suggested that Meninger's original title "The Prayer of *The Cloud*" be changed to "Centering Prayer".

Centering Prayer, "the essence of monastic practice" for Keating (1986:34, 2005: 132), "[is] preparing our intuitive faculties for the leap between effusions of love and reflections of love to the experience of love". In Centering Prayer the mind, emotions and the imagination are quietened, while the heart and will are focused on the Lord. The unknown mystic of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston, 1973:54) refers to it as the "longing love". The mystic maintains:

> Though we cannot know him we can love him. By love he may be touched and embraced, never by thought.

By implication centering is an experience of the presence and love of Jesus – not only, nor primarily, intellectual experience, but affective experience of the heart.

Keating (2005:133) asserts that "Centering Prayer could also be called *the prayer of silence* or *the prayer of desire* because in the silence we stretch out towards God with our desire", or *the prayer in secret*, following Jesus' injunction to pray in secret (Matt. 6:6). Keating's (1986:3) overarching approach to Centering Prayer has as its primary objective "consenting to God's presence and action within." Keating (1994:79) couches this approach in the premise that, "We know the divine presence is already there. We do not create it. All we have to do is consent." This consent is critical to activating God's grace opines Keating (2014:97). It becomes practically possible because, although God's grace is a gift, "[i]t is a gift that has already been given. Its powers are present but hidden in the unconscious." For Keating (1992:44), "the spiritual journey exemplifies the training in consent to God's presence and to all reality." Here Keating (1992:44, 2011:177) borrows from *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Progoff, 1957:60).

Keating (1986:99, 1996:3) further intimates that, "Through the process of resting in God, beyond thoughts, feelings, associations, and commentaries, we are moving

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from the level of our physical faculties and their perceptions to the level of the spiritual faculties and their intuitions, and opening to the divine presence at a deeper level still.” Irish priest, Fr Murchadh Ó Madagáin (2007:54), speaking to Keating’s concept of “consenting to God”, avers that there are several consents or times of letting go throughout our life. For Ó Madagáin each consent is an ackowledgement of God’s goodness and an opportunity to grow ever closer in the direction in which he is leading us.

Centering Prayer for Pennington (1988:54) is first of all, and above all, “an interpersonal relationship – a very privileged one, for the other Person is God. It is a communion and union in love.” Pennington (1988:35) contends that *the focus* is on “Christ’s passion, death and resurrection”; [the heart of the Christian mystery]. The latter premise is analogous to Íñigo López de Oñaz y Loyola’s (Ignatius of Loyola’s) Imaginative Contemplation (episodes from the life of Jesus in *The Spiritual Exercises*) although the aims are quite different. Elsewhere Pennington (1988:94) asserts that, “Centering Prayer is the movement of consenting to God’s presence and action within us.” The fundamental disposition is “opening to God”.

Cynthia Bourgeault provides the framework for an embodiment of how this “letting go of thoughts” occur. Bourgeault (2016:68) supports Keating (1992, 2005, 2009) and Pennington (1982, 1988) in concluding that Centering Prayer is not to “access God through contemplative stillness or mystical practice, but to *let go of thoughts as they arise*” (my emphasis).

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Writing in *Centering Prayer and the Healing of the Unconscious* Ó Madagáin (2011: 42), argues along the same lines in stating:

> This kind of prayer is in fact a very selfless and pure kind of prayer, since, if it is done properly, it is complete giving of oneself to God. It does not seek anything for itself or involve judging how one is doing. Rather it calls for a total *letting go* of everything, including our thoughts, in order to *be present to* God.
>
> In this way it could be said to be a perfect response to the commandment, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength’ (Deut. 6:5). *It is a total giving of oneself to God* without asking for anything back (my emphasis).

Keating advises practitioners to begin Centering Prayer with the Welcoming Prayer

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(Mrozowski) or Welcoming Practice (Sylvester, 2017:2) in which contemplatives open themselves to "contemplative union of the soul with the pure Divinity" (Blessed Henry Suso, 1910:73). Mary Mrozowski, the creator and spiritual mother of the Welcoming Prayer developed this prayer practice in the 1960s in response to Keating's teaching on Centering Prayer (see Bourgeault, 2004:141 and Immaculate Heart of Mary nun, Sr Nancy Sylvester IHM, 2017:2). Bourgeault (2004:67) and Sylvester (2017:5) recommend and affirm the "Welcoming Prayer [as] a vibrant, embodied witnessing practice and an essential tool for inner transformation." Bourgeault (2004:67) further describes the practice as a powerful tool for turning daily life into an almost limitless field for inner awakening. For Bourgeault (2004:68) the Welcoming Prayer facilitates "the practice of letting go in the present moment in the ordinary routines of daily life."

As we "centre in prayer", surmises Mother Mary Clare SLG (1993:36), we become aware of "an inner alertness and attentiveness which is the prelude to stillness before God." Having thus "centred" their being, maintains Keating (2011:176), contemplative practioners are invited to practice Centering Prayer for two twenty-minute periods per day, applying the Guidelines for Centering Prayer as taught by Keating (see *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 2011:177-179).

The goal of Centering Prayer, as taught by Keating (1986:19, 2006:19), "is to quieten ourselves (of thoughts, desires, imaginings) to cooperate more fully with the gift of God's presence." For Keating (1994:15) the practice of the discipline of Centering Prayer is not contemplation in the strict sense of the term but a preparation for it. In sum, the practice can be classified in these stages:

1. Moves from more active styles of prayer (verbal, mental, affective) to more receptive prayer of 'resting in God'.
2. Emphasises prayer as personal relationship with God, fostered by regular practice of quiet, peaceful contemplation.
3. Thus, the movement, based on Ps. 46:10, is – 'Be still and know that I am God'; 'Be still and know that I am…'; 'Be still and know…'; 'Be still…'; 'Be… ' (quoted verbatim).

Bourgeault (2004:55-58) sums up Keating's (1995:11-21; 2011:18-42, 120-128) teachings on Centering Prayer as one where the movement attempts to translate the

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essence of monastic spirituality into a form that might appeal to the particular cultural circumstances of the day.

In 1984 Keating established Contemplative Outreach Ltd. [411] to coordinate his efforts to introduce Centering Prayer to those seeking a deeper life of prayer and to provide a structure capable of sustaining their commitment.

I now turn to a discussion of *Lectio divina*.

3.2.3. Lectio divina

Lectio divina is a four-step discipline built around the practice of reading Scripture. *Lectio divina*, translated as sacred reading (Richard McCambly, 2017:1, prefers the term "reading which is sacred"), was most likely brought to Western Christianity from the Desert Abbas of Egypt, Syria and Palestine in the early fifth century. Keating (1999a:46, 2008:51, 2009:131) maintains that in the monastic setting, "It was the normal way of prayer of the ancient monks and from them passed on to the older religious orders. […]. *Lectio divina* was supported by an atmosphere of silence and solitude and a routine conducive to recollection." It was interwoved with psalmody and chanting, which assisisted the monks in their recollection. For Arico (2002:103) *Lectio divina* is not only *a method* of prayer, but is *a way of life*. Arico perceives it as a sacred, attentive listening to the word of God through scripture, liturgy and prayer.

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Drawing from the Carthusian Guigue II's (1114 - c1193) *The Ladder of the Monks* (Colledge and Walsh, 1978), Arico (2002:103-109) and Keating (2009:132) identify the four rungs of the "ladder" as reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation and contend that the four steps constitute a single movement; a continuum. Keating (2009:132) points out that "Reading (*lectio*) directs us to carefully listen to the Scriptures. Meditation (*meditatio*) is the studious activity of the mind, probing the meaning of and application of the text to our lives under the guidance of the Spirit working with our intellect. Prayer (*oratio*) is the devout turning of the heart to God to get ills removed or to obtain good things.Contemplation (*contemplatio*) is a certain elevation above itself of the mind which is suspended in God, tasting the joy of

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[4] As the movement grew and expanded more programmes were developed and introduced. Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler (2001:66) lists these as 'the Post-Intensive Retreat, Formation for Contemplative Service, Advanced Retreat, External Study Programme, The Living Flame (seven-month) Course and the nine-month Contemplative Living Course. Contemplative Outreach offers further practices which bring the fruit of Centering Prayer into daily life, i.e. The Welcoming Prayer Practice, The Forgiveness Prayer, and The Practice of Contemplative Service: Attention and Intention'.

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eternal sweetness; *thus a resting in the power of the word of God*" (my emphasis) (see also Pennington,1982:30-32). As we practice these four (integrated) movements asserts Keating (2012:92), "the external word of God in scripture awakens us to the interior Word of God in our inmost being."

Dom Joseph Aloysius Marmion, the Irish Benedictine, (cited in Arico, 2002:110 and Hall, 1988:44) postulates that, "We read (*lectio*), under the eye of God (*meditatio*), until the heart is touched (*oratio*) and leaps to flame (*contemplatio*)." The Carmelite, Joseph Chalmers O. Carm (2007), goes beyond these classical delineations of *Lectio divina* and adds a fifth element which he terms, *actio*. According to him (2007:3) *actio* is "that element which moves contemplation into daily life"; thus linking contemplation to action on behalf of the socially displaced and disheartened.

Arico (2002:111) identifies two types of *Lectio divina*, i.e. *scholastic Lectio divina* and *monastic Lectio divina*. In *scholastic Lectio divina* the steps were to read (*lectio*), to reflect (*meditatio*), to respond (*oratio*) [5] and to rest (*contemplatio*). *Monastic Lectio divina* surmises Arico is much like the *scholastic Lectio divina* except in two areas.

According to Arico (2002:111),

> Firstly, it is not seen as being a set form of prayer, but rather as *moments* experienced throughout the day. A word or phrase is taken into the daily activity where sometimes it will be thought about, at other times it will be prayed over, and at yet other times one will simply rest in the power of the word.
>
> Secondly, the difference is in the second step. In the *scholastic Lectio divina* it is meditation, a pondering, a reflecting on the word; an engaging the intellect.
>
> In the *monastic Lectio divina* it is rumination, a gentle savouring, a gentle being (or staying) with the word or phrase; it does not engage the intellect.
>
> The difference is important as it helps the contemplative to move into the contemplative dimension of the gospel, i.e. by moving one towards the heart rather than the intellect. Thus the one who contemplates God is urged to move into *operatio*; a term coined by Hugh of St Victor (c.1096-1141) who was

[5] Arico contends that Robert Mulholland, Jr substitute *oratio* with *incarnatio*. For Arico (2002:113) "[…] the understanding is that when we come to the Word in prayer, we enflesh that Word in our lives. The incarnation that started with Jesus continues in us. *Our social action is then anacting out of what we have experienced in prayer. The action is done with a spirit of compassion and openness*" (my emphasis).

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concerned that people who prayed would not see the value of putting their prayer into action.

Keating (1992:6, 1996:4) argues that "those who follow the method of *Lectio divina* are cultivating the capacity to listen to the word of God at ever deepening levels of attention." For Keating, preparation for *Lectio divina* consists of "listening to the texts of the Bible as if one was in conversation with God and He was suggesting the topics for discussion. The reflective/pondering part in *Lectio divina* is called *meditatio* (discursive meditation). The spontaneous movement of the will in response to these reflections is called *oratio* (affective prayer). As these acts of will and reflections simplify, one tends to resting in God or *contemplatio* (contemplation)."

For Keating (2008a:54) the thrust of *Lectio divina* is fourfold: first to know Jesus in his humanity and historical life; secondly to know him in his passion, death and resurrection; thirdly to know Jesus in his Ascension and; fourthly in his risen life in the Trinity. According to Keating (2008a:54) "each period of *Lectio divina* follows the same plan: reflection on the Word of God, followed by free expression of the spontaneous feelings that arise in our hearts. *As the heart reaches out in longing for God*, *it begins to penetrate the words of the sacred text. Mind and heart are united and rest in the presence of Christ*" (my emphasis). This unity of heart and mind, and the resting in Christ, reminds us of St Augustine's saying quoted above.

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My purpose in highlighting the above practices is to show that the contemplative journey is essentially one of surrender. This is so because contemplatives, as God-seekers, following Keating (1986:3) are open to "his transforming action in their lives". Only then can "they remain grounded in their identity and spirituality, while at the same time being open to evolving in accordance with the needs of the time."

3.3 Contemplative institutions and movements

3.3.1 Introduction

Vanier (1997:12), drawing from the mystical concepts in the writings of Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Ignatius of Loyola, argues that, "every new foundation has its own call, but also its shadow side. Every founder bears some darkness as well as light; none is entirely pure." Vanier subsequently proposes that these intentional Christian communities agree to a contract of checks and balances. Vanier maintains (1997:12) that:

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> Movements and communities will normally need help from outside in order to face their shadow side […]. They will also need to listen and accept criticism, to have the courage to question themselves, the honesty to admit short- comings and the energy to change.

These are timely warnings to contemplative communities which seek to take a stance on behalf of the poor and broken; those who have either lost their voice or the voiceless who have always lived on the margins of society. They demonstrate support, through concrete action, for the disillusioned, broken members of society; living in solidarity with the planet and its people. Sr Joan Chittister OSB (2003:13) encapsulates this belief in stating:

> To belong to a community is to begin to be about more than myself […]. No work is enough to satisfy the human soul. Only the satisfaction of having touched another life and been touched by one ourselves can possibly suffice.

The three networks which are highlighted below offer the kind of contemplative service which "[touches] another life and [offer the opportunity to be] touched by one ourselves" (Chittister, 2003:13).

3.3.2 New monasticism

The genesis of 'new monasticism' is difficult to pinpoint. Bede Griffiths (1994:2), a Catholic Camaldolese Benedictine monk who led a Christian-Hindu ashram in Tamil Nadu (India), anticipated a future *Lay monastic* movement. He subsequently developed a vision for a new monastic life ecapsulated in his volume *The New Creation in Christ*. The Foundation of New Monasticism surmises that in the United Kingdom certain new monastic communities have been in existence since the 1970s and 1980s. Shane Claiborne founded the Simple Way in Philadelphia in the mid-1990s. Claiborne documented their founding and work among the displaced in *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006).

The Foundation of New Monasticism (2011:3) and Wikipedia (2014:1) record the meeting between existing communities and academics at Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina in mid-2004. There they compiled a Rule of Life, the "Twelve Marks" of new monasticism (see 2005). New monastic communities have been launched in Ireland and America, including 'interspiritual' new monastic communities. This movement has formed around the work of young social activists and spiritual leaders

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in collaboration with monastics.

Rob Moll (2005:1) surmises that the Simple Way Community provides an opportunity for transformed living, through the ancient monastic practice, which provides the spiritual impetus for sacred activism. The Foundation for New Monasticism (2011:1) and Teasdale (1993:2) credit philosopher of religion Raimon Panikkar as the originator of the concept “new monk”. Panikkar used the term in a series of lectures given in 1980 at Holyoke, Massachusetts which were subsequently published as *Blessed Simplicity*: *The Monk as Universal Archetype*.

The notion of new monasticism in the Protestant tradition was developed by Jonathon Hartgrove-Wilson. Writing in *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* Hartgrove-Wilson (1998:72-75) proposes four characteristics for a new monasticism as, 1) it will be ‘marked by a recovery of the *telos* of this world’ revealed in Jesus and aimed at the healing of fragmentation, bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Christ, 2) it will be aimed at the ‘whole people of God’ who live and work in all kinds of contexts and not create a distinction between those with sacred and secular vocations, 3) it will be disciplined, not by a recovery of old monastic rules, but by the joyful discipline achieved by a small group of disciples practising mutual exhortation, correction and reconciliation, and 4) it will be ‘undergirded by deep theological reflection and commitment’ by which the church may recover its life and witness in the world (see Wikipedia, 2014:1).

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Rod Dreher, building on the work of philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, published *The Benedict Option* (2017) in which he outlined “a strategy for western Christians – identified as “order, prayer and work, stability, community, hospitality and balance – to overcome the influence of a hostile society” (Dreher, 2017:10).

Catholic Lay monk, Br Wayne Robert Teasdale, reports in *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* (1993:4) that he, Keating, Anglican priest Matthew Wright, Sufi priest Pir Netanel Miles-Yepez and David and Tamara Milliken and their ‘InnerSky Community’ are leading lights of this movement. Teasdale (2002:195, 232) coined the term “interspiritual” which he described in his book *A Monk in the World*: *Cultivating a Spiritual Life* as “a new orientation of religious and spiritual life”. This form of new monasticism is developed in McEntee’s and Bucko’s *The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Life*. In the introduction to their book, the

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authors (2015:14) maintain:

> We assert that new monasticism names an impulse that is trying to incarnate itself in the new generation. It is beyond the borders of any particular religious institution, yet drinks deeply from the wells of our wisdom traditions. It is an urge which speaks to a profoundly contemplative life, to the formation of small communities of friends, to sacred activism and to discovering together the unique calling of every person and every community.

Writing in *The Mystic Heart*: *Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (1999), Teasdale proposed "Nine Elements of Spiritual Maturity". Drawing on this McEntee and Bucko (2015:21) describe "Nine Vows of the New Monastic" as follows:

> I vow to actualise and live according to my full moral and ethical capacity.
>
> I vow to live in solidarity with the cosmos and all living beings.I vow to live in deep nonviolence.
>
> I vow to live in humility and to remember the many teachers and guides who assisted me on my spiritual path.
>
> I vow to embrace a daily spiritual practice.
>
> I vow to cultivate mature self-knowledge.
>
> I vow to live a life of simplicity.
>
> I vow to live a life of selfless service and compassionate action.
>
> I vow to be a prophetic voice as I work for justice, compassion and world transformation (quoted verbatim).

MacIntyre (1998:263) noting the decline of an affirming community that could sustain moral life concludes his book, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, by expressing a "longing for another St Benedict". By this he refers to someone in our day who could lead a moral and civic revitalisation through communal living (see Wikipedia, 2014:1).

Like the new monastic movement, the institutions and organisations cited below are also turning to the ancient tradition of silence and solitude to provide spiritual fortitude for their *contemplative* activism. The silence that is referenced here is a very specific silence. It is one that is not unintelligent, but one full of expectation and the assurance of God's presence. Out of the *silence* God will *speak* to our hearts,

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because, as Carter (2017:20) attests:

> *Silence* makes possible a true conversation with ourselves, with others and with God. Far from being an absence of words, *it offers both possibility and opportunity* (my emphasis).

3.3.3 The Center for Action and Contemplation

The Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was founded in 1987 by Franciscan priest, Fr Richard Rohr OFM. CAC is intended "[to serve], not only as a radical voice for peaceful, non-violent social change, but also as a forum for renewal and encouragement for individuals who seek direction from and understanding of God's will". The thrust of CAC's work is encapsulated in their motto, "To nurture the hope; to strengthen the faith; to deepen the commitment" (Spahn, 1996:1). CAC's primary goal is the integration of a contemplative spirituality and a healing response to the pain and crises of today's world (see www.rc.net/org/cac/index.html). Spahn (cited in Rohr, 1995:136) intimates that:

> One cannot truly know God and self in the silence of personal prayer without also knowing God and self in the suffering, anguish and despair of humanity. The only response to such 'knowing' is involvement.

CAC's primary goal is delineated in the Vision Statement (1996:2, 1998:1) perceived as a faith alternative to the dominant consciousness, offering hope, inspiration and challenge to a despairing world.

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This vision is underpinned by a deliberate public stance of servant leadership and servanthood. CAC's Philosophy of Beliefs (1996:1, 1998:1) is spelled out in a nine-point statement, the first five of which I replicate below:

1. A God who is Radical Grace.
2. A humanity that is wounded but capable of transformation.
3. A society that is beyond the boundaries of race, nation, culture, gender, economics / class, politics, sexual preference and religious difference.
4. A personhood with both rights and responsibilities.
5. Prayer and involvement with the issues of our time.

For members of CAC engagement with the world stems from insight received in

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communal "attentive" prayer and "creative" listening. Finally, CAC's Mission (*Radical Grace*, 1995:1, 1996:2, 1) is one where members and leaders commit to:

1. Networking to promote a consistent ethic of life and the work of justice and peace.
2. Educating towards and living non-violently, […] precariously and contemplatively.
3. Actively engaging in transforming society from a faith perspective.

Its Mission Statement was revised in 2006 to reflect a greater and more encompassing thrust. Aligning itself with the teachings of Jesus, and, in an attempt to embody a more holistic approach to contemplation and social justice, CAC devised seven Core Principles (1989:2):

1. The teaching of Jesus is our essential reference point [*criterion*].
2. We need a contemplative mind in order to do compassionate action [*praxis*].
3. The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. Oppositional energy only creates more of the same [*emphasis*].
4. Practical truth is more likely found at the bottom and the edges than at the top or the centre of most groups, institutions and cultures [*perspective*].
5. We will support true authority, the authority to 'author' life in others, regardless of the group [*non-tribal*].
6. Life is about discovering the right questions more than having the right answers [*primacy of discernment*].
7. True religion leads us to our True Self and undermines our False Self [*ultimate direction*] (quoted verbatim).

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3.3.4 The Northumbria Community

My primary text for the history of the Northumbria Community; a Christian Community based in Northumberland with members across the UK and internationally, is *Celtic Daily Prayer* (2002:2-10).

The writers of *Celtic Daily Prayer* (2002:7) argue that the lives of the Celtic saints have greatly influenced Northumbria in general and the Community in particular. The Community evolved out of a journey of seeking *the old paths* around Northumbria

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which reverberates with the testimonies of the men and women who "lit a fire in the so-called 'dark ages' that brought warmth, culture, learning and, most of all, faith to vast numbers of people" (*Celtic Daily Prayer*, 2002:7).

The writers (2002:4-6) report that founders John and Linda Skinner, identified one of the key starting points of the history of the community as Holy Isle (i.e. Lindisfarne). In 1976 Andy Raine settled at Holy Isle. Raine merged the account of Caleb, his daughter Achsah and son-in-law Othniel (Judges 1:14-15) with that of the community. In seeking to identify the 'upper' spring and 'nether' spring, he established that Holy Isle itself was the Upper Springs. The Skinners in turn, using Isaiah 58:11-12 which speaks of *restoring foundations* from times long past and of *building out of brokenness*, concluded that further inland would be the place where people could *seek the nether*, *hidden*, *deeper springs of spirituality* rooted in the history and heritage of Northumbria (*Celtic Daily Prayer*, 2002:8). The meditation for Day 14 in *Celtic Daily Prayer* (2002:59) encapsulates this concept:

> See the land so black and barren, God will make a watered garden;
>
> Fruitfulness where once was parchedness […].
>
> Upper Springs and Nether Springs in the field that Father's given.

The writers (2002:7) view Northumbria's spirituality as having "at its heart the desire for God, of seeking Him and knowing Him." This spirituality is "expressed in a faith that is active and contagious (Upper Springs) and a prayer that is quiet and contemplative (Nether Springs)." The founding of Nether Springs at Hetton Hall was launced at an Easter Workshop titled, "Exploring the ancient paths of Desert and Celtic spirituality", in October 1992. It is located close to St Cuthbert's Cave where his body was taken by those monks who were fleeing from the Vikings who had invaded Holy Isle.

Hetton Hall is both a base for Companions living in north Northumbria and a focal point for the *diaspora* around the country and the world. The writers of *Celtic Daily Prayer* (2002:7, 9) confirm that Nether Springs serves as one expression of 'the *monastic heart*' of the Community's ethos as well as being the administrative centre for much of the mission and work of the wider Community. For the Northumbria Community (*Celtic Daily Prayer*, 2002:7, 9) "people matter more than things, and relationships more than reputation; […] *prayer and action, contemplation and*

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involvement, all belong together" (my emphasis throughout).

The Community consciously adopts a dual contemplative stance. In the first instance the Community affirms:

> Here I stand;
>
> and I say a prayer.

This is followed by a positive response to the call from God:

> God called forth a people;
>
> and we responded to His call.

Community life is regulated by the *Rule of Availability* and *Vulnerability* (2002:10). Those who wish to join the Community as Companions are reminded:

> [W]e ask that those who wish to become Companions with us in Community say 'Yes' to Availability and Vulnerability as their way of living. This involves availability to God and to others – *expressed in a commitment to being alone with God in the cell of your own heart and to being available for hospitality, intercession and mission*.
>
> Intentional vulnerability is expressed through being teachable in the disciplines of prayer, […] and being accountable to one another, often through soul friendship [the Celtic concept of *Anam Ċara*]. It also means […] living openly among people as 'church without walls' (my emphasis).

In the section which follows, I briefly introduce the construct of the "Self" which has a bearing on Keating's and Nouwen's contemplative practice.

3.4 The psychological construct of the self

Merton contends that all of us is shadowed by an illusionary person; thefalse self. For Merton (1957a:11) "the false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside of the radius of God's love – outside of reality and outside of life."

Sociologists like Giddens, Mead, Gecas, Benner and Ritzer perceive the secular or 'false self' as the self which is fabricated by social compulsion. Self and ego are closely related. Since the ego is "a derived sense of self it needs to identify with external things" (Tolle, 1999). According to Eckhart Tolle (1999:33), "the most

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common ego identifications have to do with possessions, gainful employment, social status, education, belief systems and personal and family history among others." This identification personifies the false security of the psyche. Consequently, avers Fr William McNamara OCD (1981:147), the ego is but a slave of the public, "*an invented social myth*, or *a seeker of reward, success and outer promise*" (my emphasis). Tolle and McNamara point out that none of these characteristics epitomise the individual.

George Herbert Mead (1962:113, cited in George Ritzer, 1996:341) postulates that the self arises as a result of development, social activity and social relationships. For Mead (1962:113) the term 'true self' presupposes the understanding that, "to be aware of oneself is to have self-concept". For Viktor Gecas (1982:3) "self-concept, as a broad and holistic construct, is the overarching perspective we have on who we are." Baumeister (1998:697) defines self-concept as "The individual's belief about himself/herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is." In contrast, contends Parker J. Palmer (1990:17), the true self is anything that dismantles our illusions.

Self-concept is related to several other 'self' constructs, such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-reflection, self-image, self-knowledge, self-efficacy, self-management and self-awareness.

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Having discussed three contemplative practices, and having given a brief overview of three contemplative organisations and contemplative movements, I now highlight the two contrasting strategies in Contemplative Spirituality.

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Chapter 4

Two contrasting strategies in contemplative spirituality

4.1 Introduction

In the past there has been a tendency to present silence, solitude, withdrawal (into the "desert"), and contemplation as one polarity; and social engagement, mission and action as another polarity. Abbé Michel Quoist (1981:29) is skeptical about this distinction between "contemplation and action, the temporal and the spiritual, militant life or life of prayer." Palmer (1990:2) surmises that "the contemporary images of what it means to be spiritual tend to value the 'inward' *search* against the 'outward' *act*, silence over sound, solitude over interaction, centredness and quietude and balance over engagement and animation and struggle." Consequently, we are faced with a choice between these two concepts which are regarded as opposites. One, following Merton (1973b:62), is "a *contemplative* concept in which prayer, in order to penetrate more profoundly into the mystery of God, must 'rest from exterior action and cleave to the desire of the Maker'. The other is an *active* idea of prayer which accompanies action and sanctifies action."

The word contemplation of necessity "brings to mind a monastic life dedicated to penance and one cloistered within the walls of the monastery" à la Merton (1953) and Mother Mary Clare (1981, 1993). Fr Kenneth Kirk (1934:199) therefore sees great value in interrogating our position vis-à-vis contemplation *or* action in asking:

> Are rigorism, self-abnegation and world-flight no more than obsolete ideals of other days, or have they too an underlying principle of which the Church and Christians are still in need?

The discussion which follows seeks to answer this question among others. John Caddock (2008:2) cites Manning (1996:216) for whom contemplative spirituality accentuates "the need for a change in consciousness, *a new way of seeing* God, others, self and the world" (my emphasis). However, in the classical understanding within contemplative spirituality, knowledge of God does not imply that God can be known. The unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross (see 1947, 1966), Merton (1956), Carretto (1972), Hall (1988), Clèment (1993), Arico

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(2002) and McColman (2010), all confirm that God is unknowable.

In *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Progoff, 1957:77, 103) the fourteenth-century English monk makes two pertinent distinctions with regards to the unknowability of God:

> This one thing I tell you, there never has been and never will be a creature so pure and so deeply immersed in the loving contemplation of God who does not approach Him in this life through that lofty marvelous *cloud of unknowing*.
>
> You are to concern yourself with no creature; whether material or spiritual or with their situations or doings, whether good or evil. To put it briefly, during this work you must abandon them all beneath the *cloud of forgetting* (my emphasis).

Writing an Introduction to *Contemplative Prayer*, Douglas Van Steere (1973b:13), highlights Merton's (citing Abbé Jules Monchanin, 1965) perception of "God alone, faceless, unknown, unfelt, yet undeniably God." In a detailed discussion Merton (1973a:101-116) comments on the renewal in the monastic and cloistered Orders that were necessitated by the changes envisioned by Vatican II (see *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965c). Merton (1953:32) perceived that there was a shift of emphasis from the previous narrow and rather frigid, insistence on ascetic practices. According to Merton (1973a:101), the renewal anticipated that, not only are individuals "participating in the work of giving their lives a new shape and a new scope, [but they are also tapping] the root of their contemplative vocation and trying to rediscover its true meaning."

Mother Mary Clare's (1981) response to Kirk's question above and Merton's observation is quite enlightening. Mother Mary Clare (1981:50) observes:

> When a man [sic] is possessed by the love of God, he must respond and long for others to respond to his love from which is derived the impetus and courage to give ourselves generously to the work of intercession. As we allow ourselves to become possessed by God, we must expect to experience the pain of … man's cruelty to his fellow men.

Religious of the Cenacle, Sr Hall (1988:10), reasoning along the lines of Mother Mary Clare believes that a vital aspect of the renewal instituted by Vatican II is the aspiration in many to grow in relationship with God. Theirs is an attempt to respond more effectively to Jesus and to "the message of his life and Gospel, which so

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directly address the poignant needs of our world today". Michael Ramsey (1981:vii), former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, writing a Foreword to Mother Mary

Clare's *Encountering The Depths*, makes this insightful comment which is the essence of what underlies these contrasting strategies:

> Christian people are often shy of contemplation, thinking it to be an exercise which is beyond them or a practice suitable for monks and nuns or *an escape from the practical needs of the world*. Contemplation is none of these things. It is a liberation from our restless brain-activity into the depth of the love of God in our souls, *a love which brings us nearer to the needs of the world around us* (my emphasis).

Here Ramsey touches on precisely this dichotomy: prayer ("an escape from the practical needs of the world") as opposed to action ("a love which brings us nearer to the needs of the world around us"). On the one hand there is the purely contemplative dimension. On the other hand there is the concrete and social dimension of contemplation as action in the world. In Nouwen's (1997:vii) terminology, the divide is between 'desert life' (contemplation) and 'public life' (action). Rachel Srubas (2008:7) in turn, defines the two strategies as "restorative reflection" and "active responsibilities". In the first instance (restorative reflection – the purely contemplative), the focus is on the "union of the soul with God *sola cum solo*, of the mystic marriage, of the intuitive vision of God in which the soul loses all consciousness of itself and its prayer" (Kirk, 1934:158). In the second instance (active responsibilities – the social dimension), the focus is on the contemplative response to the hungry, the homeless, the lonely; for it is Christ who suffers in the hungry and the homeless. The latter are those who are excluded from the opportunities of the day in terms of socio-economic, political and educational expectations.

The document, *Renewal and Congregational Life Commission of the World Council of Churches* (1986:12) (henceforth *Renewal and Congregational Life*) stipulates that:

> There are indeed monks and nuns who live as hermits, but they are always in relation with the community from which they come and with their spiritual father. Moreover, monks and nuns who are hermits, like those who are in community, still welcome all who seek God and help them in their earthly pilgrimage. And in

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> the prayer in which they stand before God, the whole world is present to them, because they can only truly love God by also loving the world which God loves.

This focus on the dichotomy between prayer and action is further identified in Patricia Hart Clifford's, (following Merton, 1973b:94), distinction of "the rushing currents" (the stream) and "the still pools" (the spring). According to Hart Clifford (1994:4) Merton, using the image of the spring and the stream, highlights the necessity for the spring to be a living organism flowing outward. Barring this, the spring will become a lifeless, stagnant pool. If the stream, on the other hand, "loses contact with its source, it dries up." In Merton's analogy, avers Hart Clifford (1994:4) "*contemplation* is the spring of living water, and *action* is the stream that flows out from it to [water] others."

Merton (1973b:94) contends that if "action is out of touch with an interior source [contemplation], it [eventually] becomes arid and barren, and prayer that does not flow into action is cut off from life." As contemplatives-in-action we hold out the *spes vitae melioris* (the hope of a better life). This then, is "the integrity of contemplation and action" as Hall (1988:11) attests to. Contemplation and action are therefore not separate, polarised realities. Neither are they dualistic, but rather complementary, so that "neither *can exist* completely independent of the other" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*; Johnston, 1973:58). Progoff (1957:80) and Underhill (1922:85) prefer the phrase "neither *can be had* fully" (my emphasis).

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The discussion in the sections which follow will focus on those who have been called primarily to be cloistered over against those who live out their Christian contemplative vocation in the world, the 'secular estate', as the spiritual masters of all ages term it. I will begin, though, by categorising the two contrasting strategies and then discuss them as two distinct or perceptible classifications.

4.2 Two contrasting strategies

4.2.1 Introduction

The contemplative life is unquestionably devoted to prayer (dialogue with God), contemplation (of God) and silence and stillness (in the presence of God). For Mother Mary Clare (1972:2) contemplative dialogue (with God) means "sharing the divine life by prayer and sacramental union […] which is a participation in the very life of God." Tolle's (2003) thesis on silence is that we "meet everything and

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everyone through stillness instead of mental noise" or "interior chatter" as Mother Mary Clare (1981:22) perceives it. This silence is practiced in both solitary and communal contexts, i.e. the cloistered contemplative vocation on the one hand and Christian religious and laity who live their contemplative vocation in the "secular estate" on the other hand.

Pure contemplation (what I term monastic contemplation in this study) has been, and continues to be, practiced by monks and nuns; whether as solitaries, anchorites (anchoresses) or in contemplative community. In contrast, social reform (what I term contemplation as social activism) is practiced by those in holy orders (secular or religious) and by the laity. Their call is perceived as a deliberate interaction with those living on the fringes of society; the wounded, the outcasts, the weak and the oppressed.

For both those in the monastery and those outside of it, there is the acknowledgement, according to Mother Mary Clare (1981:22), that:

> In silence God dwells in us, and we in him. From such silence in prayer comes a stilling of the mind. There comes a cessation of the interior chatter which surges up from memory and the unconscious, and which threatens to disturb our quiet attention on God.

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The *first* dimension of this thrust (attentiveness to God) is prayer in the hidden places (monastic contemplation). This hidden life finds expression in the language of the desert, identified by Mother Mary Clare (1993:18) as "cross, crucifixion, asceticism, duty and rule." It is a spirituality grounded in silence, solitude and stillness with *unio mystica* as its aim. "Monastic life", perceive the compilers of *Renewal and Congregational Life* (1986:13) "will only have its proper influence if monks and nuns endeavor to *be* before *doing*, for what people look for in them is their deep purified spiritual being, and not their human works."

Augustian Fr Martin Laird (2006:100), quoting Hesychios/Hesychius of Vatos (1979:163), supports Mother Mary Clare's perception in stating that, "Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing, only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and himself God." For the monastics contemplation is the threshold into Mystery. Laird (2006:101) contends that, "The inner stability and stillness, which result from a well-

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established practice, allows [cloistered contemplatives] not only to distinguish the objects of fear itself, but also to be still in the midst of fear." This living with inner stability and attentiveness, finds fulfillment in a life of faith. Thus, those who exercise their faith, by virtue of their faith experience a *conversatio nostra in coelis* (a living in heaven despite still being here on earth) declare *Verbi Sponsa* (1999:3).

Dom Paul Delatte (1921:3), third Abbot of Solesmes, reminded the enclosed monks that their business is not to enjoy long life, become learned or make a name for themselves in the world. Instead, their aim is to walk close to God and seek union with Him. Here in the interior place (or cell) of the heart, monks and nuns are to "[relax] in [God's] presence waiting upon him in emptiness" according to Mother Mary Clare (1993:64). George Woodcock (1978:41-42), cites Merton who declares:

> Night is our diocese and silence is our ministry.
>
> Poverty our charity, and helplessness our tongue-tied sermon.
>
> Beyond the scope of sight and sound we dwell upon the air,
>
> Seeking the world's gain in an unthinkable experience,
>
> We are exiles at the far end of solitude, living as listeners,
>
> With hearts attending to the skies we cannot understand.

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Merton[1] affirms that contemplative monastics have nothing to tell us except to reassure us that if we: 1) dare to penetrate our own silence and, 2) dare to advance without fear into the solitude of our own heart, and ultimately, 3) risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through us and with us, then we will truly discover the light and capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations. For Merton it is the intimate union in the depths of our hearts, which enables Silence and us to be One Spirit.

This simple abiding in emptiness and attention is the call to an austere asceticism; what St Athanasius of Alexandria termed "the daily martyrdom of conscience" (see Ruth Penelope Lawson CSMV, 1996:18). Fr David Lonsdale SJ (1990:146) using the General Congregation 32, Decree II on Union of minds and hearts 5.8 as a basis, maintains that "while it is 'in action' that we are called to be contemplative", this

[1] Merton, quoting Pope Paul VI, is cited by Daniel J. O'Leary (1998) in *Passion for the Possible*: *a Spirituality of Hope for the new Millennium*.

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cannot obscure the fact that we *are* called to be contemplative essentially. This *divinae theoriae* is always to be associated in practice with self-renunciation and abandonment to the will and action of God. Sheldrake (1987:10), expounding on this idea, perceives that a contemplative attitude takes precedence to any fruitful Christian action since unreflective and restless activity lacks true direction. Nouwen (1997a:58) points out that focused attentiveness (Weil's, 1973 *Attente de Dieu – Waiting for God*) enables the contemplative-at-prayer to still the mind thereby "gradually letting go of thoughts, emotions, feelings and passions that [prevent] the deep communion with God."

Contemplative dialogue (with God) maintains Mother Mary Clare (1972:2), "means sharing the divine life by prayer and sacramental union… which is a participation in the very life of God." Frederick Crossfield Happold (1979:70), in turn, avers:

> In the state of contemplation… there is found a self-forgetting attention, a humble receptiveness, a still and steady gaze, an intense concentration, so that emotion, will and thought are all fused and then lost in something which is none of them, but which embraces them all. Gradually, by a deeper and deeper process of self-merging, a communion is established between the seer and what is seen, between him/her who feels and that which they feel.

This self-outpouring is powerfully illustrated in the priest-poet, John Donne's, poem "Batter my heart"[2] where the poet yearns for God to:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
>
> As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
>
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, and bend
>
> Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make new.
>
> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
>
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
>
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

The *second* dimension of this thrust is prayer in the marketplace (Happold's, 1979:102 "mysticism of action"). Opposing the position of Sheldrake (1987:10)

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[2] Holy Sonnet 16. In: Dame Helen Louise Gardner (ed.) 1952.

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above, Miller (in James Borst, 1979:9) contends that, “You can’t have lasting social reform unless you bring a genuine contemplative spirit to the work. And you can’t be a genuine contemplative unless you are conscious of and distressed by the ills and distresses of the human family.” Consequently, for Sr Una O’Connor IBVM and Brian Grogan SJ (1986:6), “contemplation and action is concerned with attending to and noticing the meaning of the events and occurrences which make up our days. Reflection then is linked to right action and right response.” Mother Mary Clare (1993:52) agrees that:

> There is therefore no separation between the apostolate of prayer and action.
>
> They are two aspects of a harmonious whole, two manifestations of a God-centered life.

Contemplatives, subsequently, strive to be *Céli Dé* (Celtic for “servants of God”). As they gather as the praying community (*ecclesia orans*) to contemplate God, their prayer becomes a norm of belief (*lex orandi: lex credendi*). For Arico (2002:78), “[Contemplatives] are experiencing the wound of consuming love. It is like the refiner’s fire. The death of our false self is experienced on a deeper level. There is a greater compassion for the world and the cosmos and there is an intuitive knowledge of the restructuring of our being.” Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes,* 1965a:199) encourages the praying community to develop in themselves this consciousness of the world and this concern for the whole human family, so that:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

The alienated, lonely, suffering masses find themselves, contends Jacques Dufresne (2017:6), in “a place of alienation, a place where one becomes a stranger to oneself because one is a stranger to others.” Pennington (1987:125) expresses similar sentiments in stating that we are a broken people who “live in broken communities in a state of brokenness. [Consequently], we are alienated from ourselves and from each other.”

This alienation calls for prayerful action for, it is in the quiet and silence that we are most attentive to the weakest. It is in the silence of the desert that contemplatives withdraw to wait upon God in attentive listening and prayer. Our prayer leads us

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simultaneously towards God and towards the world. This is the essential basis out of which is born a more just and moral social order, culminating in what Fr Alois of Taizé (2012:1) terms "a new solidarity between all human beings."

Leslie Edward Stradling (1997:67-68), former Anglican Bishop of Johannesburg, is of the opinion that the truly contemplative ones are in touch not only with God but also with his world. They keep theselves informed about the world and attempt to serve God in it. Not only do they offer the Eucharistic sacrifice but live out that sacrifice in all their waking hours, knowing that God encounters them in their 'said prayers' in order to send them out into their 'done prayers'". Fr Raymond Richard Raynes CR (1958:34), former Superior of the Community of the Resurrection, teaches that "prayer opens channels through which it becomes possible for God *not changing* his purpose, but *releasing* it." This enables contemplatives to be involved in the project of "social justice" on behalf of the *hombré inutil* (the marginal man).

There is much truth in Hall's (1988:10-11) observation that:

> [Christians] want to learn how to respond more effectively to Jesus and to the message of his life and Gospel, which so directly address the poignant needs of our world today. Often they have an intuitive sense that the changes called for, in themselves and in the world, will not come about through human means alone, but must be born in hearts fully opened to God and to the transforming power of his love. In other words, without always being able to explain or define it, what many feel called to is to become 'contemplatives in action'.

In a very informative essay Kalman Yaron postulates that humans are essentially *homo dialogus*. For Yaron (1993:139) "the individual is incapable of knowing himself without being in communion with humanity, creation and with the creator". Yaron's contemplative stance is clearly biased towards relational and environmental supports. Consequently for Dufresne (2017:6), "We may be rooted in a specific family and culture but we come to this earth to open up to others, to serve them and receive the gifts that they bring to us, as well as to all humanity." Kent Annan (2016) calls this "sit[ting] in the circle" with the oppressed, thereby affirming the value of the *other* and our need for each other. Both these positions harp back to Jewish mystic and philosopher Martin Buber's (1970) I - Thou relational encounter.

Buber (1970:3-11) intimates that "All real living is meeting. The nuanced bonding of

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‘I’ in the word pairs ‘I - Thou’, ‘I - It’ comes about only in relationship.” Gerald Vann speaks to Buber’s analysis of this engagement between people. Vann (1965:156) intimates that “primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations. It is only through the reactions of others that our own existence is confirmed. If we accept others as they are, then we achieve a confirming relationship that is acknowledged by the familiar address ‘Thou’”. Lonsdale (1990:90) opines that it is when we come face to face with God in an avowed I - Thou encounter that we can move out into the world and “engage with life and its concerns.”

Mother Mary Clare (1972:11) contends that active contemplatives are “called to enter the heart of the conflict.” For Voillaume (1964:122, 123) *engagement* is realised when active contemplatives “[choose] to march towards Christ by the road of the poor” in “quest of a better world.”

It is this distinction between monastic contemplation on the one hand, and social activism on the other hand that underlies the present study. This accounts for its focus on “the contemplative life and a life of contemplation”. The study distinguishes between contemplation in the interior of the heart that leads to union of the soul with God; and contemplation of God (i.e. humans’ *quest* for God, à la St Gregory) in silence which leads to effective social action among the weak and vulnerable people in society. It is to this contrast and difference in focus in the practice of *monastic contemplation* and *contemplation as social activism* that I turn to in the sections that follow.

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4.2.2 Monastic contemplation

Merton (1948, 1949, 1950) sums up contemplative monastic life as “one lived in response to a call from God heard within the heart: a call to go apart and enter more fully into the quest for God. It is marked by a life of intense prayer and contemplation cultivated in solitude, silence and stillness, but lived in community.” For Merton (1958:106) this way of life embodies a “total immersion in prayer”. In order to support this intention, the enclosed monastic seeks to contemplate God while holding the needs of the world in *their heart lifted up* before the Living God.

Merton (1973a:108) cites St Benedict who taught that “the monk lives *a saeculi actibus se facere alienum* (as one who is basically alien to the ways of the world).” Those men and women called to the contemplative life in monasteries pray, work

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and live community. The daily rhythm of the monastic day is centered on the Eucharist and the 'Liturgy of the Hours prayed in community at regular intervals during the day and night'. The Liturgy of the Hours frames the day. Each day includes set times for personal prayer, meditation, reflective reading and study. Cloistered monks and nuns also have some time each day allocated for work; the healthy balance of *ora et labora*. While this monastic rhythm is characteristic of the enclosed community, study, contemplation and engagement can be a helpful lens through which one views spiritual transformation in general. It is a deliberate moving from reaction to reflective response for enclosed contemplatives.

Monastic vows are pre-eminent in the lives of cloistered monastics. Merton (1957b:111), in explaining how monastic vows impact upon the monk, maintains:

> The Rule of St Benedict … is written for monks who are to live in the direct line of the pure, ancient tradition. The monk who vows obedience under the Rule of St Benedict is therefore the true descendant of St Anthony of the desert as well as of St Pachomius and of St Basil. He enters upon the monastic life as a cenobite, indeed: but there is nothing in the very nature of his vocation itself to exclude a deep admiration for the ancient hermits, or to prevent his desiring to share something of their solitary contemplation of God (my emphasis).

It is to be understood therefore why the present-day monk adheres to the essential element of monastic life, i.e. self-renunciation to seek the face of God, for as Merton (1957b:132) further declares:

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> That is why it is important for the monk, above all, to be what he is called, a monk, a solitary, a man made 'lonely' by his detachment from all things.

Monks (and nuns) in the various religious orders seek, above all else, to live in accordance with Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas' principle of *ex toto posse suo* (to love God with all their power). This is reflected in their search for union with God through monastic silence and solitude. The Benedictines, Trappists, Camaldolese, Carthusians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and the *Petits Frères* all leave the visible world in order to better reach God or "the Great Invisible" as Voillaume (1964:98, 99) terms it. By implication, the monk and nun live a life of consecration in their obedience to their calling of total availability for God's purposes in the world.

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In the Orthodox (Eastern) tradition, the monastic vocation is referred to as *zoe metanoias* (a life of conversion). Monks and nuns submit themselves, firstly, to this way of life by taking monastic vows as an act of deliverance from themselves and the world in order to be transformed. Both Fr Hugh (1961) and *Renewal and Congregational Life* (1986), perceive this conversion as involving "asceticism, in which monastics leave behind the flesh, which is subject to the powers of evil in this transient life, and as a movement of their whole being towards God and his Kingdom." *Renewal and Congregational Life* (1986:9), regards monastic vows as evidence of the "dual process of leaving behind the world and responding to the divine invitation: negation and affirmation and death and resurrection."

Merton (1957b:53) attests that:

> The monk is always and essentially a man of prayer and penance. He has left all things to deny himself and follow Christ in poverty, labour, humility. In a word, the monastic life is the Cross of Christ.

Consequently, asceticism (from the Greek *askesis*) as world-renunciation in the first place, meant a rejection of normal human tendencies and of materiality. It was characterised by *eremus* (austerity), *desertum* (withdrawal) and *solitudo* (solitude). Withdrawal from the world opens the way for an intense concentration on a particular objective, i.e. *unio mystica* (see for example Merton, 1951:13).

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In the second place it was regarded as a means of God's grace.

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Fr Hugh describes the call to the monastic life whilst Merton points out that the monastic spirit is one and the same in all the monastic Orders. For Fr Hugh (1961:16) and Merton (1957a:52):

> This gift of his [God's] love […] draws us into the way of the Cross, into the way of renunciation, and this is often the sign that we are being called into the monastic life.
>
> *All seek to glorify God and save their souls by a contemplative lif*e, according to the Rule of St Benedict and guided by his spirit (my emphasis).

In this regard the Preamble to *The Rule* of the Sisters of the Love of God (1996) serves as a definitive summary of the practice of enclosed monastic communities although its content cannot be transposed directly onto all contemplative

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communities. The Preamble (1996:1) states:

> All Christians are called through Baptism to sanctification in a life of total commitment to the service of God. *For the monastic this total commitment demands withdrawal* in order to fulfil the vocation to follow the way of Christ bound by the Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. *The monastic way* will be expressed either in a life of *active ministry made fruitful through prayer,* or in *one disciplined for the work of prayer on behalf of the world* (my emphasis).

Renewal and Congregational Life (1986:23) intimates that "all vows and commitments – whether it be to chastity, poverty and obedience, to silence and solitude, or to fasting and self-denial – can only be ancillary to the principal task, the life of prayer, which is the foundation of all monastic life." For those who live a consecrated (cloistered) life contemplation is the central dimension of their monastic vocation.

Monastic contemplation is characterised by "a fundamental dedication" (Keating, 1999:5) of the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer and simplicity of lifestyle. The monastic life therefore presupposes being apart from the world and to have opportunity for reflection, meditation and inner quiet.

In an interview with Michael Andrew Ford (1999:310) for the BBC series on Spirituality (reproduced in *Spirituality*, Vol. 5), Archbishop Hume maintains that, "The monastic life is designed so that the rhythm of prayer and silence helps you raise your mind and your heart to God." The cloistered contemplative seeks, like the Desert Fathers, maintains Mother Mary Clare (1993:28), "interior prayer, rest, peace, quiet, as well as the struggle of the interior conflict." Here in the monastery – a sacred separation from the common place – the monk or nun contemplates God (on behalf of the world). This contemplative practice is reflected, for example, in the Aim of the Community of the Sisters of the Love of God. Part of this Aim (1996:2), states:

> The Community … is called to witness Christ's repairing of human disobedience by the sanctification of its members through their union with the life of the incarnate Son of God. The Sisters shall therefore strive by their discipline, prayer and constant self-oblation to fill up what is behind all of the afflictions of Christ for his Body's sake, using their privileges of enclosure and

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> silence as a means to lead them in the power of the Holy Spirit to this union with God through Christ.
>
> *Since contemplative life and prayer is the realization in time of the soul's union with the will of God*, the Community also bears witness to the Divine will for unity. For this reason… while maintaining all that is distinctive in their own life and calling, [the Sisters] shall pray especially for the monastic life in all its forms (my emphasis).

Hume (1984:39) exemplifies this search for immanence, or the beyond, quite powerfully in stating:

> So here I am; a pilgrim through life, restless indeed, looking, searching all the time for that which will make me truly and fully myself. That is natural, and I discover that it is … only when I am united to that which is most lovable that I am truly myself and so truly human.
>
> *I am made for God*, *whom to see is to contemplate the most beautiful of all*; whom to love is to love the most lovable. Yes, I am made for God […]. It is my duty, and should with practice and perseverance become my joy, to praise Him and serve Him (my emphasis).

For all contemplative communities, the old Latin saying from Psalm 36:7*, Vacete et videte quoniam ego sum Deus* (Empty yourself and know that I am God), is foundational. In prayer they proceed from emptiness to complete trust in God. Monastics cultivate an inner state of continual availability for prayer and contemplation. There are two modalities to their prayer-life. Firstly, there are pure/diffused prayer where they cease all worldly activity and withdraw into 'the silence of the desert'. Secondly, there is the permanent state of prayer which proceeds continuously; *simul in actione contemplativus*.

According to Rohr (2006:132), the focus of prayer is union with the Beyond/the Ultimate Mystery. This search for the Beyond finds its origin in the Desert Fathers' *fuge, tace et quiesce* (live in solitude, silence and inner peace). Fr Joseph Wilson MSC, priest of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, views this longing for God as a thirst which only God can quench. Fr Wilson (1996:7) maintains:

> There is still a deeper thirst in us than freedom. This deeper thirst is in everyone's heart …. So strong is this thirst that it goes right to the very soul.

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> This thirst is nothing less than a thirst for God himself. Living from the heart is a way of acknowledging this and finding peace for our souls.

Having highlighted the importance of prayer and contemplation, it would serve us well to review how the disciplines of solitude, silence, and simplicity of lifestyle find expression in the monastic vocation. Monastic silence has always been regarded as one of the chief practices of the monastic community. Monastic silence as ascetical obedience is normally associated with a monk's formal vow of silence. It is thought that by clearing the mind of distraction, one may listen more attentively to God.

Pennington (1987:82), referring to the monk's vow of silence, intimates that "One enters, then, into a strict cloistered life or a solitary life in order to protect the inner atmosphere of silence, listening, and freedom, in order that the Spirit may do his work in us and guide us in all that we do." For Mother Mary Clare (1993:24), "This contemplative dimension is the fruit of our willingness to meet the discipline of learning to wait in silence and stillness, as well as the … loneliness and sometimes the apparent emptiness which confront us in the waiting." As Br Beaumont Nyquist Mandus (1952:1) maintains, "In *the Silence* of my soul, *I listened* to the Lord" (my emphasis).

Silence "prepares the way for the union of the soul with the will of God and is an offering of perpetual reverence to [God's] majesty" (*The Rule* of the Sisters of the Love of God, 1996:12). *The Rule* (1996:12) further prescribes that:

> [T]here must be an outward silence of speech and movement, a silence of the mind for the overcoming of vain imaginations and distractions, and a silence of the soul in the surrender of the will to be still and know that God is God, leading to a silence of spirit which is the preparation for the fullness of contemplation.

In his volume, *The Monastic Journey*, Merton avers that the primary function of monastic silence is to preserve the *memoria Dei*; something more than just "memory". For Merton (see 1978a:21) it is "a total consciousness and awareness of God which is impossible without the spiritual disciplines of *silence* and *solitude*, *recollection* and *withdrawal*." Here in the silence, maintains Irish priest and philosopher-poet Fr John O'Donohue (2007:215), the contemplative is deliberately "navigating the searing silence and darkness of God."

In solitude, "a flight of the alone to the Alone", according to Carl McColman

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(2010:86), contemplatives find union with the Unknown. Thomas Merton (1957a:31) intimates that “The truest solitude is not something outside you, not an absence of men or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the centre of your soul.” Writing in *Elected Silence* (1949) and *Thoughts in Solitude* (1958) Merton offers us a comprehensive account of monastic contemplation, casting light on the practice of solitude and the simplistic lifestyle of contemplative communities, discussed below, as a single *ordo monasticus*.

What follows, relies largely on Merton’s (1959:52-110) insights. Merton points out that the Benedictines and the Cistercians live and practice the *cenobitic* life (from the Greek *koinobios* – to live in community). The Benedictine vocation has always been essentially contemplative, sedentary and silent according to Merton.

Tracing the history of the Benedictines [3]from the Benedictines of the Primitive Obedience to the present, Merton (1957a:61) points out that Cluny monastery was intended initially to be a renewal of Benedictine austerity. It underscored the monk’s obligation to separate himself from the world and to live in solitude. It also emphasised that monastic life is one of uninterrupted prayer. Merton (1957a:61), comparing the modern monk to the Desert Abbas, contends that the monk,

> […] had left the world with its pomps to fight the obscure battle with the powers of evil which [he] must fight, as Christ fought it, *in the desert*. Stripped of all hope of hierarchical greatness, *the monk’s rôle in the life of the Church is at best invisible*. He will never be anything or anyone in the sight of men, because *his life is hidden with Christ in God* (my emphasis).

The Order of Camaldi, as one of the most venerable and ancient shoots of the primitive Benedictine branch, personifies the pure contemplative life, characterised by silence and solitude (Merton, 1957:112). According to Merton (1957b:113), they accept that “interior silence” and “interior solitude”, by themselves, is not enough to guarantee a purely contemplative life. Interior silence may well be the refuge of the monk engaged in a more or less active life, who seeks God in moments of recollection.

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[3] The best-known Benedictine monastery was Cassinum (Monte Cassino) near Subiaco. Cluny and Solesmes are other Benedictine monasteries that were once well-known. Solesmes was famous for the revival in the 19th century of Gregorian chant. Cîteaux is the best-known Cistercian monastery.

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For the Camaldolese, avers Merton (1957b:113) “the best way to foster interior silence is to preserve exterior silence. Similarly, the best way to have interior solitude is not to be alone in a crowd but to be simply and purely alone. The purpose of this solitude is to enable the monk to live alone with God in an atmosphere which is most conducive for deep interior prayer.” Merton (1957b:113-114) further intimates that the hermit’s solitude keeps him ever present to God, if he is faithful to the call of the hidden life. The monk’s day, in the silence of his cell, is a prolonged Communion with God asserts Merton (1957b:114).

The Cistercians are divided into the Cistercians of the Strict Observance and the Cistercians of the Common Observance. According to Merton (1957b:95) Cistercians of the Strict Observance, or Trappists, are a homogeneous, unified religious Order. The Cistercians of the Common Observance are a loose-knit group of Congregations following different observances. The *Carta Caritatis*, or Charter of Charity (see Merton, 2015), is the foundational document of the Order of Cîteaux. Merton (1957b:78) confirms that Cistercian life is largely one of “contemplation in common, in which the humility, poverty and charity of the common life are regarded above all as means to dispose the soul for union with God in mystical wisdom.” Cistercians are bound by a strict rule of silence. Solemn, perpetual vows in the Cistercian Order imply adherence to the *Exordium Parvum*, and in particular the *usque ad exhalationem spiritus desudant* (Let them go on struggling until their last breath ideal. This conforms to what the Carmelites [17] term “contemplative service” and “contemplative community living”.

One dimension of the Cistercian practice is *solitude in community* which fosters attentiveness of the heart to (or awareness of) God and fraternal communion. Another dimension is to live a solitary life of prayer, work, contemplation, fasting and silence.

The *eremitical* (“hermit like”) orders of the Carthusians are characterised by prolonged reading and continual prayer. Merton (1957:98) points out that “the Carthusian life combines the advantages of *eremitical* solitude and of the common life. Poverty, austerity, silence and remoteness support the Carthusian ideals of solitude and simplicity.” Merton (1957:100) further intimates that although Carthusians remain within the traditional monastic framework, their life is led almost

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entirely in the solitude of their cell. The Carthusians have always existed as hermits-in-community but "the Charterhouse is compact enough to be called a monastery rather than a hermitage" (Merton, 1957:100).

The spirit of the Carthusians is one of solitude and silence, simplicity, austerity and aloneness with God. According to Merton (1957b:103) "The intransigence of their *flight from the world and from the rest of mankind is meant to purify* [the monk's] *heart from all passions and distractions which necessarily afflict those who are involved in the affairs of the world* […]" (my emphasis).

The origins of the Carmelite Order are *cenobitic* and *eremitic,* i.e personifying the *laura* or common life. Explaining their origin, the compilers of the Order's (2013b:4) website maintain that a group of consecrated lay men living as hermits on Mount Carmel inaugurated the Carmelite way of life. These hermits lived in community, displaying elements of the *cenobitic* life. Explaining the Carmelite Charism, the compilers (2013b:1) contend that the heart of the Carmelites – whether friars, hermits, enclosed nuns or lay – is contemplation. For them, Contemplative Carmelites practice '*vacare Deo*' (openness to God); seeking to open their hearts to God. The Order "[carries within] itself great wisdom in discerning the 'delicate touch' of God's action in the depth of the soul. "Without *this lived encounter with God*", maintain the writers (2013a:1), "Carmel ceases to exist. *This is why the expression and source of this encounter, God's gift of contemplation*, *is the very heartbeat of what Carmel is and what it desires to be*" (my emphasis).

The four mendicant orders consisting of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites and the Augustinians, exemplified a new understanding of meeting the needs of the church and society. Instead of binding themselves to one monastery, these new orders called for service in the world as first priority. Wakefield (1983:160) confirms that the Franciscan Order is contemplative-active. This is exemplified as: "firstly, apostolic work should flow from and lead back to prayer, and, secondly, St Francis made provision for the eremitical life." Wakefield (1983:160) further contends that Francis' "*Rule for Hermitages* marks a new development in the history of eremitism." Those called to the *eremitical* vocation are required to live in small hermitages. Two of the four friars function as "mothers" whose duty it is to take care of their "sons"; those who are given wholly to prayer. Francis' notion of the eremitical life therefore unites community to prayer.

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Franciscans and Dominicans have a contemplative foundation, but were placed within the world by their founders. The Franciscans were founded as orders of Friars to go out of monastic structures and evangelise, and then return for a common life; the *contemplata aliis tradere*.

Monks and nuns are therefore invited to become a *gift to the world*. Clément (1993:378) reports that "the principal gifts of the perfect monk are *rhema kai dynamis*, the 'word' that discerns spirits and the 'power' that heals." For Clément (1993:378), "The monk by making himself wholly one again is open to the fullness of the Trinity and discovers his own ontological unity with all human beings." This *unitate* (one-ing) is best experienced in what Giovanni Melchior (John) Bosco of the Salesians (1983:308) calls "a martyrdom of charity and sacrifice for the good of others."

By their example of lifelong commitment to God (their Life Vows) enclosed contemplatives call each of us in our various secular vocations to wholeness and holiness. Carter (2017:21) cites Ivan Illich (1973:42-46) for whom,

> [T]here is a *silence of availability* or 'deep interest', a *silence of nourishment and growth*, the *silence beyond words* and the *silence of the Pieta*. In the silence beyond words we are addressed by God, whilst in the silence of the *Pieta* (the silence of suffering) we face the mystery of death and discover the *power of compassion* (my emphasis).

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Illich's (1973:46) 'power of compassion' speaks to an intentional spiritual practice and life as a contemplative. Fr Theodosius Florentini (1994:20), founder of the Order of Holy Cross Sisters, put it aptly in stating, "Our age refuses to tolerate having contemplatives behind convent walls. Well then, *they will have them in the midst of the world*" (my emphasis). Thus true contemplation "exists in the midst of the dynamic activity of life" (Florentini, 1994:20), as should become evident in the discussion on contemplative prayer as social activism which follows underneath.

4.2.3 Contemplative prayer and social activism

The literature is replete with proponents of contemplation-as-action who affirm that contemplation and action are not set in opposition or held in tension to each other, but are held in balance or in the dialectic of complementarity.

In contrast to the above approach (4.2.2), we have one where, for Mother Mary Clare

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(1993:1) it is an entirely false dichotomy which distinguishes between prayer as a "purely Godward or personal activity on the one hand, and compassionate involvement with the world's pain, insecurity and frustration on the other hand." Mother Mary Clare (1972:7) argues that prayer and action are two aspects of a harmonious whole, two manifestations of a God-centred life.

Pope Paul VI affirms this notion. In his Apostolic Exhortation on the "Renewal of the Religious", Paul VI (1971, No. 10) exhorts the Religious communities:

> Must not members of each community who are seeking God before all else combine contemplation with apostolic love?

Merton (1968:34) similarly proposes that:

> This age which by its very nature is a time of crisis, of revolution and of struggle, calls for the special searching and questioning which is the work of the Christian in silence, his meditation, his prayer; for *he who prays searches not only in his own heart but he plunges deep into the heart of the whole world in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depths* (my emphasis).

God, moving us "down the labyrinthine ways" of time (Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven"),[4] is active in a process of cosmic renewal and invites us to "extend *caritas* for suffering at every level of human experience" (Keating, 2012:203). This urgency to stand with those who suffer the anguish of alienation is encapsulated in the invitation extended to us by Francis Thompson in his poem, "The Hound of Heaven". The theme of the poem is God pursuing sinful humans. Inasmuch as God is *hounding* sinful humans, so there is the search, the seeking, for God within humans. My concern, however, is with the concept of the hunger within contemplatives for an ever-deepening experience of oneness with God.

John Wesley's (cited in Langdon Gilkey, 1981:42) take on justice making is that the Gospel "knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness." Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard OCSO (1957), taking a different approach, arrives at the same conclusion. Chautard's (1957:37) thesis is that "the interior life must come first, our good works and apostolates will follow as the fruit of a judicious interior life." We infer

[4] In Walsh, T (ed.) The Catholic Anthology: The World's Great Catholic Poetry, p. 327.

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that, out of the prayer encounter, we bring community and solidarity to the world. A case in point is the secular spirituality of the Carmelites.

As the Carmelite Order developed over the centuries, explain the writers of their charism (2013:4) its spirituality witnessed an inter-play between the *eremitic*, mendicant, monastic and lay. Apostolic Sisters and Lay Carmelites live out their charisms among the *hombré unitil*, awakened to the reality that Christ is present in them. This deliberate act of solidarity finds a reverberation in the life and practice of Le Vicomte de Foucauld (Frére Charles de Jesus), "the Apostle of the Sahara" (McNamara, 1981:140). Voillaume (1964:38, writing a Foreword to *Seeds of the Desert*), likens De Foucauld's practice as:

> Less and less is there any question of charity exercised behind the walls of a monastery alone, but rather of a whole life of charity in direct contact with the world outside.

Br Charles of Jesus' focus was a sharing of Jesus' work of redemption. Voillaume (1964:6) postulates that the religious life of his disciples is so marked by the same tendencies that "they could not be described other than: *contemplatives thrust straight into the world and the world's misery*" (my emphasis).

Here the choice is not between prayer over service; contemplation over action, but rather being "contemplative in action" to use Ignatius's (see William Barry SJ, 2008:85) definitive phrase. However, those who intentionally walk the Christian path know of the ever-present tension between these two polarities. Leech (1992:143) challenges us not to speak vaguely about prayer and action or prayer and justice, without any indication of the concreteness within which these activities are actualised. Such realities include oppressive regimes where social activism is perceived as a threat to the state. Moved by the imperatives of the gospel, however, active-contemplatives seek to agitate for the rights of the poor and dispossessed; a stance encapsulating "prayer and courageous action" according to the Northumbrian Community (2002:7).

The work of Pema Chödrön, abbess of a Tibetan Buddhist monastery, speaks to our theme of the interrelatedness of contemplation and compassionate action. Highlighting our common suffering in this wounded world, Chödrön suggests that the solution lies in acknowledging our "coinherence of human lives" (Mother Mary Clare;

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1993:36). Chödrön calls this the "fragility of existence" which she links with the concept *bodhichitta*. Writing on the healing power of bodhichitta, Chödrön (1996:53) maintains:

> We awaken this bodhichitta, *this tenderness for life*, when we can no longer shield ourselves from *the vulnerability of our condition*, from the basic fragility of existence. In the words of the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, "You take it all in. *You let the pain of the world touch your heart and you turn it into compassion*" (my emphasis).

St Teresa of Avila (*The Interior Castle*, see 1976) in turn postulates that true contemplation leads not to self-absorption, but to the emptying of oneself on behalf of others. In addressing her nuns with regards to union with God, Teresa (1976:430) maintained:

> You may think that as a result the soul will be outside itself and so absorbed that it will be unable to be occupied with anything else. On the contrary, *the soul is much more occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God* (my emphasis).

Kirk (1934:184) perceives this Godward service as contemplation being the advocate of action. Kirk (1934:185) subsequently postulates that:

> Without humility there can be no service worth the name; patronising service is self-destructive – it may be the greatest of all disservices. Hence to serve his fellows at all – to avoid doing them harm greater even than the good he proposed to confer on them – a man must find a place for worship in his life.

In light of Mother Mary Clare and Kirk, Quoist (1981:82) asks a very pertinent question of contemplatives namely, "How can you live if you don't know why you are living?" In answer to his question, Mother Mary Clare (1993:33) reminds us that the Christian cannot escape the burden of sharing in the sorrows of mankind. For her (1993:32, 33) to pray "'Christ's prayer for the world' … is both costly and a privilege, for as we learn to see our part in this burden of man's sin, something of the prayer of Christ is re-enacted in us." Mother Mary Clare (1993:33) therefore proposes that, in prayer and contemplation, the contemplative observes the world in the light of God, and holds up its suffering to God's love for healing and restoration.

Vanier similarly questions whether the contemplative life can be insular and

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introspective. For Vanier (2008:63), "when religion closes up [its adherents] in their own particular group, it puts belonging to the group and its success" above love and vulnerability towards others. Thus, for him, religion neither nourishes nor opens the heart.

Some of the more prominent modern-day proponents of *contemplation-as-action*, like Freeman (1998:31), believes "everyone is graced by this spirit of wholeness … and completeness" to stand before God on behalf of the world. Speaking up for those who are marginalised, helpless and weak is therefore also spirituality. Wilson (1996:14) calls this "living compassionately". It is to recognise "God's story among us" (Nouwen, 1997:6) in the poor and suffering. This concept is reflected in the English anchoress Dame (also referred to as Lady or Mother) Julian of Norwich (see 1961: chapter 9, First Shewing) who maintained:

> Please, Lord, don't allow me to shut my eyes and my heart on all this poverty, shortage, suffering and want of fulfilment. Grant that I may constantly feel the stab of my own shortcomings, that I may stay permanently conscious of the desire of my heart for fulfilment in You. Grant that these three wounds of contrition, compassion and longing for You never silt up in this lifetime, cutting myself off from the truth and from humanity: myself, my fellow-men, You Lord.

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Dame Julian's thrust suggests a three-fold focus of the inward (self), outward (others; particularly the marginalised) and upward (God). This compassionate living is a sign that we are being transformed; the process of God recreating our very selves. Arico (2002:28-29) distinguishes three phases in this process of transformation, with radical transformation being at the apex. His phases are 1) *simple transformation* which takes place because of our desire and our willingness to consent to the changes, 2) *transitional transformation* which means that although we have a desire and we are active agents in our own cause, we start to feel out of control. It is an experience of brokenness; God is moving you into a new way of life, and, 3) *radical transformation* where God has taken over and is working on levels of our being that we cannot get to. In radical transformation God is completely in charge and we consent to this union with God. It is this transformative union that strengthens us for action.

The Encyclical, *Gaudium et Spes*, also speaks to this notion of 'living compassion-

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ately'. *Gaudium et Spes*, 24 teaches, explicitly, that "man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself." The experience of God's love and the experience of our weaknesses are correlatives. Consequently, the deeper the experience of God's mercy, the more compassion we will have for others. This presupposes a deliberate identification with, and action on behalf of, the poor and despised ones. Therefore, when we live in a contemplative way, surmise Dawson *et al* (2001:166) – echoing Teilhard de Chardin and Ignatius – "the whole creation becomes a sacrament of God's presence, an icon through which we encounter the divine. It means being able to see God in everything and everything in God." This is possible when we live from that place within each of us where God dwells.

Montaldo and Toth also engage with the idea of contemplative living. They propose four dimensions of contemplative living which are crucial for contemplatives who are proponents of prayer as action in the world. Montaldo and Toth (2008:9) task us to foster an,

> *Awakening* to an ever-deepening awareness of 'true self', *Contemplation* of a life experienced from a God-centered perspective, *Compassion* in relationships with others, and *Unity* realized in our undeniable and essential inter-connectedness with all of creation.

The rights and dignity of the poor, or "the rights and aspirations of the poor" as Voillaume (1964:127) terms it, are inextricably linked. Thus, if the nature of goodness is the outpouring of self for others, then contemplatives-in-action seek to struggle with the outward world through acts of justice and loving solidarity with the poor. Salvadoran Archbishop, Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez, understood the danger and possible implications of such a position; eventually being martyred for his public stand. In an entry in his *Diary*, dated 6 September 1979, Romero [5] paraphrased and contextualised (in the Salvadoran context) Irenaeus's well-known dictum, "*Gloria Dei*, *homo vivens*, the glory of God is the human person fully alive, rendering it as *Gloria Dei*, *pauper vivens*, the glory of God is the poor person fully alive." Gustav Nelson (1997:14), linking the vocation of the active contemplative to works of mercy, agitates for a community where the members are free to *live out their lives in the* world. They are expected to take up their residency in the world.

5 See Opus Dei (2013:3), "Oscar Romero and St Josemaria".

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Montaldo and Toth (2008:6) perceives this ‘residency in the world’ as one where “Contemplative living deepens the awareness of our connectedness and communion with others, [it] becomes a positive force of change in our lives and *provides meaningful direction to our journey*” (my emphasis). This new direction presupposes a call for a countercultural commitment to the mandate of Christ to “feed the hungry, clothe the poor” (Matt. 25:35-40) where, in the secular estate, the *anawim* plod “under the weight of *a daily drudgery too often made inhuman by other men’s wills* …” (Montaldo and Toth; 2008:7) (my emphasis). *“*Contemplatives subsequently long to take their experience of and with God into the world. It is through the discipline of contemplation that contemplatives bring the world into God’s presence, and thus ultimately link themselves with His world”, proposes Merton (1975:10).

Charles R Ringma (2014:8-9) cites Carlo Martini (1994:3-5) who highlights four inter-related dimensions of contemplative waiting, they being:

1. *Consolatio* – where we gain hope, courage and renewal in the comforting and healing presence of God. This is where we hear the words: you are my beloved son/daughter;

2. *Discretio* – where through the promptings and nudging of the Spirit we make new life and ministry choices. This is where we hear the words: this is how you need to live and act;

3. *Deliberatio* – where we wrestle with the voice of God and the leading of the Spirit and come to a place of surrender and obedience. This is where we say the words: Yes, Lord, I love to do your will; and

4. *Actio* – where we live out in the world the call of God and the commitment we have made. This is where we say: Lord have mercy upon me and empower me to do your will (quoted verbatim).

In this “doing of God’s will” (Matthew 7:21-23) “we seek to be contemplatives, open to the presence of God encountered in prayer, community and our service of others” (Ringma, 2014:8). Contemplatives gather within the context of a supportive community environment where each member is valued, is listened to, and “[is] empowered to have a voice and the courage to act on convictions.” For Fr Eugene Boylan OCR, writing in *A Mystic under Arms* (1945:61), the thing that matters most is

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the love in us that leads to the action, rather than the action itself. Aligning herself with Boylan's insights on prayer and action, Mother Mary Clare (1972:3) avers:

> [This] as I understand it, is the essence of a real apostle, the one who is sent but whose apostolate is primarily to *show forth the love of Christ by which he is consumed, which love must overflow into prayer and sacrificial work and offering* (my emphasis).

John Garvey (2006:29) quotes Nouwen for whom social activism, birthed in prayer, involves "a determination to listen carefully to people and events so as to discern the movements of the Spirit." It involves a deliberate setting aside of time to "be alone with God and *listen* to the Spirit" (see Renovaré, 2019:2). It further involves crisis moments and an attenuated optimism about what human beings can become and accomplish. Such contemplative practices might be coupled with a prayer prayed by the Sioux Native Americans. Andrew Wilson (1991:187) reports that in this prayer the Sioux asks the Great Spirit to "enlighten our hearts" for us to "see everything" and through this insight help our fellow-humans; particularly the *anawim* (poor and suffering masses) or the *hombre inutil* (the marginal man) ignored by society. Thus by implication, active contemplatives need to *get apart* to *see*, to get a true perspective (Pennington, 1987:102). This, then, is communal discernment.

It is a rare truth that the Christian contemplative life cannot be lived apart from community (Pennington, 1987:102). Merton (1973b:29) subsequently contends that, "The Christian (even though he be a monk or a hermit) is never merely an isolated individual. He is a member of the praising community, the People of God". For Sr Wendy Robinson SLG (2013:28) in contemplation we are turning "in love together to that which unites us – the presence of God." Elizabeth O'Connor speaks to this *communal* "turning together in love". For O'Connor (1976:58), this turning together is "both the most creative and difficult work to which any of us will ever be called." Accordingly, "the call of every Christian *is* to be in community" (my emphasis).

Contemplatives gather in "the profoundly silent presence of God" (McColman, 2010:115) with the stated aim that each gathered individual is to uphold the principle of "Being here; now". Gerald May (2001:2) affirms that "we need the nourishing experience of silence and solitude … the power of shared desire, *the grace of gathered openness* to *God*" (my emphasis). We discover God's purpose when we

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cultivate this sacred space during the contemplative moment. The practice of communal silence enables contemplatives to "discern what the Spirit is saying" (Nouwen cited in Garvey, 2006:29) to the praying community. The *shared* silence allows us to hear the *vox Dei* prompting us to act. This is the "listening responsiveness of contemplative prayer" suggests Mother Mary Clare (1993:41).

It is in the silent "darkness of the soul" (St John's *noche oscura*; *Dark Night of the Soul Book* 1) that contemplatives find and respond to the *direction* of God. In this regard Robinson (2013:24) contends that, "in the discipline and depth of silence we can begin to come into a quite new, living relationship with the silent, unknown shapes of God, the God who speaks through silences." Fr Robert Charles Llewelyn (1998:58), speaking to the concepts 'profound silence' and the 'silent shapes of God', suggests that:

> True silence which is creative silence is the most demanding activity God asks of any of us. Here it is that heart, and mind and will, memory and imagination are gathered up and collected in God.

These ruminations imply an expectant waiting on God to reveal to us where he is at work within us and his world. Rose Mary Dougherty (2009:26) therefore avers that "it [then] gradually becomes possible for us to stand in each present moment unencumbered and respond to what is given us." Voillaume (1964:60-61), writing in reference to De Foucauld's *Petits Frères*, perceives this contemplative stance thus:

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> This self-injection of ours in suffering humankind is indicative enough of the way our prayer should come. [T]he Little Brother… must carefully avoid acquiring the habit of *separating his prayer from the share of human anguish which he bears within him*. Rather must he take into his soul the prayer of mankind harnessed to its daily drudgery *too often made inhuman by other men's wills* (my emphasis).

This is a call for a "sanctification of the present moment" (Bishop Fulton J Sheen, 1950:129), "allowing God's prayer in us to fill our hearts and overflow in compassion for our world" according to Dougherty (2009:22). It is an attempt to make a common spiritual cause of action around the issues affecting those suffering in the earth. Mother Mary Clare (1993:39) postulates that, "The life of action and the experience of prayer become the one expression of a total commitment to love." Out of this

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encounter maintains *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS* 1), “Where before we invited the ‘world’ to come to us now we try to be present to the ‘joys and hopes, and griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age’.”

The true contemplative needs to be aware of at least two processes in determining the course of action they need to pursue. Leech (1992:143), tapping into the classical teachings of contemplative prayer, identifies these processes as: 1) a negative process of disillusionment, a process of stripping away of illusions and falsehoods, of superficial ideas and stereotypes, of pseudo-religion and, 2) a positive and creative process, a movement towards wholeness, integration of body and mind, flesh and spirit, personal and political. Here there are elements of Nouwen’s downward move and its impact on both the contemplative and those they are tasked with “encountering”.

For Leech (1992:144) these movements involve “a shattering of illusions and a breaking down of façades of false confidence and false security. These movements become *kairos* moments which prepares us better to go out and ‘struggle with the world’”, for “[t]hose who continue to struggle are at peace” (Thomas P McDonnell, 1974:18).

I have shown thus far that the primary gift of contemplation to contemplatives, seers or ‘seekers’ is transformation and union with God. For Ringma a second gift of contemplation is to be ‘undone’ in order to gain a new self and new perspective. Ringma (2014:8) explains this transition as follows:

> [W]e need to withdraw into ‘the cave’, ‘the desert’, ‘the closet’ in order to be denuded – stripped bare – ‘*undone*’ from our contamination, illusions and self-made plans. In this ‘nakedness’ we need to be ‘reborn’, come to see ourselves in a different light and see God’s purposes more clearly. When this takes place as God’s great gift to us, then many implications flow from this, including *a new way of engaging our world and finding our place in the vast operations of the Spirit renewing the world*. Put simply, this means that *contemplation empowers action* (my emphasis).

Ringma (2014:8), drawing from Victor Turner (1969), defines the in-between stage where one is undone as one where a new sense of self, of purpose and calling may emerge. Schneiders (1986:265) perceives this as “the capacity of persons to

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transcend themselves through knowledge and love [and] become more than self-enclosed material monads."

Thus contemplatives become "communities of justice" according to Heuertz (2014:2), whose "Contemplative prayer practice is a commitment to loving our self so we can love others well" (Heuertz, 2014:3). For Heuretz (2014:5), contemplative activism *grounds* us in God and allows us to be a channel of this love.

Fr Roger Salter (2015:1) writing in Virtueonline, identifies three progressive stages which serve as precursors for action namely, 1) the enunciation of the cause of our approach to God (*we cry*), 2) his gracious provision that attracts us (*he invites*), and 3) a firm grasp of the mercies he proffers (*we confide*). These stages personify withdrawal into the desert (contemplation), seeking union with God (through entering the silence) and interceding for the needs of society (action).

Writing about the second half of life when we are more susceptible to the idea of engaging in social activism Chittister (1999:261) proposes:

> We are closer to the centre of the self than we have been since we were born. Feeling empty and vulnerable, we *are cast adrift to contemplate what we have become and what we have done for others*. The spirituality of the second half of life calls us now to give ourselves to the world in ways that have nothing in it for ourselves except the satisfaction of knowing that *we have done what should be done because it needed to be done* (my emphasis).

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Donal Linehan postulates that a sense of the sacred has to be cultivated within the culture of our time. His position is very important for active contemplatives who interact with those on the margins of society and warrants an extensive quote. Linehan (1998:72) believes:

> The task is that of building bridges between the gifts of God and the contemporary life experience – to create a spirituality for living the gospel 'in' but not 'of' today's world. Union with God must be realized in daily life and every place can become sacred, as Thomas Merton taught.
>
> The older spiritualities tended to reach upward to God beyond this world and related readily to religious devotion. A newer approach would focus on a fullness of life within this world as an experience of faith in Christ – 'a conscious human response to God'. The emphasis […] would entail an inner search for

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> meaning and a lifelong process of conversion together with a strong "commitment to service of the wounded world" (*Gaudium et Spes*1965, par. 39).

Rohr, too, highlights this "service of the wounded world" that the Council referred to. He distinguishes between "attachment and detachment". The work of the soul is attachment whilst the work of the spirit is detachment according to him. For Rohr (1999:170), "without detachment, we develop codependency. Without attachment, however, there is no compassion, no social justice, no holding the tension of opposites." Highlighting the tension, the pain and the essentially tragic nature of human existence, Rohr (1999) proposes a Third Way or *via media* (middle way) between these two polarities. Rohr (1999:171) identifies the contemplative stance as the Third Way and states with great conviction that:

> The contemplative stance is the Third Way. We stand in the middle, neither taking the world on from the power position nor denying it for fear of the pain it will bring. We hold the realization, seeing the dark side of reality and the pain of the world, but we hold it until it transforms us, knowing that we are complicit in the evil and also complicit in the holiness. Creativity comes from here and we can finally do a new thing for the world.

For Chittister (1999:259), "The spiritual life calls us to consciousness, to awareness, to reflection on the meaning of the moment". Such a moment is embodied in Jesus' encounter with Mary and Martha of Bethany (see Luke 10:38-4). Srubas (2008:108) infer two practices from the Lucan text. She distinguishes between 'contemplative stillness' and 'productive activity'. Srubas (2008:106) likens these practices as:

> I know that contemplatives often depend on activists to prepare the food and lay the table *where the Lord might break bread* and *speak a word of wisdom* (my emphasis).

Srubas's (2008:106) categories of "breaking of bread" and "speaking a word" fall neatly into the distinction between prayer and action. The contemplative "hears" the word of wisdom through contemplative *listening* and then *acts* in the secular city. Srubas's (2008:108) call is for "each of us [to] become a whole person who is both a contemplative and an activist, both a hearer and a doer of God's word". Contemplatives therefore fulfill the injunction, *bonum est diffusivum sui* (goodness is

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self-diffusing) with great aplomb.

Iona Community's John Bell's (1989) [6] lyrics to the "Grace" of the Eucharistic Celebration, speaks to these concepts:

> God bless to us our bread,
>
> And give bread to all those who are hungry
>
> And hunger for justice to those who are fed
>
> God bless to us our bread.

Bell's call is one of both contemplative listening and social activism. It is in this regard that Mother Mary Clare (1993:34) affirms that, "Contemplative listening is decisive because it is the beginning of our entry into a personal and unique relationship with God, in which *we hear the call of our own special responsibilities for which God has intended us*. Listening is *the aspect of silence in which we receive the commission of God*" (my emphasis). Nelson (1997:7), linking the vocation of the active contemplative to works of mercy, agitates for a community, within the context of the *ekklesia*, where:

> A lean church structure sets church members free to *live out their lives in the* world. [Members] are to take up their residency in the world.

The challenge, though, is to be like the "men of the desert [and] become pillars of prayer" as Clément (1993:211) proposes. Quoting Amma Syncletica (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, see 1975), Clément (1993:212) maintains "It is possible while living amongst a crowd to be inwardly solitary, and while alone to be inwardly beset by the crowd."

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the two strategies in contemplative spirituality; namely monastic contemplation and contemplation as social activism. In the first instance I drew attention to the distinctive nature of the cloistered contemplative whose focus is the interior life of prayer and union with God. Mystics like the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross – both proponents of

[6] From the Album, "Love From Below" © 1989. WGRG: Iona Community. The text of the song appears in the *Grace in Essence* Magazine.

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apophatic prayer – taught that the way to God lies through deep darkness in which all knowledge and all wisdom are defeated and annulled by God's presence.

Practitioners of *via negative* seek union with God; more particularly union with Christ crucified. By its very nature, negative prayer neglects the concrete and social dimensions of prayer as action in the world. This could be construed as advocating disengagement from social interaction. I posited the idea, drawing from these mystics, that by the denial of customary processes of knowledge and thought, enclosed monks and nuns may come to know God who cannot be discovered by reason but by vision, not by thought but by contemplation. In this search for Immanence cloistered contemplatives align themselves with Bernard of Clairvaux's (1090-1153) yearning for God. Writing in *On Loving God* (see Dom Jean Leclercq OSB, 1987:187) Clairvaux avers, "You [God] who are everything I can desire and love … [are] true charity. True love does not ask for a reward, but deserves it."

In the second instance, I showed how the first part of this study's theme (i.e. a life of contemplation) is replicated in contemplative communities. I explored briefly how the understanding, practice and ideals of concepts such as "dark night", "unknowing" or *agnosia*, "aridity" and "passivity" are prevalent in enclosed contemplative communities. I used the various Orders as reference point. These nuns and monks all leave the visible world in order to better reach God through self-renunciation and focused contemplation. Thus prayer and contemplation is the realisation in time of the soul's union with the will of God.

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In the third instance I demonstrated that contemplation and action are not separate, polarised realities, but are interconnected; "coupled together in spiritual kinship" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*; Progoff, 1957:112). Contemplatives seek to take their experience outward to the world through social action and transformation. As such, contemplation and action need to be held together in tension. Clément (1993:199) contends that, "In this way it will be possible by degrees to walk in the hubbub of the city carrying the silence of [the desert] in one's heart." I showed that prayer and action are two complimentary realities; their separation and dissociation can only operate to the detriment of both.

One has to guard, though, in presupposing that contemplating God would lead automatically to service and concern for others. McColman (2010:242) writes with

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great insight that,

> While the exercises of the contemplative life cannot guarantee anyone any kind of supernatural or extraordinary encounters with God, for those who are willing to see the possibilities within them, they can help us to see all of life in an entirely new way. And so we arrive at a paradox: Become a contemplative, and nothing will change; become a contemplative, and everything changes.

For McColman this implies the possibility that God is working something wondrous within us. McColman (2010:242) believes that "… in accepting the possibility of deep transformation, [we] choose to embrace the promise of a new dawn." It is significant that Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*) asserts that, "the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of people of our time" are to be the concern of the disciples of Christ on their spiritual journey; opening the way for justice, reconciliation, wholeness and healing.

Simone Weil (cited in Panichas, 1977:114) affirms that "We are living in times that have no precedent, and in our present situation universality, which could formerly be implicit, has to be fully explicit. *It has to permeate our language and the whole of our way of life*" (my emphasis). Finally, in the *Rule of St Benedict* (Prologue) the mystic calls on us to 'pray, work and rest'. We cannot presume that the spiritual life can be something apart from the rest of life. We subsequently pray that we may see all our work as prayer in action. Andrew Murray (1905, see 2017:103) can therefore assert that "works do not sanctify us, rather we sanctify works."

Fr Jacques Philippe (2014:39) further contends that, "By bringing us into communion with God, prayer makes us share in God's creativity. Contemplation nourishes our creative faculties and our inventiveness" thereby enabling us to respond to the call by Vanier (1988:144-145):

> My brother, my sister, like Abraham you also have been called to leave your family and friends, to be a bridge in a world of division and war. Remember the call of Jesus who draws you out of the world of comfort and security so that you may walk with him.

This makes possible Mother Julian's (see 1961, Thirteenth Shewing) promise from God that, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well" *Deus mea lux est*.

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Chapter 4 serves as *viaticum*, providing the context and background for chapter 5 (Keating) and chapter 6 (Nouwen). In chapters 5 and 6 I offer a detailed study of the life, teaching and contemplative practice of Keating and Nouwen. Keating leans towards the first position. For him, withdrawing into the cloister of the heart becomes a sacred separation from the common place. In contrast we have Nouwen, who leans towards the second position, displaying a strong sense of social concern for those who live on the fringes of society, where suffering and brutality are the order of the day. Nouwen, in acknowledging our corporate identity, calls contemplatives to interact with the disempowered and dispossessed in our complex contemporary world.

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Chapter 5

The Contemplative Life: Abbot Thomas Keating (1923-2018)

> As for me, I have but one desire, the desire for solitude. To be lost in the secret of God's face (Merton, 1953b:1).

5.1 Introduction

Abbot Thomas Keating's and Fr Henri Nouwen's writings "contain complex discussions on the nature of being and share common themes of universality, mystical union with God, social justice and non-violence" (Caddock, 2008:3). In both Keating and Nouwen we encounter the teaching that the mystic achieves a level of intimacy with God whose experience of God transforms life and hence society, but the emphasis is different. They perceive contemplation as moving beyond the intellect and "beyond words to a deeper union with God". Both perceive contemplative spirituality as a practice that emphasises "the need for a change in consciousness, a new way of seeing God, others, self and the world" (Caddock, 2008:2). Contemplation affords them the opportunity to 'engage the world at the coalface in social activism'.

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Beyond such similarities, there are also contrasts between these two scholars that the next two chapters will explore in more depth. An immediate and obvious difference between Keating and Nouwen is that Keating continues to live as a 'cloistered contemplative' while Nouwen chose the 'uncloistered contemplative' life even though he lived in community with the intellectually damaged residents of L'Arche. Although Keating is a Christian monk, he sees similarities between Christianity and other faiths and thus calls for an integration of these diverse beliefs into an overtly Christian practice of contemplative spirituality. Nouwen has remained largely confined to the Christian expression of contemplative prayer. Despite their professed claims, however, there seems to be inconsistencies in the life and teaching of both Keating and Nouwen.

The use of the term consistent requires further philosophical reflection on criteria for consistency. Coherence and consistency have historically been regarded as con-

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stituents of ‘truth’ – which would necessarily be contested in a world described by some as ‘post-truth’. Full consistency is clearly not possible and perhaps not even desirable – as one may also be consistently wrong. For the purposes of this study *consistency* will be situated within the context of contemplative spirituality where the regular performance of spiritual disciplines, ritual practices and habits provides the framework for theological reflection.The rituals are therefore in a sense primary whereas theoretical reflection may be regarded as secondary in the sense that it reflects upon and seeks to reinforce such practices with an orientation towards the future. The views of the selected authors therefore, in terms of their own spirituality, need to be consistent with their own spiritual practices. For Keating and Nouwen this would imply living lives of contemplation and reflection with a view to maintaining a balance between the ‘inner life’ (contemplation) and the ‘outer life’ (the quest for social justice). Conversely, *inconsistency* will be defined as views that are contrary to such practices.

The bulk of this chapter will consist of detailed descriptions of Keating‘s views on a contemplative life, his practice as a monastic and his perceived leaning towards religious pluralism. This will be done making use of primary as well as secondary literature. Such descriptions will then be used to address the question whether his life of contemplation is consistent with his views on contemplative spirituality. This will be done through a critical investigation of the results of such a description, seeking to search behind the primary sources.

I commence this chapter with a discussion of Keating’s biography linking it with his vocation as a solitary professed.

5.2 Keating’s biography

Fr Thomas Keating, an American Cistercian priest, monk and former abbot, was born in Rhode Island on 7 March 1923 to a wealthy family. According to Ó Madagáin (2007:2) and Rick Archer (2013:1-2) Keating experienced an epiphany during his freshman year at Yale University. Here he was challenged in his faith and religious worldview while attending a philosophy class. Keating developed an interest in contemplative prayer in 1940 when he investigated the Church’s history and the writings of Christian some mystics. Prompted by these studies and times devoted to prayer and meditation, he experienced an awakeningthat, on a spiritual level, the

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Scriptures call people to a personal relationship with God (*A Rising Tide of Silence* DVD, 00:09:17 - 00:09:50).

This revelation became the impetus for Keating to transfer to Fordham University in New York. According to records held at Emory University (1983-2015:1-2) he received a deferment to enter seminary while awaiting to be drafted into the army. After graduating from Fordham, Keating entered the austere Trappist Order in Valley Falls, in January 1944 at the age of 20. He was ordained priest in June 1949.

David Cloud (2016:3) and Archer (2013:2) point out that "[Keating] was appointed Superior of St Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado in April 1958. In 1961 he was elected Abbot of St Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts." During his term as Abbot, and as a result of the reforms of Vatican II, Keating invited teachers from the Eastern tradition to St Joseph's. Their exposure to Eastern spiritual traditions resulted in Keating and several of the monks continuing this search throughout the 1970s at St Joseph's Abbey (Emory University, Record Group No. 070; 1983-2015:2).

In 1975 the contemplative practice called Centering Prayer was developed by Keating, Meninger and Pennington. Archer (2013:3) notes that Keating "moved back to St Benedict's Monastery following his resignation in 1981 as Abbot of St Joseph's. There he offered a series of talks on prayer at a local parish in Aspen." These conferences and retreats represent a seminal period which witnessed the proliferation of Centering Prayer in various communities. An advanced workshop was developed by Keating in which he trained teachers of the method.

Archer (2013:3) further argues that Keating's two-week intensive Centering Prayer retreat in 1983 at the Lama Foundation in San Cristabol (New Mexico) was a watershed event. Joseph G Sandman (2000:19) points out that Contemplative Outreach was established in 1984 in New York by Gus Reininger, Ed Bednar and Keating "to support the growing spiritual network of Centering Prayer practitioners." Contemplative Outreach [1] is currently based in Butler, New Jersey. According to their website (www.contemplativeoutreach.org) Contemplative Outreach personifies the embodiment of Keating's "long-time desire to contribute to the recovery of the contemplative dimension of Christianity." Keating served as president of

[1] Sandman (2000:19) points out that, from 1988 to 1999 Contemplative Outreach chapters increased from a few dozen to 154. Prayer groups increased from 73 to 439.

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Contemplative Outreach from 1985 to 1999.

Teasdale and Archer, among others, contend that Keating has been an important supporter of, and participant in, inter-religious work outside the monastery. Archer (2013:3) highlights Keating's rôle as co-founder in 1983 of the Snowmass Interreligious Conference at St. Benedict's Monastery. This Conference sponsored contemplative interfaith conferences over a 20 year period. In April 2004 Fr Robert Kennedy SJ installed Fr Kevin Hunt OCSO as the first American Trappist instructor of Zen. In its 16 July 2004 publication the *National Catholic Reporter* indicated that "St. Joseph's had become a full-fledged Zen center that year; the fruit of interfaith contemplative dialogue."

The Vision Statement (www.contemplativeoutreach.org) partly encapsulates the following:

> Contemplative Outreach is a spiritual network of *individuals and small faith communities* committed to living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in everyday life through the practice of Centering Prayer. The contemplative dimension of the Gospel manifests itself in *an ever-deepening union with the living Christ* and the *practical caring for others that flow from that relationship*.
>
> We identify with the Christian contemplative heritage. While we are formed by our respective denominations, *we are united in our common search for God* and the experience of living Christ through Centering Prayer (my emphasis).

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The Association for Global Thought (2018:2) affirms that "Keating has been a peace activist for most of his life. For him the key to building peace in the world lies in cultivating peace in one's heart. As such, the gradual enrichment of the inner life" (Nouwen's, 1972b:28, "inward way") leads to the healing of the outer world. Keating travels world-wide "to teach about contemplative Christian practices and the psychology of the spiritual journey" which is the subject of his "Spiritual Journey" video and DVD series. His other teaching materials include the "Sounds True" audio learning course, "The Contemplative Journey, Vol. 1: Contemplation and Transformation from Christianity's Mystical Tradition" (2005), the "Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ Retreat" Series (2009) and *A Rising Tide of Silence* DVD (2013). The latter semi-biography, documents Keating's spiritual journey and formation.

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An entry at www.contemplativeoutreach/faq-item/who-thomas-keating-is highlights Keating's contribution as "past president of the Temple of Understanding and of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue". Keating, together with Tilden Edwards (of The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation), Laurence Freeman (of The World Community for Christian Meditation) and Richard Rohr are the founders of 'The New Contempla-tives Exchange', a global network for contemplative studies and practice. "The overall vision of The New Contemplative Exchange is to awaken a larger embrace and expansion of Christian contemplative understanding and practice as the vital grounding of Christian life, with openness to collaboration with all streams of contemplative wisdom, in response to the urgent social and spiritual needs of our time" (The World Community for Christian Meditation Gathering, 2016).

One of Keating's most notable legacies is the introduction of Centering Prayer to the church and para-church organisations. The proliferation of the Centering Prayer movement is a testimony to Keating's influence in reawakening this ancient practice. Despite his success, however, he has been castigated for this practice. Fr John D. Dreher (1997:183) is scathing in his criticism of Centering Prayer, maintaining:

> Centering Prayer is essentially a form of self-hypnosis. It makes use of a 'mantra', a word repeated over and over to focus the mind while striving by one's will to go deep within oneself. The effects are a hypnotic-like state: concentration upon one thing, disengagement from other stimuli, a high degree of openness to suggestion, a psychological and physiological condi- tion that externally resembles sleep but in which consciousness is interiorized and the mind subject to suggestion. Centering prayer claims for itself the notion that externally resembles sleep but in which consciousness is interiorized experience of God, while setting aside external realities and overcoming the '*otherness*' *of God*. It takes these characteristics not from Christian tradition but from Hinduism, through the medium of Transcendental Meditation.

Keating's extensive corpus consists of some 30 books. Keating's life and work elicited considerable secondary scholarship. In the secondary literature most scholars have commented on Keating's understanding of contemplative spirituality,

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his inter-religious work [2] and his classifications of “transforming union” and “the true Self / false Self”.

All of the authors mentioned in chapter 4.2.3 have taken the position that we withdraw only to re-enter the world; thereby impacting it for the better. Keating’s views on the contemplative life and his own life of contemplation are somewhat inconsistent with this premise. There are three areas in Keating’s life, i.e. his belief, his teaching (through seminars and retreats) and his practice as an enclosed monk, where these contradictions are evident.

Keating’s life and practice as a contemplative encompass ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue (his ‘Opening to the East’), the ‘hidden life’ and social justice. In his dialogue with other religions Keating follows the principles as promulgated in the *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity*, *Ad Gentes*, *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* among others.

Further explorations will therefore focus on these concepts as well as his teaching on ‘the Self’ and his perceived leaning towards religious pluralism. I shall analyse these areas in the sections following hereafter, beginning with Keating’s life as a monastic in the Cistercian Order.

5.3 Keating and the *cenobitic* life

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Keating lives out his vocation as *cenobitic* in the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance or Trappists, named after the Abbey of Notre Dame de la Grande Trappe near Seez in France. As a *cenobitic*, Keating’s vocation, emulating Merton’s (see 1978:28), is a life “totally abandoned to the Holy Spirit, a life of humility, obedience, solitude, silence, prayer, in which [he] renounces [his] own desires and [his] own ways in order to live in the liberty of the sons of God, guided by the Holy Spirit speaking through [his] Superiors, [the] Rule, and in the inspirations of His grace within [his] heart”. It is a special charism; a “gazing of the heart” in faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, #2715), where Keating has consented to withdraw entirely from the world in order to abandon himself to a life of

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[2] Dupuis (1997:2) points out that the Catholic Church’s relationship to other religions has moved “from confrontation to dialogue”.This idea is also found in Knitter (1985:135). (This is in contrast to Pope Paul VI’s view in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that inter-religious dialogue is not an integral part of the Church’s evangelising mission (see p. 122 of thesis).

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contemplation; that profound interior silence which characterises the life of both the *eremite* and the *cenobite*.

Richard Fournier (1996:3) cites Abbot Armand Veilleux (1982:143) for whom "The goal of monastic life is to get to know oneself – to know one's heart – which means to 'return to the Center', to go back to the roots, to the core of one's being, where one can ultimately encounter God". It is enjoined upon Keating, therefore, to "seek the *interiora deserti* above everything" (Allchin, 2014:23) and to uphold *The Charter, Customs and Constitutions of the Cistercians*.

Trappist monks "dedicate themselves to meditative reflection, silence and solitude under the *Rule of Saint Benedict*" (*The Charter, Customs and Constitutions of the Cistercians*, 2015:57). Monks and nuns are called to unity; expressed as unity with God and themself. The monks are further called to enter into a *koinos bios* where they seek God together in community (*sancta societas*). Fr Hugh (1961:20) points out that "[God] calls [monks] to a life of renunciation […]. *It is God who first called* and who still calls *men to renunciation* and *the motive is therefore a Godward one*" (my emphasis). At their profession Trappists take vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, stability and *conversatio morum* (conversion of manners).

Fr Hugh (1961:58) further attests that "The taking of vows in a solemn act … *binds the member to the community* at the same time as *it declares that he has willed this response to the call that God gave*" (my emphasis). For Merton (1953:7):

> The whole meaning of the monastic vocation is summed up in these vows … given to the monk as a means of consecrating his life to God. They deliver him from the uncertainties and cares and illusions that beset the man of the world. *They imply struggle and difficulty*. *They demand complete self-renunciation*. *They lead to a life perfectly hidden in Christ* (my emphasis).

Merton, arguably the epitome of the *eremitic*/solitary professed, sketches a composite picture of what the *eremitic* life would encompass. In a lengthy treatise Merton (1953:1-10) explains the rigorous practice and vocation of a Trappist, parts of which warrant replication as we consider the life, beliefs and practice of Keating as an enclosed contemplative. According to Merton (1953:1-10): [3]

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[3] Merton's 1951-1955 series of lectures to Novices as part of their training and introduction to the Cistercian way of life were compiled by Fr Patrick F. O'Connell OCSO and published in 2015 by

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> The average Trappist monastery is a quiet, out-of-the-way place […] occupied by a community of […] men who lead *a silent energetic life consecrated entirely to God*. It is a life of prayer and of penance, of liturgy, study, and manual labour. *The monks are supposed to exercise no exterior ministry – no preaching*, *teaching*, or the rest.
>
> The life is physically hard, but the compensation for this hardship is interior peace.
>
> In the average Trappist monastery silence is an all-pervading thing that […] saturates the men who live there.
>
> Farm labour is the monks' support […]. When they are not working, or praying in choir, the monks devote their time to reading, meditation, contemplative prayer. The whole day is supposed eventually to become a prolonged prayer in which the monk remains united with God through all his occupations. This is the real purpose of the monastic life; a more or less habitual state of simple prayer and union with God … (my emphasis throughout).

Fr Hugh (1961) links Jesus' call to renunciation in his disciples (Matt. 19:11-29) with the call to monastic obedience. Fr Hugh (1961:42-43) maintains:

> When it [the call to monastic obedience] is received it interrupts the ordinary course of life, so that those who accept it follow Christ in such a way that they must leave all and submit themselves to a new pattern of life […].
>
> Today's monastic obedience *is a recognition of a continuing call to a detailed obedience. In monastic obedience, the will of the individual soul submits itself, in response to a call […]. In effect, monastic obedience always takes place within a community and is directed towards the superior* […] (my emphasis).

It is to be noted that the call to the eremitical life does not exist in isolation. Patterned after the Desert Abbas, life-in-community (the *solitudo pluralis*) presupposes "solitude and communion, silence and speech, support [of] one another" (Allchin, 2014:

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the Merton Legacy Trust as *The Charter*, *Customs and Constitutions of the Cistercians* (see. Bamberger; 2015:58).

Bamberger notes in his Preface to *Charter*, *Customs*, *and Constitutions of the Cistercians* "these texts gave rise to the Cistercian way of spiritual living that continues to contribute to the Church's witness in this new millennium". For Bamberger (2015:vii) the doment is "*a witness to the process of transformation that ensures the continuity of the monastic tradition* that witnesses to the God who, as Saint Augustine observed is, 'ever old and ever new'" (my emphasis).

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vii). As a member of the Monastery of St Joseph's, Keating is part of a Christian community of men who have committed themselves to the search for God through the *horarium* (daily schedule) in corporate prayer, work, obedience, "and every sort of rigour" (Blessed Henry Suso,1910: 62); that is, an emphasis on solitude-in-community. The monks seek to live out St Benedict's precept (#73) to "prefer nothing to the love of Christ".

Having taken vows in the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, [4]Keating upholds "the practices of self-denial, austerity and abstention from worldly pleasures as the pathway to spiritual growth and moral perfection." Fr Hugh (1961:54) subsequently maintains:

> Our taking vows is precisely a religious act done in faith and repentance. We come and confess that we desire the mercy of God and the monastic rule and life.

Trappists generally affirm that the more silent you were and the more penances you performed, the closer you would draw to God and the more likely you were to make spiritual progress. This conforms to David Frenette's (2012:317) claim that, "The only way to 'see' God face to face is to remain in the darkness of unknowing." Keating (2007:4, personal correspondence), differing with the perception that the monastic life is an escape from the world, perceives it as the aggressive action of persons who struggle against "principalities, powers […] in heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). For Keating the monastic goals of personal perfection through withdrawal, is paramount. Keating professes to adhere to the *eremitic* practice of an interior perspective reaching through self-knowledge to emptiness before God. Keating (2002:14) maintains that he joined the monastic community because he was sold on the idea of spending his whole life in search of *unio mystica*, therefore,

> In my understanding, contemplative prayer was the heart of the spiritual journey. At the time, an austere regime was considered the indispensable way to contemplation; hence I looked for the most difficult order I could find. I was

[4] Although Benedictine monks follow a common way of life – Bamberger (2015:11) points out that "the chief instrument of current Cistercian practice is the *Statute on Unity and Pluralism*" – monasteries do not replicate each other. According to Norris (1996:83) these monasteries have a unity that is not restrained by uniformity.

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willing to give up everything – family, friends and comfort – in order to follow Christ into the desert (my emphasis).

Merton (1953:28), speaking to this premise, intimates that "[T]he important thing is not to live for contemplation but to live for God. That is obvious, because, after all, that is the contemplative vocation." In the Prologue of his definitive volume on contemplative spirituality, Keating (2008b:ix) expresses similar beliefs:

> As a member of a community of Cistercian monks since 1944, I have had the rare opportunity to absorb the contemplative tradition of Christianity within the context of monastic practice and experience.

As a solitary professed (enclosed monk), Keating is under monastic obligation to abide by and conform to the directives embodied in the *Declaration of the General Chapter* of 1969, where the monastic *Constitutions of the Cistercians*, the *Rule* and the Father Master (the Abbot), direct every aspect of the monastic community. *The Declaration of the General Chapter on the Cistercian Life* postulates:

> Following the first Fathers of our Order we find in the Holy Rule of St Benedict the practical interpretation of the Gospel for ourselves.
>
> God calls and we respond by truly seeking Him as we follow Christ in humility and obedience. With hearts cleansed by the Word of God, by vigils, by fasting and by an unceasing conversion of life, we aim to become ever more disposed to receive from the Holy Spirit the gift of pure and continual prayer.
>
> This search for God is the soul of our monastic day, a day composed of the *Opus Dei*, *Lectio Divina* and manual work. Our Cistercian life is basically simple and austere. It is truly poor and penitential 'in the joy of the Holy Spirit'. Through the warmth of their welcome and hospitality our communities share the fruit of their contemplation and their work with others.
>
> It is through stability that we commit ourselves to this community. It lives in an atmosphere of silence and separation from the world, and fosters and expresses its openness to God in contemplation [...].

In accepting *The Declaration of the General Chapter*, Keating would thus seemingly call for the rediscovery of the traditional eremitical vocation where the solitude of the hermit/solitary would be combined with ministry to those around him. This is, as at

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the beginning, a call into a concrete situation and into an actual monastic community. Furthermore, as an enclosed monk, Keating is expected to fulfill – in his life and practice – the dictum of Pope Paul VI to the Cistercians after Vatican II:

> Therefore the hearts of the faithful require that this living water be channeled off into them through the hidden artery uniting them to the contemplatives. Otherwise they will dry up…. There is indeed a pastoral function also enjoined upon you, *but the proper pastoral work for you is the hidden life* (Pope Paul VI, 1969) (my emphasis).

This injunction presupposes a life of prayer and reflection; God leading the solitary professed into the *ascesis* of a hidden life (Ps 131:2). This, of necessity, implies austerity, poverty and simplicity of life. One would have to presume therefore that the monks lean towards St Thomas's *vita contemplativa, simpliciter est melior quam activa* (the contemplative life in itself, by its very nature, is superior to the active life); (St Thomas cited in Merton, 1948:368). Writing a Preface to *The Charter*, *Customs and Constitutions of the Cistercians*, Abbot John Eudes Bamberger OCSO (2015:vi) points out that, "Merton was at pains to 'return to the sources'" [5] in order to maintain continuity with traditional monastic values while adapting them to the men and conditions of the mid-twentieth century". This presupposes that Keating, as Merton's heir and successor, would continue this 'unbroken' tradition. Keating, however, has opted for a generalist / universalist position; thereby seemingly distancing himself from the very tradition that is supposed to sustain his life and practice as enclosed eremitic.

However, *The Rule* of the Sisters of the Love of God (1996:4) points out that, "The practical implication of the principle of enclosure, both with regards to those who are permitted within the enclosure and the occasions on which the Sisters may go out of enclosure, shall be stated in the *Customary* (of the Order). The Bishop, or at least the Warden, shall have knowledge of, and have given permission for, these exceptions". In the Cistercian understanding and teaching, every monk called to contemplation is called to some degree of solitude. As a Cistercian monk, former abbot and spiritual advisor Keating further subscribes to the Benedictine twin vows of

[5] Back to the sources" means an understanding of the Bible, especially the New Testament, Jesus and the early Church, in the light of contemporary critical knowledge (see www.archive.thetablet.co.uk. Also in Merton; 1957a:48).

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stabilitas loci (vow of stability) and *interior patefactio ad commutationem* (openness to change). Keating's engagements in inter-religious conferences, conducting retreats and teaching seminars, and his participation in interviews outside the monastery, is therefore possible because of permission granted by the Abbot of the monastery.

Keating's teaching and speaking engagements take him away from his monastery – "the last bulwark in the world for great-souled men of bold and daring aspiration" (McNamara, 1981:114) – where he would presumably be under monastic vows to engage fully in the life of the monastery. Thomas Sterns Eliot (1936, see 1963:200), in his poem "East Coker" (III; Quartet number 2) from *Four Quartets*, reminds us of the purpose of waiting on God in the silence of the heart in maintaining:

> I said to my soul be still, and wait without hope
>
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
>
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith,
>
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Here we have elements of the monastic vocation and its thrust towards the life hidden with Christ in God (see Dame Julian, Underhill and Merton as examples).

I shall explore Keating's practice as active-contemplative in section 5.6. For now, I wish to look at how Keating perceives the Self as a distinct category in relation to God and others. Keating's teaching on the Self has a bearing on his purported "renunciatory active" work (LeFevre, 1981:78) for the neighbour.

5.4 Keating's teaching on the self

5.4.1 Introduction

Keating perceives that within us all there is a real and unsatisfied longing for God. However, worldly distractions often prevent the modern contemplative from fulfilling this innate desire for God. For Sr Margaret Magdalen CSMV (1998:18) these worldly distractions can be overcome when we accede that:

> It is far more necessary to stop and strip away the desires that have become idolatrous accretions which hinder and block our growth. For the more we turn

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to false gods to satisfy our hunger, the more starved and shriveled we become spiritually.

Merton (1951:12) comes to a similar conclusion in determining that "The earthly desires people cherish are shadows. There is no true happiness in fulfilling them." Ellen T. Charry (1996:8) agrees with Merton and is critical of "self-creation" where "the natural [i.e. true] self and the self-constructed [i.e. false] self are at odds with one another from the very outset." For Charry (1996:8), "empowerment of the self […] is so deeply individualistic that it cannot admit that not everyone can lead a self-conscious life, fastidiously forming oneself."

Magdalen (1998:42), in turn, contends that it is only in going into the *interior desertum* that the Self is able to "face [its] own fearful, inner void, to confront [its] own desert of emptiness and illusion." Therefore, in line with Magdalen (1998:18) the Self, in "opening [itself] to radical, inner transformation, will one day, by God's grace" [recover] "its heart; where God, self, other and world interpenetrate" (Fournier, 1996:4).

Keating's treatment of the self is variously identified as "the divine action/therapy" (1994), "wounded self", "healed self" (1999b) and their implication for "transformed union" (2008). He uses a further category, the concept "consciousness" (1994) to illuminate the inward workings of these practices. I shall use Keating's two volumes on Centering Prayer (as identified earlier) and the *Heartfulness Guidebook* (2009:38 - 63) to clarify how the source literature conceive the above categories; starting with the true self/false self concept.

5.4.2 Keating and the true self/false self

Keating's (1986, 2012) thesis is that "we developed a provisional or false self to make our way in the world." He believes "we are born into a duality between the *ego* (self) and *being* (oneness). The ego is driven by fear of death and alienation, and is the source of all suffering and woundedness." [6] Keating (1986:2, 2012:59), refers to the false self interchangeably as "the idealised image of ourselves", "the psychological awareness of daily life" and "emotional programs for happiness". The false self is deeply entrenched avers Keating. For Keating (1986:2), "the False Self is our *wounded* self i.e. the self which seeks for things in the world to

[6] The concept "woundedness" is understood differently by Nouwen as I shall show in chapter 6.5.5.

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counterbalance our woundedness." The solution, for Keating, is "experiencing a psycho-spiritual 'Divine Therapy' through Centering Prayer."

Keating (1986:2) perceives the false self as "beginning with needs not met in childhood." Keating (1986:2) subsequently argues that "We unconsciously compensate for these unmet needs by developing irrational compulsions for things such as 'power and control, affection and esteem, survival and security' which cannot make us happy. Our conscious thinking and our behavior attempt to satisfy these exaggerated needs; thus re-enforcing the false self." For Keating (1982:2), "the false self is created when we experience emotional trauma throughout our lives in areas of our core psychological needs." Consequently, maintains Keating

(1986:2), "[W]e develop *attachments* to people, places, and situations that bring us comfort, and *aversions* to people, places, and situations that lead to discomfort in the light of these wounds."

According to Keating (1986:186) the false self is amplified by a culture that supports material success, competition, divisiveness, over-consumption by the middle classes [7] and fear of the other. Keating (1986:187) proposes that the self developed in our own image rather than in the image of God. This accounts for the distortion of "the image of God in which we are created. The self then seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival / security, affection / esteem, power / control and bases its self-worth and identity on the group and its culture." Ó Madagáin (2007:46) concurs with Keating (1986) in posturing that during contemplation grace is present, but so is the false self. The solution, surmises Ó Madagáin (2007:46), resides in dismantling the false self by means of both active confrontation and passive purification. The latter, avers Keating (1986:3), is consenting to God's action on our souls.

For Keating the contemplative journey is not a means to experiencing untold euphoria, but rather a purification of the unconscious. Consequently, suggests Keating (1999b:7), we need to let go of the false self. However, surmises Keating (2002:23), "[the resolve] to change our values and behavior is not enough to alter the unconscious value systems of the false self" and the resultant behaviour they give rise to. Keating suggests that only passive purification through contemplative prayer

[7] See the discussion on the 'Two Standards' in chapter 6.

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can effect this profound healing change. "*Only then*", opines Keating (2002:23), "*will the reservoir of interior silence*, built up in periods of contemplative prayer, *never run dry*" (my emphasis).

Ó Madagáin (2007:46) citing Keating (2002:31) reasons that:

> Once the false self has been dismantled and a greater union with God is experienced, *we are then better enabled to minister to people without the crippling and often damaging prejudices that we were carrying before*. The purpose of bringing us through the dismantling of the false self is so that we can be *more effective instruments in the hands of God* (my emphasis).

In *Intimacy with God* Keating (1994:64-72) contends that the false self is not innate but acquired. It is gradually constructed throughout childhood on the basis of accumulated trauma once (self-reflective) consciousness has differentiated itself from its environment. For Keating (1994:71-72) any trauma which accrues from growing up in dysfunctional families and/or societies restrains negative and positive elements of the psyche into the unconscious. In an interview with Kate Olson in 1999, Keating argues that the false self is problematic precisely because,

> As we evolve toward self-identity and full self-consciousness, so grows the sense of responsibility, and hence guilt, and so grows the sense of alienation from the true self which has long ago been forgotten in the course of the early growth period.
>
> This whole process of growth normally takes place without the inner experience of the divine presence. That is the crucial source of the false self.

Keating contends that there's basically nothing wrong with us. For him (1995:2) the problem resides in our basic goodness having been superimposed by emotional programmes for happiness, something extraneous to achieving ultimate happiness through a relationship with God.

The True Self or "Higher Self" (Joseph Dispenza, 2013:3) – which I shall explore next – should therefore be a counterpoise to the false self. Keating defines the true self in slightly different terminology than Weil and Merton. For Weil (cited in Craufurd, 1973:98), when the separation between the false self and God is bridged, one loves with God's unconditional love because,

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> Such a love does not love beings and things in God, but from the abode of God. Being close to God it views all beings and things from there, and its gaze is merged in the gaze of God.

Merton, writing in *Contemplative Prayer* (1973b:86-87), maintains:

> [O]ur meditation should begin with the realization of our nothingness and helplessness in the presence of God […]. '*Finding our heart*' and recovering this awareness of our inmost identity implies the recognition that our external, everyday self is to a great extent a mask and a fabrication. It is not our true self. And, indeed, *our true self* is not easy to find. It is *hidden in obscurity and* '*nothingness*' *at the center where we are in direct dependence on God* (my emphasis).

Elsewhere Merton (2000:89, 91) defines the true self in these terms:

> We become real … not when we pause to reflect upon our own self as an isolated individual entity, but rather when, transcending ourselves and passing beyond reflection, *we center our whole soul upon the God who is our life*. That is to say we fully "realize" ourselves when we cease to be conscious of ourselves in separateness and know nothing but the one God who is above all knowledge […].
>
> The *recognition of our true self, in the divine image,* is then a recognition of the fact that we are known and loved by God (my emphasis).

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Fournier (1996:4) argues that for Keating, "the true self resides under the false accretions of individual personality that have been built up through acculturation and experience." Eliminating these accretions and "the illusions that go with them is one of the major tasks of the contemplative life and the recovery of the inner life." Ó Madagáin (2007:12) consequently postulates that:

> The true self that we are trying to get in touch with or set free is our deepest self, created in God's image. In order to reach our true self, we must unblock it of all the emotional wounds that we have accumulated throughout our life.

Keating (2014:119) perceives the true self as "God manifesting God-self in us." Keating (1986:190) clarifies this God-self as "The image of God in which every human being is created; our participation in the divine life manifested in our

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uniqueness." Thus our true self is a personal and individuated entity; not an "impersonal" or "universal" self according to him. Merton gives a less convoluted explanation of the true self than Keating. For Merton (1957a:11-13) the true self emerges only when we realise that:

> Every one of us is shadowed by an illusionary person: a false self […]. My false and private self is the one who wants me to exist outside the radius of God's will and God's love – outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion […]. For most people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. *Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend*: *to discover myself*; *and if I find my true self*, *I will find Him* (my emphasis).

Merton (1957a:13) contends that, "to say we were born in sin is to say that we came into the world with a false self, coming into existence under a sign of contradiction." Thus, for Merton (1957a:13) the individual is someone that "they were never intended to be and therefore a denial of what they are supposed to be."

Keating (1986), Arico (2002) and Ó Madagáin (2007) propose that Centering Prayer will enable us to gradually dismantle the false self; thus enabling the return to the true self. For Arico (2002:157), speaking to the dismantling of the false self, both thoughts and silence has a crucial rôle to play during Centering Prayer. Arico (2002:157) asserts that the thoughts carry what needs to be healed and the silence creates the space for the healing to take place. The false self is being healed as we surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit through the gift of contemplation.

Jesuit priest, Fr Dean Brackley SJ (1988:31) perceives this as "a reintegration of our broken and scattered lives." Ó Madagáin (2007:17), touching on the need for healing of the false self, also acknowledges that:

> The human person is a complex reality and both growth and healing take time. [W]hat needs to be healed are the suppressed emotions, which are now causing us to look for fulfilment in the wrong places. This healing can and does come about through the regular practice of centering prayer.

Keating (1986:22-23) reasons along the same lines in making this proposition:

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> The conscious resolution to change our values and behaviour is not enough to alter the unconscious value systems of the false self and the behaviour they engender. Only the passive purifications of contemplative prayer can effect this profound healing.

Keating (1992:52) links this purification to "divine action" with "consents" that we were unable to make in childhood. These consents are invitations to welcome life and death as God's gracious gifts. Keating (1992:52-55) and Ó Madagáin (2007:54-58) classify the Consents thus:

1. First Consent – to the basic goodness of our nature with all of its parts.
2. Second Consent – to the full development of our being by activating our talents and creative energies.
3. Third Consent – to accept the fact of our nonbeing and the diminutions of self that occur through illness, old age and death.
4. Fourth consent – to be transformed; i.e. a transforming union requiring consent to the death of the false self (quoted verbatim).

For Keating the journey of dismantling the false self leads us more deeply into experiencing and behaving as one who is progressively living in union with God, which is our destiny. Keating (1999a:15) proposes that, "To be no self is to be the true Self." Here he aligns himself with the Buddhist doctrine of (*Ṣūnyatā*); "non-self" or "emptiness".

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5.4.3 Keating and the elf in contemplation

Keating explores the concept the "Self in Contemplation" in works such as *Intimacy with God* (1994) and *The Human Condition*: *Contemplation and Transformation* (1999b). For Keating (1999a:15) contemplating the self encompasses "the need to explore the inner world and the human search for happiness". Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (1955:336) expresses something similar in having her Sojourner reflect thus:

> It had been so brief a sojourn […]. He was at once exhausted and refreshed. His stay was ended. Now he must gather up the shabby impendimenta of his mind and body and be on his way again.

The implication of Keating's and Rawlings' position is that "the search for God is also

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the search for ourselves" (Keating, 1999a:15). Here self-knowledge is important. Divine/transforming union, according to Keating (1986:105), "is not a free ticket to happiness in this world. For some, this may mean a life of complete solitude, full of loneliness; for others it may mean an active apostolate that prevents them from enjoying the delights of divine union; for others again, it may mean intense suffering – physical, mental, or spiritual – which they undergo for some special intention or for the whole human family." According to Keating (1999b:1), one of the great perennial questions asked by all humanity is, "Where are you?" or "Where am I?" This question is the focus of the first half of the spiritual journey (see Rohr, 2012 for a comprehensive discussion of the "two halves of life").

The search by the Self surmises Keating (1994:3) emanates from a *spiritual* hunger that is part of our nature as *spiritual* beings. The *Self undergoes a "purification of the unconscious"* (1999b:6) which presupposes a letting go of the False Self (my emphasis). Keating (1999b:6) asks two fundamental questions of the Self, namely:

1. Who are you? and,
2. Where are you hiding?

For Keating (1999b:3) the answer to these questions depends on an honest response to two further explorations, namely "Where am I in relation to God, myself and others?", and "Whoever I think I am, I am not." According to Keating (1999b:8), the Self "needs to become conscious of the divine presence within." This process happens as the Self contemplates God in the silence. In the final analysis, proposes Keating (1999b:4), "Divine love is the full affirmation of who we are". The presence of God is felt very subtly at first, surmises Keating. "As it becomes stronger and more pervasive", maintains Keating (1999b:8), "it initiates a gradual return to the state of intimacy that the story of the Garden of Eden describes in mythological form."

Keating (1999b:9) contends that "the Gospel introduces us to the divine therapy for the illness of the human condition." This is achieved through "contemplative prayer which addresses not only the distortions of our conscious behavior, but also the dynamics of the unconscious." Divine therapy, according to Keating (1999b:9), is based on:

> [The] realization that *you know where you are and that your life is unmanageable.* We may be able to lead a relatively normal life, but *there is no*

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experience of the true happiness that comes from letting go of the obstacles to the awareness of the divine presence.

Spiritual awareness is designed by God to become our *normal awareness* (my emphasis).

Commenting on the concept of transformative union in practitioners of Centering Prayer, Keating (2008b:76) posits the idea that our praying is a giving of self to God, enabling us to *receive* God, and to make it possible for God to *give* himself to us. Divine union encompasses "a single experience of the union of all our faculties in God or the permanent state of union called transforming union". For Keating (1986:71) divine union is therefore a "restructuring of consciousness effected by frequent practice not restricted to 'resting' (i.e. to be seated in quiet) prayer." Keating (1986:72) recommends persevering in the face of the *noche oscura de alma* (St John's dark night of the soul); "suffering for the sake of purification… that brings the joy of divine union."

I mentioned in section 5.4.2 that Keating's use of the concept *Ṣūnyatā* or "non-self" indicates that he borrows from Buddhism. Keating's writings are replete with such references which I highlight in the following section.

5.5 Keating and the blurring of boundaries

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5.5.1 Introduction

It is to be remembered that Keating is a Christian first and foremost who has sought the *anchoritic* life as an expression of "following Christ" (Matthew 16:24). However, many threads are woven into Keating's spiritual life at present. His thrust transcends the external differences of religions whilst acknowledging the richness of each. Keating's life and practice personify what James Herrick (2003:15) terms the New Religious Synthesis. He embodies within himself the *Novo Ordo*; being both Christian and leaning towards Eastern traditions.

Keating's practice of combining contemplative practices with psychology, eastern religion and New Age has had a marked influence on him. Keating (2008b:ix) asserts that exposure to Eastern methods of meditation awakened a deep appreciation of them. In advocating a practice which includes non-Christian religions and all faith groups, Keating takes a position which is diagonally opposite to traditional Judaeo-

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Christian religious/spiritual assumptions. He believes that experience and inner transformation is the meeting place between East (Buddhist and Hindu in particular) and West (Christian). This epitomises the push toward religious pluralism.

In contrast to Keating, Weil believed syncretism effaced the uniqueness of the individual traditions. Weil avers that each religion is alone true. For Weil (see 1984:137), “A ‘synthesis’ of religion implies a lower quality of attention.” Likewise, Merton’s exploration in Asia was aimed at deepening his own religious and monastic commitment as Br Patrick Hart, writing a Foreward and Postscript to Merton (1974: vii), reports.

According to Hart (1974:312-313) Merton (1968) could attest, “I think we have now reached a stage […] of religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment and yet learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist discipline and experience.” Pennington too affirms that Merton did not practice any Eastern disciplines. Pennington (1987:139), points out that in Merton’s writings we encounter a great adherence to the practices of the Christian and monastic tradition.

A caution is in order therefore; guided by a trend that is revealed in the inter-faith dialogues and discussion forums in which Keating participates. In her “Report on Monastic Meeting at Petersham” Sr Mary L. O'Hara CSJ (1977:53) points out that one of the objectives of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue is to acknowledge that:

> *The methods of concentration used in other religious traditions can be useful for removing obstacles to a deep contact with God.* They can give a better understanding of the oneness of Christ as expressed in the various traditions and contribute to the formation of a new world religious culture. They can also be helpful *in the development of certain potencies in the individual*, for there are some Zen-Hindu-Sufi-etc. dimensions in each heart (my emphasis).

At the conclusion of their deliberations they published *Common Heart*: *An Experience of Interreligious Dialogue* as an expression of their conviction that what unites them is greater than what divides them (see Miles-Yepez, 2006; Brooks, 2008:17). Contributors included Keating (Christian), Roshi Bernie Glassman (Zen), Swami Atmarupananda (Hindu), Ibrahim Gamard (Islɑ̄m), Pema Chodron (Buddhism), Netaniel Miles-Yepez (Sufi) and Rabbi Henoch Dov Hoffman

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(Judaism). These endeavours to promote inter-religious dialogue are focussed on small circles of intellectuals (i.e. national leaders in the respective religions). This excludes ordinary representatives of the world's religions who might feel the need for shared spiritual experience.

Keating's contention (following *Common Heart*) that "other religious traditions can give a better understanding of the oneness of Christ" is disingenuous since they all hold diametrically opposing views about God. Buddhism, as a non-theistic religion, focuses on the purification of the human mind and life. Christian scholar, Michael Green (2002:15), points to the difference between Christianity and the two ascetic religions of Buddhism and *Sanatana Dharma* (Hinduism):

> The divine in Hinduism is impersonal, though approached through countless deities and statues. Buddhism is religion without God, and even without a final existence. Christianity teaches that God both forgives a person and also offers supernatural aid. In Buddhism and Hinduism there is no forgiveness, only ruthless *karma*, and no supernatural aid.

Furthermore, the other religions do not teach the salvific otherness of Jesus as Saviour and Mediator as understood by Christians. *Redemptoris Missio*, 5, for example, speaking to the character of the revelation of Christ, maintains "God made himself known in the fullest way in the definitive Word of his salvation: he has told humanity who he is. And this definitive self-revelation is the fundamental why the Church is missionary by nature. She cannot fail to proclaim […] the fullness of truth which God has made known to us about himself." Similarly, the religions do not teach about Christ's unique position to the Father.

Keating's statement also flies in the face of Christian belief about Jesus' Incarnation. Keating is thus seemingly supporting the belief that there is "a deep, evolving experience of community between and among the religions" (Teasdale, 1999:4). The concern here is whether Keating, in accepting Buddhism, Hinduism and Islamism on their own valid terms, is not compromising his Christian beliefs. Doctrinally, the heart of Buddhism lies in the notion of *no-self* or *emptiness* surmises Krüger. Krüger (1991:6) points out, however, that Buddhism is "not atheistic; i.e. it is not opposed to theism and does not deny a divine realm."

The call by Keating and others for unity is an aberration of Jesus' *ut omnes unum*

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sint injunction (John 17:21) which proceeds from his unity with God. Keating's viewpoint leans towards syncretism, a concept viewed in a negative light by the International Missionary Council. In their discussion manual the International Missionary Council, citing Madathiparampil Mammen Thomas (1985:398), defines syncretism as "illegitimate mingling of different religious elements". In line with this definition, the Manila Manifesto [8]rejects "the *syncretism which tries to mix faith in Christ with other faiths*" (my emphasis).

5.5.2 Keating and religious pluralism

Despite being a Christian, Keating accepts the Buddhist and Islamic faiths, in particular, as equally valid. In this regard Keating (Vision No. 11 of Contemplative Outreach) intimates: *We affirm our solidarity with the contemplative dimension of other religions and sacred traditions*, with the needs and rights of the whole human family, and with all creation (my emphasis). Keating (2008b:64) subsequently proposes that Christian contemplatives should "be challenged by the insights of Eastern spirituality, *perhaps even to integrate them into our Christian tradition*" (my emphasis). Keating (2012:217) further notes:

> It should be possible to belong to the emerging global community … and to *embrace trans-cultural religious values as well as to practice one's own religious tradition. Spiritual unity is the catalyst that could facilitate unity on all the other levels of social interaction* (my emphasis).

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It is to be questioned whether the meditation techniques practiced by Buddhists or Hindus can by themselves assure mystical experiences. In an interview with Jim Kenny in 2012 Keating (2012:8) opines, "If you don't love all of the religions *you're not practicing your own correctly*" (my emphasis). He therefore aligns himself with the precepts and teachings of the religions; equating the contemplative tradition of other religions with the Christian contemplative tradition. A case in point is the inner worship of contemplating Buddha which Keating compares to Christian contemplative prayer. Keating (2008b: ix) contends that "The contemplative dimension of life, present in all the great religions, is *the common heart of the world*. *There the human family is already one*" (my emphasis). Keating thus calls for the integration of an Eastern spiritual experience into the Christian contemplative experience. He

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[8] See Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation 1989. *The Manila Manifesto* Section 3: "The Uniqueness of Christ".

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equals out the different religious traditions and assimilates them into one as if they are compatible.

For Bryan R Wilson (1995:24), Keating's *raison d'être* embodies "an eclectic range of mystical traditions as the inspirational sources to appeal to a Western constituency." Needless to say, there are subtle, though important, differences between different religions. I deal with some of the more serious differences further down. It suffices to make a few general observations at this stage.

Firstly, according to Alfred Bloom (2017:1) "Christianity provides the major paradigm for religion based on revelation, while … Buddhism is a leading model of religion based on the wisdom of an ancient sage gained through enlightenment." Secondly, a statement such as "The contemplative dimension of life … is the *common heart of the world*" (my emphasis) runs contrary to the position held by Islām with regards to *iman* (confession of faith) and mystical life for example. There is therefore no "common heart" in these instances despite Keating's assertion that there is. There are other instances where the differences between Christianity and the world's religions part ways. I turn now to a fuller discussion of such differences.

Some of Keating's terminology is very similar to that of the New Age movement. One such instance is Keating's launch of and participation in the Snowmass Interreligious Conference of 1982. At the end of their deliberations the participants published eight "Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding" (see Scarborough Missions, 2016) including the following three:

1. The world religions bear witness to the experience of Ultimate reality to which they give various names: Brahman, Allah, Absolute, God, Great Spirit.

4. Ultimate Reality cannot be limited to any name or concept.

6. The potential for human wholeness – or in other frames of reference, enlightenment, salvation, transformation, blessedness, nirvana – is present in every human person.

It is crucial to interrogate these and other constructs that make up Keating's belief, understanding and practice as a contemplative monk. Keating affirms these Principles as descriptive of the practice of modern contemplatives. A closer look and an analysis of these beliefs reveal a marked leaning towards syncretism and

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assimilation of the religions. I shall unpack these statements in the sections following immediately below. I wish to begin with a statement Keating makes in *The Thomas Keating Reader*.

Keating (2012:220) argues that "[e]very seeker of Ultimate Mystery has to *pass through interior death and rebirth*, *perhaps many times over*" (my emphasis). Here there are elements of reincarnation; both a Hindu and Buddhist concept ánd belief. Krüger (1991:40-41, 191) explains:

> Reincarnation in Hinduism is when the soul, which is seen as eternal and part of a spiritual realm, returns to the physical realm in a new body. A soul will complete this cycle many times, learning new things each time and working through its *karma*. This cycle of reincarnation is called *saṃsāra*. The third of three key concepts, linked to *karma* [9] and *saṃsāra*, is *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* refers to the escape from the cycle of birth and rebirth.
>
> The term used by Buddhism to express its unique interpretation of liberation is nirvāṇa". Conversely, reincarnation in Buddhism – sometimes called metempsychosis – asserts that rebirth does not necessarily take place as another human being, but as an existence in one of six Gati (realms) called Bhavachakra. In Buddhism karma functions as the predisposition to engage in actions whose roots lies beyond the boundaries of our consciousness.

This concept and its related understanding are inconsistent with Christian belief about the soul at death, yet Keating accepts this teaching unquestioningly through the assertions he makes. A similar difficulty arises with the four selected statements from "Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding" (2016:1).

The first one states that, "The world religions bear witness to the experience of Ultimate reality to which they give various names: Brahman, Allah, Absolute, God, Great Spirit." The second one states that, "Ultimate Reality cannot be limited to any name or concept."

Here Keating associates and equates the monotheistic God of Judaism and Christianity with gods in other faith communities. Christians and Jews believe in the otherness of God/YWH. The three Abrahamic faiths are monotheistic with Christ-

[9] Karma is an accumulation of every good or bad deed, thought, word and everything else you have ever done in this life and in all of your previous lives.

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ianity's monotheism being Trinitarian, while Judaism and Islam are strictly Unitarian. Orthodox teaching on Trinitarian belief is that God is one Being in three divine persons.

Furthermore, Christians perceive God as unfathomable, immeasurable and inexhaustible. He is, in the words of Hymn 372 (*Hymns Ancient and Modern Revised*, 1982:294) “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”. This distinctive nature of God is not replicated in the other religions. The “other” or the “numinous” speaks of God, the Creator, who is above and greater than the creature. This is evident in the book of Isaiah, among others, where we are reminded of the uniqueness of God:

I will not give my glory to another (Is. 42:8).

I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God (Is. 44:6).

To whom will you compare me or count me equal? (Is. 46:5).

I am God, and … there is none like me (46:9).

The essence of Islamic faith is the doctrine of *tawhid* (the oneness of God). Ebrahim Moosa (1991:208) points out that, “In Islām, Allāh signifies a transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient and sovereign deity, who is beyond human perception”. For Pundit Sivasri (1998:18) “… the word *Jothi*[10] in Hinduism is used to symbolise God, good, unity, harmony, reconstruction, renewal, peace, love, truth, righteousness and service. It shows the path to attaining enlightenment and removes all kinds of evils, dispelling ignorance and bringing good over evil. In the latter instance *Deepotsavas* (Illumination) signifies the victory of divine forces over those of wickedness.” Two lines from the Deepavali prayer show how transformation takes place without a Saviour or mediator between God and humans; a fundamental belief in Christianity:

Om! *Asatoma Sadgamaya* (Lead us from the unreal to the real) and,

Mrityorma Amritam gamayu (From mortality to immortality)[11]

The latter concept does not indicate how transformation from the old self to the new self is either effected or achieved.

Another point of contradiction where the various faith communities part ways is that

[10] Pundit Sivasri, Guru Krishnaa, is the Hindu Priest at the Radha Krishna Temple in Gatesville (Cape Town).

[11] See Isha Sadhguru, 2017.

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of salvation. In the third Guideline for Interreligious Understanding, Keating postulates that, “The potential for human wholeness – or in other frames of reference, enlightenment, salvation, transformation, blessedness, nirvana – is present in every human person.” However, Hindu and Buddhist concepts such as “transformation”, “nirvana” and “enlightenment” have their own nuanced meanings that are diametric-cally opposite to the Christian concepts of salvation and transformation. The former is a referent for Christianity’s *heilsgeschichte*. The latter refers to the transformation from a life that no longer conforms to the ways of the world to one that delights God. This is accomplished by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2); an inward spiritual transformation that will manifest itself in outward actions (Col. 1:10 and Eph. 2:13). Thus, when our thinking is changed, our beliefs, our actions and our life are changed.

In Christianity the *heilsgeschichte* (see Stephen C Neill, 1970) identifies the personal redemptive activity of God within human history to affect his eternal saving action. Christianity is unique in its teaching that salvation is through faith in the substitutionary atonement of Christ, his resurrection and his finished work on the cross. Here we encounter God’s self-communication through which he makes known his divine plan.

This may be accomplished through his *theophany*, the manifestation of himself in a visible form to enhance human understanding. Every other religion and cult teaches works of righteousness as the path to salvation.

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For Bloom (2017:4), “Salvation in Buddhism follows a different paradigm or template because human evil is not viewed as sin against God or violation of his commands. Human evil is grounded in fundamental ignorance. […] a blindness to our true nature as passion-ridden beings filled with hate, greed and the delusion of our own goodness. […]. *Salvation is liberation from such bondage through the transformation of our consciousness and our awakening to the true nature*; *the Buddha nature*” (my emphasis).

Islam is not a religion of salvation in which Allᾱh is the active agent and the people are merely responsive. Here, salvation is preached as changing the world as opposed to substitutionary atonement. William Montgomery Watt (1991:21) highlights two points at which the Qur’ᾱn appears to deny what is central Christian

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belief. Watt (1991: 21) argues that "[i]t appears to deny that Jesus died on the cross (Surah 4:156-158) and it rejects his divinity (Surah 4:171); with the attendant denial of the doctrine of the Trinity (Surah 4:171, 5:76)."

The fourth Guideline for Interreligious Understanding states that, "Prayer is communion with Ultimate Reality, whether it is regarded as personal, impersonal or beyond them both." For Christians prayer is both communication and communion with a personal God who can be known through his self-revelation in Jesus who is both "the propitiation for our sins and the mediator between God and us" (1662 *Book of Common Prayer*; see 1955:14). For Geoffrey Parrinder (1961:193) "Prayer in Islam involves more than words and so the word *şalāt* includes the actions of ritual devotion." Cloud (2013:2) is therefore understandably concerned that Keating and others "… are using contemplative practices, yoga, Zen, and Sufism to promote interfaith unity."

The final point of divergence in the various religions is that of the view of transformation. [12]

The belief and practice of the Buddhist and Islamic faiths are incompatible with Christian faith and morality. Buddhist and Islamic Christianity's radical transformation of humans presupposes that the personality is divinised by, not merged into, God. Christian belief hinges on, and is evident in Jesus' Incarnation, death and Resurrection. The Christian is recreated in Christ (Jn. 3:3, 5:24; Rom. 6:11; II Cor. 5:17). Keating (2008b:50) himself attests, "Christianity is not centered around a moral teaching, but *around a person – one who is both man and God at the same time – two natures indissolubly linked in the oneness of a single person*" (my emphasis).

It is to be remembered that Christianity, at its noblest, is not only about personal transformation, but also about social and institutional tranformation until everything comes under the Lordship of Christ and God's Kingdom [13] rules completely (Matthew

[12] The scope of this study does not allow for an exploration of this concept. I would recommend Morgan's and Baybrooke's excellent volume. The authors (1998:126-139) give a comprehensive overview of how the religions respond to this imperative. Starting with the Baha'i faith and ending with the Zoroastrian faith, Morgan and Baybrooke explain the differences very succinctly.

[13] The kingdom of God is the sphere of God's rule (Psalm 22:28). The Kingdom is variously described as "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11), "kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11), "kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5), and "kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Revelation

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3:11, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 9:1-2, John 18:36). In Christianity both the *Ecce nova facio Omnia* and the *regnum Dei intra vos est* apply with equal validity.

Keating (1986, 1994, 1995) further speaks of moving to "higher levels of consciousness", the "energies of the unconscious", and the "healing of the unconscious". Keating shows tendencies prevalent in the beliefs of Teasdale (1999:3), believing that "what the religions hold in common can be the basis for creating a new world." Teasdale (1999:3) references this as "the Interspiritual Age" characterised by a "global culture based on common spiritual values."

Keating (2016b:3) following Teasdale (1999) teaches that "mystics of all religions are in touch with the same God". As such Keating (2016b:3) uses terms like Trusting in "God" [sic] or in a "Higher Power" or however you understand it, "the Absolute" or "the meaning of the universe", interchangeably and almost indiscriminately. These and similar statements have resulted in Keating's critics labelling him as leaning towards syncretism and promoting New Ageism. Ó Madagáin (2007:235-249) highlights the objections to Keating in various journal articles by critics like Catholic teacher, Johnette S. Benkovic, and Holy Cross Father Edmund Sylvia CSC. Benkovic (1993:24) perceives Centering Prayer as New Age in form, parading as Christian, but imperceptibly leading people away from focusing on Christ and instead focusing on self-fulfillment and self-realisation. Benkovic (1993:24) maintains:

> By this term we are referring to that prayer which concentrates on emptying the mind of thought through the repetition of a single word. *We are not referring to prayer that centers on Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him*.

Ó Madagáin (2007:247) identifies Dreher as another critic. Dreher (1997:2) defends his criticism of Keating in an online article called The Danger of Centering Prayer stating that, "the technique of *Centering Prayer* is neither Christian nor prayer." Caddock, too, is highly critical of Keating. Writing in response to the volume by Manning, Caddock (2008:3) questions Keating's teaching about salvation. Caddock is concerned that Keating echoes Manning (1996:198) for whom the call to salvation is "*a call to a transformation of consciousness to be psychologically awakened to the unity and oneness of all creation*" (my emphasis). In contradistinction to this premise, Christians are urged "to work out [their] salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

11:15). Admittedly, the kingdom of God is the "already-but-not-yet"; and we "have to live with the 'not yet'" contends Nouwen (1997b:65). *Ut adveniat regnum tuum*.

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This *working out* does not imply exterior acts, but rather who we are to become, i.e. to die to self and put on Christ (Eph. 4:22-24).

For these critics Keating seems to have abandoned his roots in Christ for a universal worldview vis-à-vis the religions; this despite him being entrenched in the Christian monastic tradition. The latter presupposes that the faith which he holds and proclaims is, in line with Fr Arthur Macdonald Allchin (1967:2), "the life of Christ, present in every age in the lives of the saints, Christ's life down the centuries." For them, his teaching leans towards an unambiguous call for compromise, syncretism and assimilation in terms of religious belief and practice. Such a position would cause alarm within contemporary lay contemplatives who are seeking to "contemplate God" within the purely Christian contemplative tradition.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, for example, writing in the "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation" is understandably cautious in warning about the possible damage such practice could cause. Ratzinger (1989:34) states, "… mixing Christian meditation with Eastern techniques can lead to syncretism." Ratzinger (1989:12), speaking to the dangers of assimilation, further contends, "... we find ourselves faced with a pointed renewal of an attempt, which is not free from dangers and errors, *to fuse Christian meditation with that which is non-Christian*. […] Still others do not hesitate to place that absolute without image or concepts, which is proper to Buddhist theory, on the same level as the majesty of God revealed in Christ […]."

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Pope Paul VI too, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 53), classifies other religions as "natural religious expressions, worthy of esteem [but which cannot establish] an authentic and living relationship" (with God). In *Ecclesiam Suuam* (no. 107) he maintains, "Indeed, honesty compels us to declare openly our conviction that the Christian religion is the one and only true religion." The Encyclical, *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Waters of Life* (no. 2.2.3) is equally wary in its treatment of syncretism and assimilation. There the compilers address their concerns thus:

> Developing our human potential will put us in touch with our inner divinity, and with those parts of our selves which have been alienated and suppressed. This is revealed above all in Altered States of Consciousness (ASCs), which are

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> induced either by drugs or by various mind-expanding techniques, particularly in the context of ‘transpersonal psychology’.

Keating (2008b:29), however, teaches that “all religions, at their deepest mystical level, use myth and symbol *to say the same thing*” (my emphasis). Keating (1986:124-125) is of the opinion that “if we stay on the spiritual journey long enough, we will eventually reach a point where *the practices that used to sustain us in our faith fall short*. They don’t support us like they used to. When this happens, though it can be incredibly disillusioning at first, it’s actually *an invitation to go deeper with God, to draw nearer to Go*d” (my emphasis).

In the final statement his call is for a purely Christian response vis-à-vis our need of God as the ultimate object of our longing; linking it with Christ’s *kenosis* or “self-impoverishment” (Main, 1981:66). Keating (2008b:29) argues:

> In the spiritual disciplines of the great religions of the East, *the emphasis is on emptying the mind of concepts.* To those who follow these traditions, there-fore, the idea of going to the Absolute (i.e. God) through a man (i.e. Jesus) seems like a second-rate procedure. *Anyone who has experienced trans-cendence is likely to reject that procedure* (my emphasis).

This is contradictory to Keating’s (1986:127) earlier teaching that “… thoughts are not only inevitable, but an integral part of the process of healing and growth initiated by God.” He (1986:127,180) further argues that practitioners should avoid manipulating their experience to either “have no thoughts” or “make the mind a blank.” McColman (2010:63) contends that Merton, Bede Griffiths, Bourgeault and Keating express their Christian faith in tandem with Sufism, Vedanta or Zen. The difference, however, resides in Merton’s emphasis. McColman (2010:63) points out that Merton “*approached interfaith spirituality* with a more open and generous spirit, hoping simply to encounter *those with a different spirit*, those with *a different perspective*, and *in a genuine desire to deepen wisdom and understanding*” (my emphasis).

Keating’s life, practice and teaching on contemplative prayer are not a call for the religious traditions to converge, but rather one where the call is for the traditions to merge. As I pointed out earlier, there are too many elements – real divergences – in the various traditions which make such a call problematic. Based on the above

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discussion, I would propose that the religions are neither equivalent nor complementary. As an avowed inter-religious advocate, it serves Keating well to remember the words of martyr and fellow-Catholic, John Bradburne [14] who intimated:

> God's love within you is your native land,
>
> So search none other, never more depart,
>
> For you are homeless save God keeps your heart.

Having posited a mostly negative picture of Keating's teaching on, and dialogue with, other religions, I now offer a more positive view. We can presume that Keating's teaching on the religions revolves on two approaches to inter-religious dialogue, namely, education (learning about the other) and transformation (losing and finding oneself through "the other").

Keating's work responds to the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions and to *Ad Gentes*. Both documents recognise and affirm the moral values in dialogue between religions. *Ad Gentes* opens with these words:

> The Church, therefore, urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture (*AG* 1).

Vatican II considered the Catholic Church's relationship to other religions and advocated for inter-religious dialogue as an integral part of the Church's mission. The Council acknowledged that positive values are found preserved in the great religious traditions of humanity. It affirmed that in other religions there are "precious things, both religious and human" (*GS* 92), "seeds of contemplation" and "elements of truth and grace" (*AG* 9, 18), "seeds of the Word" (*AG* 11, 15), "elements which are true and good" (*OT* 16) and "rays of the truth which illumine all mankind' (*NA* 2).

The Council recognised and affirmed the spiritual and moral values in other religions in stating, "whatever truth and grace is already found among the nations is a sort of

[14] Bradburne is cited by Owen Williams in *The Southern Cross*, June 14 1998.

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secret presence of God" (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*, 9). *Ad Gentes* (*AG* 11, 41) spell out the need for inter-religious dialogue, through "seeds of the Word", which will enable the members of the Church to witness to Christ:

> In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those peoples by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of people among whom they live; *let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living*; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently *lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows*. At the same time, however, let them look to the: profound changes which are taking place among nations, and let them exert them-selves to keep modern persons, intent as they are on the science and technology of today's world from becoming a stranger to things divine; rather, let them awaken in them a yearning for that truth and charity which God has revealed. Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of women and men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may *learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth* (my emphasis).

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Furthermore, maintains *AA* (14, 29), "At the same time, let them try to illuminate these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior."

Nostra Aetate contains similar themes. *Nostra Aetate* (*NA* 1) opens with the following statement:

> In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, *the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions*. *In her task of promoting unity and love among men*, indeed among nations, *she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship*, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely

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> her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship (my emphasis).

Nostra Aetate, 2 continues: The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. *Nostra AetateNA* 2 consequently instructs the members of the Catholic Church to acknowledge, preserve and promote the socio-cultural values, the spiritual and the ethical values found among the religions. This, according to the declaration, is achieved through *dialogue* and *collaboration* with other religions.

Dominus Iesus (*DI* 22) too takes a balanced approach in stating that, "Equality, which is the presupposition of interreligious dialogue, refers to *the personal dignity of the parties in dialogue*, *not to doctrinal content*" (my emphasis).

The views of Pope Francis and Belgian theologian Fr Jacques Dupuis SJ are also enlightening. Pope Francis (2018:2) touches upon the *benefits* of dialogue across the religions. In a message which Pope Francis sent to the participants of the Inter-religious Forum G20 in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 26-28 September 2018, he maintained:

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> With regard to religions, I believe that beyond the differences and different points of view, a first and fundamental contribution to the world today is to be able to show the fertility of constructive dialogue as a way of discovering among us all the best solutions to the problems that affect us all. Such dialogue does not mean renouncing one's identity (Apostolic Exhorta-tion *Evangelii Gaudium* 251), but *being willing to go out to meet the other*, *to understand their reasons*, *to be able to weave respectful human relations*, *with the clear and firm conviction that listening to someone who thinks differently is above all an occasion for mutual enrichment and growth in fraternity* (my emphasis).

For Dupuis (1997:363) the "spirit of dialogue" must characterise the Church's mission of evangelising. Dupuis's hypothesis is that of an "inclusive pluralism" which acknowledges the value of, and the positive elements in, the religions. According to

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Dupuis (2002:223), God reaches people and mediates his salvific purposes to all of humanity. This is achieved through the provision of “paths to salvation” which are present in the religions. Paul F Knitter (1985) also touches upon the value of dialogue with other religions. For Knitter (1985:95) the benefits of inter-religious dialogue is that “one is prepared to listen to the other, to allow oneself to be challenged by the other, and to believe and hope that through this dialogue one can come to a more adequate understanding of the faith of the other and of one’s own faith as well.”

The next section will explore Keating’s teaching and practice as a contemplative activist.

5.6 *Id quod est*: Keating as active-contemplative

In the preceding sections I have posited the idea that true asceticism is not the rejection of the world, but the acceptance of the bond that binds humanity together in common suffering. Fr James Conner OCSO (1993:12) subsequently postulates that contemplating God in the silence of the heart, calls us to *metanoia*; “allowing contemplatives to pronounce that prophetic word in the earth.” For Keating (2002:46) this is the vocation of being a member of the human family. There is an urgent need for this “prophetic word in the earth” because, as Judy Herman (1992:51) suggests, the *hombré inutil* the world over experience severe trauma, and:

> Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. *They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others*. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. *They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis* (my emphasis).

The Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes (1980:48) notes that “Religious should live in a realistic way the mystery of the desert to which their *exodus* has brought them. It is the place where … the world rises from its condition of arid earth and becomes paradise anew. For this reason it could be said that

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contemplatives are in a certain way 'in the heart of the world'". [15] Thus contemplatives become the catalyst for the *anawim* becoming *mensch* – true human beings. Keating (1999a:2) points to "the importance of contemplation as *the source* of action" (my emphasis). Keating therefore insists that contemplation is not preoccupation with our own interests. For Keating (1999a:2) "we bring the needs of the world and the problems of life before God, then leave them with him and wait in silence not only from speech, but as far as possible from thought."

According to Keating, "there is no limit to what God will do by means of us, if we train ourselves to trust him enough." In taking this prophetic stance, Keating implies that he has "a word" (Conner, 1993) for current situations and concerns that beset modern humans. Pennington (1999b:131) similarly intimates that regular contemplative practices like Centering Prayer will not only result in a deepening joy, but also a deepening share in all the suffering in the "desecrated earth" (Pennington, 1999b:131). For Pennington (1999b:132), "We have been 'Christed in baptism'. With him we weep, intercede, and offer up the splinters and beams of the cross that the Father allows to be placed on our shoulders or invites us to carry with the Christ in others, as did Simon of Cyrene."

Keating's teaching on transformation of consciousness provides the context for a consideration of his authenticity as active-contemplative since transformation opens him to the possibility of serving others. For Keating's (1995), transformation of consciousness embodies "being centered in one's heart [as] the key to living a life of connection and integrity with self, God, others."

This is evident from his proposal during an interview in the "Spirit of Peace Building Series" with Jim Kenny on 1 September 2012. Keating suggested that "We're on the edge of an axial period, put it that way. Which, in spite of all its miseries and violence; there's a seed moving at a deep level in humanity that is being nourished by this contemplative renewal and activated by social and peace activities and so on."

Keating (2012:8) avers that "we are allowed to co-create the future with God." Keating (2012:10) further postulates that "*we should interrogate our contemplative practices and deepen their earnestness*, so that our capacity to *bring the fruits of*

[15] Note how this differs from Keating's perception of "the heart of the world" as we encountered in section 5.5.1 above.

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contemplation into our activities becomes a continuous exchange" (my emphasis).

In his brief response to Keating's pronouncements, Kenny (2012:12, 14) proposes that, "we are in a second 'axial age'; the first axial age – the birth of the great, classical religious traditions of ethics and spirituality – having passed." For Kenny this second axial age provides the ideal platform for contemplative activists to attend to the needs of the most disempowered in society and enable their voices to be heard. This is the call for "social justice" as Fr Ronald Rolheiser OMI (1999) has it.

There are semblances of this call to social activism in the Encyclical *Venite Seorsum* III. *Venite Venite Seorsum* III, commenting on the hidden life of religious monks and nuns, vividly points out that:

> This way of life does not make those called to it aloof from the rest of humanity […]. In solitude where they are devoted to prayer, contemplatives are never forgetful of their brothers and sisters. *If they have withdrawn from frequent contact with them, it is not because they are seeking their own quiet comfort, but to share more universally in the fatigue, sufferings and hopes of all humanity* (my emphasis).

Throughout this chapter I juxtaposed Keating against Merton in an attempt to highlight some of Keating's departures from the normative as monastic. I wish to do so again. I'm guided by Conner (1993:12) who said of Fr Louis, "Merton was a social critic precisely because he was a contemplative. He sought the monastery and solitude because [as Merton states], '[I]t is clear to me that solitude is my vocation, not as a flight from the world, but as my place in the world'. Merton believed that the contemplative must share in 'the universal anguish and the inescapable condition of mortal man. The solitary, far from enclosing himself in poverty, becomes every man. He dwells in the solitude, the poverty, the indigence of every man'."

In most of his writings Merton addresses this thrust of the *hermetic* (solitary) life. Merton (1978a:29) intimates that the ultimate ends of the monastic vocation can only be viewed in light of the *ad mysterium Christi* since Christ is the centre, the source and the end of the monastic calling. In essence, argues Merton, Christ is both the *way* and the *goal* of the monk.

Merton further attests in *Journals*, Volume 6, 345:

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> [W]hat I am looking for in solitude is not happiness or fulfillment but salvation. Not 'my own' salvation, but the salvation of everybody. […]. I am here for one thing: to be open, not to be 'closed in' on any one choice to the exclusion of all others, to be open to God's will and freedom, to His love which comes to save me from all in myself that resists Him and says no to Him.

Merton seemingly proposes that the modern contemplative needs to respond, *not only as a social activist*, *but as a contemplative* who acknowledges that, if we truly believe in the dignity of all as children of God and see every person and culture as God's manifestation to the world, this belief should be evident on all levels of our interactions (Conner, 1993:12).

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, from whom Keating draws insight, says much the same. For the mediaeval author "*Anyone who aspires to contemplation must cultivate study*, *reflection and prayer*" (Progroff, 1957:119) (my emphasis). This practice presupposes that the monk practices his vocation within the confines of the monastery. As Chautard (1957:8) points out, it is the fruit of *union* with our Lord through prayer, mortification and the sacraments. Archer (2013:3) highlights Keating's life as one of devoting himself primarily to personal study and reflection, prayer and writing. Extraneous to these monastic obligations Keating presents seminars and workshops, leads retreats and is a participant-presenter in inter-religious dialogues outside the monastery. The latter practices have become the trademark of Keating's life and practice as contemplative.

What Bishop Kallistos Ware infers about the Jesus Prayer, can be transposed onto Keating and his retreat into the monastery. For Keating, á la Ware (1974:32), retreating to Snowmass might be "regard[ed] as self-centred and escapist, introverted, an evasion of responsibility to the human community at large" (my emphasis). Johnston differs with this understanding. For Johnston (1986:102) "the mystic ... has in his own way heard the cries of the underprivileged, the down-trodden, the victims of violence and deceit and exploitation." This is achieved surmises Johnston (1986:101) through an inner fire and,

> Sometimes … this inner fire *drives people into solitude where they intercede* for mankind and unleash a power which shakes the universe. But the same inner fire *drives others into the midst of action with a passionate love for*

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> *justice* and a willingness to die for their convictions. Here is the action which is the overflow of mysticism. It is filled with compassion for the poor and needy and underprivileged (my emphasis).

Johnston (1986:105) classifies these as "mystical action" or "flight and involvement".

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I gave an overview of Fr Keating's life, his beliefs and his practice as a contemplative monk in the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance. I illustrated the complexity of Keating's teaching about contemplative prayer, the true self/false self, the self in contemplation, divine union and transformation of consciousness. I pointed out that his participation in inter-religious dialogues and his affirmation of other religious traditions as having equal validity runs contrary to the Catholic Church's belief and teaching that "a certain indifferent mentality must be excluded, which is 'marked by a religious relativism that leads to maintaining that one religion is the same as another'" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 36).

Fr Michael Casey OCSO (2001:65) classifies the Benedictine fidelity to a monastic way of life, obedience and *stabilitas loci* as "the tidal movement of the monk's fundamental assent to the call of God."

Using Casey's position as context, I propose that Keating both adheres to and diverts from those prescriptions that link the monk to an authentic life of surrender, obedience and humility before the living God; the distinctive spirit of the Cistercians. Teasdale (1993:4) points to the belief that, "The monastic or contemplative call challenges [the] psychologically dysfunctional social milieu by offering a vision of peace, holiness, integration and *the unmistakable reality of the inner life*; *it offers clarity and focus on what is essential*" (my emphasis). In light of these pronouncements, I posited the idea that, as a Cistercian, Keating subscribes to *The Charter*, *Customs and Constitutions of the Cistercians*. This further implies adherence to *The Declaration of the General Chapter*. Monastic practice and experience implies that the *Exordium Parvum* ideal will be replicated in Keating's life, practice and belief as an enclosed monastic.

Next I focused on Keating's participation in inter-religious or "intra-religious" (Raimon Panikkar, 2005:2) dialogues. I pointed out that, in borrowing from the religions,

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Keating leans, perhaps imperceptibly, towards syncretism and assimilation in incorporating the teachings of the other religions almost indiscriminately into his belief and practice. Keating's (2008b: ix) assertion that "My own exposure to Eastern methods of meditation […] awakened in me a deep appreciation of these values" suggests that he may be compromising both his beliefs as a Christian and his vocation as a cenob*itic*. I concluded the chapter by making reference to Keating as active-contemplative. I posited the idea that Keating's views on the contemplative life presupposes that his contemplating God in monastic silence and solitude is an attempt to show care for the weak and dispossessed in response to insight received from his time in contemplation and surrender.

In this regared McNamara (1981:117) argues that, "In the act of contemplation *we affirm the totality of being*; *we see and experience the presence of God*. And this experience empowers us to *live out our universal assent to the world as a whole*" (my emphasis). The expectation is, therefore, that Keating would re-enter society to engage with it; thus "foster[ing] a better world" as McColman (2010) and Pennington (1987) have proposed.

I now turn to a discussion of Nouwen's life, belief and teaching as a contemplative-in-action. I will highlight the complexities of his life and the interplay between joy (through his downward mobility) and sadness (through his "woundedness").

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Chapter 6

A Life of Contemplation: Father Henri Josef Machiel Nouwen

> In the lives of those who shared in our humanity and yet were transformed into especially successful images of Christ (II Cor. 3:18), God vividly manifests to men His presence and His face. He speaks to us in them and gives us a sign of His Kingdom (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Article 50).

6.1 Introduction

At the heart of Henri Nouwen's (1992: 36, 1994: 10, 1997c: ix) exploration of spiritual living is the concept that we are all "beloved by God". For Nouwen (1994:105) we need to both claim that truth, and then face up to the challenge of truly becoming what we are. Nouwen (2009) uncovers a perfect typology of belovedness in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32).

In this parable God invites us to accept that we are his beloved. God's invitation, surmises Nouwen (2009:79), "is *a call to abandon relational zones and become vulnerable*, interdependent, and obedient to the voice of unconditional love" (my emphasis). For Nouwen (2009: 98), our 'homecoming' is to identify affectionately "in spirit with Love and also to become Love for others". For Nouwen (1992:36), "'Becoming the beloved' is the great spiritual journey we have to make". Here he echoes St Augustine's (cited in Anthony F. Chiffolo, 1998:98), *Dómine Iesu*, *nóverim me*, *nóverim te*, […]. *Oderim me et amem te*.

The theme of being beloved is replicated in the poems of the 13th century Persian Sunni Muslim poet and mystic, Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi (1207-1273). Andrew Harvey (1996:41) points to this replication in an extract from the *Maţnawīye Ma' nawī* (*Spiritual Couplets*), Rumi's book of poetry:

> *You are – we all are – the beloved of the Beloved*, and in every moment, in every event of life, the Beloved is whispering to you everything you need to hear and know. […]. Listen, and you will discover it every passing moment.

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> *Listen*, *and your whole life will become a conversation in thought and act between you and him, directly, wordlessly*, now and always (my emphasis).

In his book *Reaching Out* Nouwen (1975:7), following psychologist Carl Ransom Rogers (1961:21, 26), [1] asserts that "what is most universal is most personal and indeed nothing human is strange to us". For Nouwen (1982b: 109) "prayer is entering into a deep, inner solidarity with all human beings so that in and through us they can be touched by the healing power of God's spirit". Nouwen (1982b:109) intimates that "by giving words to these intimate experiences we can make our lives available to others". The challenge, in line with Nouwen (1972: 87), is to leave the time of silence being "both 'a wounded minister' and 'a healing minister'."

In his co-edited volume, *Compassion*, Nouwen (1982b:102) writes, "Prayer requires that we stand in God's presence with open hands, naked and vulnerable, proclaiming to ourselves and to others that without God we can do nothing." Nouwen challenges us, therefore, to be *monk*[*s*] *in the world* (from Teasdale's 2002 seminal work of the same title); individuals who have left the world temporarily so that the love of God can be fulfilled and tested by their love for others. Withdrawal for him enables us to pray intentionally for the salvation and healing of society. His preference is for a contemporary spirituality which is more active-apostolic than monastic-apostolic.

According to Wil Hernandez (2012: xxi, xxiv, 14) Nouwen's (1975:23, 63-65, 111) dynamics of the spiritual life are exemplified in "three tensional polarities as inward (i.e. psychological), outward (i.e. ministerial) and upward (i.e. theological)." Hernandez (2012:14) clarifies this as: the first refers to *self*, the second to *others* and the third refers to *God.* Hernandez further maintains that we encounter three examples of tension and imperfection in the life of Nouwen, namely, restlessness, woundedness and struggle. This has led biographers, like Jurgen Beumer (1997:167) and Hernandez (2012:95) to perceive Nouwen as "a restless *seeker*, wounded *healer* and a faithful *struggler*" (my emphasis). For Hernandez (2012:189),

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[1] Rogers (1961:26) goes on to indicate his belief that what has seemed to him 'most private and unique, and hence most incomprehensible by others', has turned out to be that facet which most resonates with others.

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> Henri Nouwen saw things differently and operated out of a different framework of thinking because he personified the nondualistic consciousness characteristic of contemplative mystics. Ever mindful of how all of life is interconnected, Nouwen pursued all efforts at integration as a worthwhile investment and expenditure of energy.

In his self-descriptive title, *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen (1972: 63), highlighting his lifelong struggles intimates, "my doubts, my hopes, my fears and my joys, my pain, and my moments of ecstasy [ought to be] available to others as a source of consolation and healing". Part of Nouwen's struggles encapsulated his search for direction with regards to his life-vocation. Nouwen (1966:8) contends that he "wrestled personally with the meaning of his own vocation and the question of where God was calling [him]". In this he was, like St Benedict, living the dictum *soli Deo placere desiderans* ([he] sought to please God).

Despite his lifelong struggles, Nouwen (1966:65) nevertheless showed great foresight in calling forth a "… people with whom we can identify … people who have broken out of the constraints of their time and place and moved into unknown fields with great courage and confidence."

Nouwen's theology is one of a both/and as opposed to an either/or; emphasising both sides of apparent tensions in life. Vanier, of whom Nouwen (1987:34) writes, surmises that Nouwen "… felt called to another kind of life: simpler, poorer, and more centred on prayer and commitment to service". This call is acknowledged by contemplatives the world over as Nouwen's belief that contemplative stillness and right action will overflow into justice. [2] Acting as "contemplatives at the-heart-of-the-world" (Teasdale, 2002; Merton, 1973a; Rohr, 2006) enable this search for justice on behalf of the indigent, marginalised, masses to be actualised.

The sections which follow will subsequently explore how Nouwen's (1990:30) life, teaching and practice as contemplative can enable us "to reclaim the mystical aspect of theology so that every word spoken, every advice given, and every strategy developed can come from a heart that knows God intimately". These dynamics hinge

[2] Nouwen's practice is in line with Butler (1927:322-323) who avers that the "'Contemplative life' has a subjective or personal meaning, according to which, whatever be the external conditions, *that man* [sic] *is leading a contemplative life who effectively practices contemplation*. [I]t is *a life in which good works of the active life have their place*, *provided that contemplation be there as a reality*" (my emphasis).

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on the premise of how to integrate a life of responsible action and socially engaged service with a life of contemplation.

Some of the themes we encounter in Nouwen's (1972b, 1981b, 1982, 1986a) writings and practice as contemplative include love / unloved, sorrow / joy and anger / compassion. Nouwen's "key notions of woundedness, compassion and 'life signs' [offer] us a route to meaningful integration in a world of conflicting visions, ideologies and philosophies" maintains Michael W. Higgins (2016:5). These themes, the 'tensional polarities' and 'imperfections' form the basis for an exploration and critical analysis of Nouwen's life and practice in the sections which follow. I shall start with a discussion of Nouwen's biography to provide the context for his teaching and practice as an active-contemplative.

6.2 Nouwen's biography

Henri Josef Machiel Nouwen, the Dutch Roman Catholic priest-psychologist, writer, pastoral mentor, academic and social critic was born in Nijkerk, Holland, on 24 January 1932. According to Gabrielle Earnshaw (2011:6-10) Nouwen finished his secondary education in The Hague where the family had relocated after World War II. In 1950 Henri entered the minor seminary at Apeldoorn and later the major seminary at Rijsemburg where he studied theology and philosophy in preparation for ordination. On 21 July 1957 he was ordained by Bernard Cardinal Archbishop Alfrink to the priesthood in St Catherine's Cathedral, Utrecht, to serve in the Archdiocese of Utrecht.

Nouwen (1996: 15) attests that as a child, "[his] life had been well-protected" since,

> [L]ife in the garden of my youth was quite beautiful and offered me invaluable gifts for the rest of my life: *a joyful spirit*, *a deep devotion for Jesus and Mary*, *a true desire to pray*, *a great love for theology and spirituality*, a good knowledge of contemporary languages, a serious interest in scripture and the early Christian writers, *an enthusiasm for preaching*, *and a very strong sense of vocation*. My maternal grandmother, my paternal grandparents, my parents, friends, and teachers all encouraged me to trust my desire to *live a life with Jesus for others* (my emphasis).

It is significant to note that this youthful exuberance, a true *joie de vivre*, would

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dissipate in later years with Nouwen (1997a:18-19) going through bouts of self-doubt and depression. Equally significant is the impact of the Latin motto *Ego sum vites*, *vos palmites* – engraved on the foot of the chalice he received at his ordination – would have on Nouwen's life, teaching and practice as an active-contemplative. The motto *Ego sum vites*, *vos palmites* sums up the depth and thrust of what his life exemplified. Having replaced his grandfather's chalice with "glass cups in which the wine can be seen and from which many can drink" (1996: 18), Nouwen's life would be similarly "poured out" (Ps 22:14) so that many could "taste and see" (Ps. 34:8). Nouwen (1996:18) surmises that "These glass cups speak about a new way of being a priest and a new way of being human."

Continuing his biography, LaNoue (2000:17) points out that Nouwen moved to the United States in 1964 to study at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. His training at Menninger was fundamental to Nouwen's eventuat pastoral ministry where he merged his knowledge of counselling and psychology as models for ministry. Nouwen's academic career began at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. He held the post of professor in the Yale Divinity School of Pastoral Theology from 1971 to 1981.

In 1983 Nouwen was appointed Horace De Y. Lentz Lecturer and Professor at Harvard Divinity School reports Michael Swan (2016:2). During his tenure at Yale and Harvard Nouwen displayed a marked disenchantment with academic life. For Higgins (2016:6) Nouwen's disenchantment with academia was partly attributable to his innate restlessness. Nouwen's search for life's purpose resulted in him joining the Trappist Monastery of Genesee near Rochester on a seven-month sabbatical. His goal, according to Higgins (2016:7), was to test a vocation to the contemplative life while keeping a journal. *The Genesee Diary* evolved out of this encounter.

From October 1981 to March 1982 he lived among a group of priests of the Maryknoll Community, serving the poor in barrios in Bolivia and Peru. This impetus which drove Nouwen out of academia is powerfully encapsulated in an observation by Brett Grainger (2004:73) who avers that:

> The explosive political convulsions that rocked Latin America in the late 1970s called him to resign from his post and serve the poor […]. Travels in Bolivia and Peru brought him into direct contact with the stark lifestyle in the First and Third

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> Worlds, but he also learned … that his gifts and skills as a pastor and writer were more use to the South back in the North.

This awakening led Nouwen to return to North America where he took up a post at Howard Divinity School. For Grainger (2004:73) this decision personifies Nouwen's "reverse mission [3] which would awaken the wealthy and advantaged to the plight of the poor". In 1985 Nouwen joined L'Arche in Trosly-Breuil, the first communy founded by Vanier. A year later he settled at L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill near Toronto, Canada. Here at L'Arche Nouwen's restless heart would finally find a home.

The Henri Nouwen Society (2002:12) reports on his death thus: Three weeks after his return to Daybreak, while en route to Russia to do a documentary on Rembrandt's painting of The Prodigal Son, Nouwen died suddenly on 21 September 1996 in Hilversum, Netherlands. He is buried in St John's Anglican Church Cemetery in King City, Ontario, not far from the Daybreak Community.

Nouwen (1979:22) regarded the interior life as a crucial aspect in our lives for hewould stress that, "solitude is precisely the ground where this common vocation become manifest. There we can empty ourselves of our needs for self-affirmation, self-realization, and self-fulfillment and begin to experience how God's call comes to us through [our] brothers and sisters". Building on from this, Nouwen (1998:85) is led to ask:

> What is the place of prayer, contemplation, meditation, and the interior life in a ministry that responds to the immediate needs of the poor and oppressed? Can you be a monk as well as a social activist?

Nouwen implies that, unlike Trappist monks who, as isolated hermits, pursue a single minded contemplation and leave social activism to others, the new monastic (or 'emerging spirituality'; Herrick, 2003:17) [4] is set free from *this restrictive activity*.

Nouwen's prolific writings, teaching, seminars and engagement with society have positioned him – like Merton (cited in Sheldrake, 2008:181) – as "one of the twentieth century's most influential writers" on spirituality. His biographers contend that Nouwen wrote at the intersection of theology and psychology; his writings being

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[3] The concept refers to Nouwen's move from the poor South to the affluent North (see 1993a:188).

[4] Founded by New Zealanders Mike Riddell and Mark Pierpon in the 1970s, the Emerging Church can be found primarily in North America, Western Europe, Australasia and Africa. Brian McLaren is the most prominent proponent of the church in the United States

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mostly of an autobiographical nature. His vast corpus consists of 40 books with *The Genesee Diary* being an account of his life and teaching. *Life of the Beloved* develops such captivating concepts as the 'restless searching of the heart' and the struggle of being human. In 2016 a group of biographers and critics collaborated on a posthumous volume of unpublished correspondence – *Love, Henri: Letters on the Spiritual Life*. This volume, together with *Letters to Marc* (1987), comprise Nouwen's epistolary corpus. These letters were his response to people who were seeking to live and lead an authentic life.

Writing the Preface to his ground-breaking book, *The Holy Longing*, Rolheiser (1999:1) refers to Nouwen as "the spiritual writer who most influenced our generation". Vanier (2007), in describing the contribution of Nouwen, makes this insightful comment:

> [Nouwen] was a genius fueled by anguish, a wounded healer whose radical trust in God's love changed the way today's believers approach their faith.

Karen Pascal (2012:3), executive director of the Henri Nouwen Society, believes that part of Nouwen's gift was heralding the movement of God. For Pascal (2012:3), Nouwen spoke and wrote with a "'heart-based and community-based voice' which spoke from his woundedness and his deep humanity". Anne Lamott (2016:2) quotes one of Henri's friends who describe his life work as "writing and praying and living and sharing and growing". Fr John Dear (2006:46), former Jesuit priest and peace activist, calls Nouwen "a true prophet of peace and justice" while Ford (1999:60) refers to him as "a priest to the marginalized". If these premises are true, then it is imperative that we, like Nouwen, should be part of this "movement of God without boundaries" (Pascal, 2012:3).

Dominican Francis MacNamara's OP (1996:59) summation of Seán Dunne's life has equal validity for Nouwen who "… knew he was a pilgrim. Deep within, he saw that he could not ever move safely in the marketplace if he were not sustained by much time in the desert."

Nouwen locates axial meaning in the religious movement of *descent* or *downward life*. In section 6.3 which follows, I shall explore Nouwen's concept of the 'descending way' which accentuates Nouwen's (1990:28) conscious decision not to be "dominated by the desire to be relevant but instead [be] safely anchored in the

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knowledge of God's love". Nouwen (1979), like Brackley (1988:18) and Freeman (2004), points out that "modern individuals seek security through upward mobility; viewed as a predetermined climb up the 'social ladder' in an attempt to transcend their social background. By being upwardly mobile, they hope to benefit from various rewards they believe to be associated with desirable societal positions."

Predmore (2015:2) quotes Nouwen who intimates, "I invite you to discover your vocation in downward mobility. It's a scary request […]. The world is obsessed with wealth and security and upward mobility and prestige. But let us teach *solidarity*, *walking with the victims*, serving and loving" (my emphasis). It is this "walking [in solidarity] with victims" that provides the impetus for Nouwen's choice of downward mobility or the "descending way" to use his terminology.

6.3 Nouwen's praxis of the descending way

Nouwen sought "downward mobility" throughout his life. "In adopting the downward lifestyle we move from illusion to who we really are", surmises Nouwen (2009:41). This "voluntary simplicity" (Odgers, 2004:11) embodies a wish to live not in the trappings of worldly success, but in the heart. Nouwen (1992:16) himself attests that he "became a little less concerned about success, career, fame, money, and time, [with] *questions of meaning and purpose* [coming] *more into the centre*" (my emphasis).

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Nouwen's (1990:43) *praxis* of the religious-spiritual movement of descent challenges us to offer a rebuttal to "the power games of the world [and model our lives instead] on the servant-leader, Jesus… ". Nouwen (1990:10) explains the rationale behind his change of direction in a frank way, maintaining that, "After twenty-five years of priesthood, I found myself praying poorly, living somewhat isolated from other people, and *very much preoccupied with burning issues*. Everyone was saying that I was doing well, but *something inside was telling me that my success was putting my own soul in danger*" (my emphasis). Nouwen's (1979:4) search out of "a lonely existence" personified the "very deep desire to live out the other side of our being, the side that wants to play, dance, smile […]." Living out "the other side of our being", is essentially a call to live "in fearless play", maintains Nouwen (1975:35). This counter-cultural move resonates with Nan Credie Merrill's (2009:127) observation that:

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An unlived life enslaved by fear

Holds potential gifts in abeyance;

Wisdom’s way spawns peace

In heart, mind and soul.

Choose Wisdom.

Nouwen’s (2007) deliberate choice of the downward move released those “potential gifts [that were held] in abeyance” (Merrill, 2009:127). Using Matthew 10:24, 39; Matthew 20:26-28 and Luke 24:26 as a point of reference, Nouwen (2007:57) conclude that:

> The gospel radically subverts the presuppositions of our upwardly mobile society. It is a jarring and unsettling challenge. We live out our relationship to God in relationship to the world – principally in relation to others and secondarily in relation to things. It is true that attachment to God depends on a kind of detachment from riches and honours, but it depends more on attachment to people, especially the poor and outcast. The way of the world is upward mobility, a flight from the poor. The way of Christ is downward mobility, a quest for ever more authentic solidarity with the poor. Avarice and honours are the first dangers to this solidarity because they lead us away from the poor; poverty and humiliations, on the other hand, cement the friendship.

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Nouwen’s downward mobility is most evident in his relocation to the L’Arche community, i.e. “joining a community where the residents did not read his books or knew he was a prominent writer”; to paraphrase Andrea Smith Shappell, cited in Catherine Owers (2016:5). Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Annice Callahan RSCJ (1992:119) senses that “His move to L’Arche enabled him to redefine his goals in life, realign his mission and become a great humanitarian”. In a sense L’Arche represented both “a phase of ‘hidden life’ and solitude [and] a phase of active toil and of experience in making the gift of self in the world” as Voillaume (1964:84) attests to.

Therefore, maintains Callahan (1992:120), “His involvement with L’Arche in Trosly-Breuil and in Toronto is a concrete way of living solidarity with poor people in a community of shared faith”. Callahan (1992:120) cites Robert Durback (1987:10) for

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whom "These moves indicate a continuing search, an evolving spirituality reaching out to others, the life of a pilgrim and prophet". For Nouwen (1987:35) L'Arche personified the "descending" style in contrast to the university's "ascending" style.

Nouwen (1987:38) intimates that the descending way is a conscious choosing of the *imitatio Christi* in the same way that "God shows his love for us in the descending way of Jesus". His rôle at L'Arche, therefore, was not aligned to that of a "charismatic leader or figurehead" (Grainger, 2004:74), but one of sympathetic companion enabling the 'wounded ones' to find their voice. Dominican Sister Jeanne d'Arc OP (1968:96) speaks powerfully to Nouwen's 'descending' in maintaining that, "There is no severer trial on this earth than clinging on in naked faith, *even for a man of goodwill who is quite prepared to inflict suffering on himself provided he can see some result*" (my emphasis). In this downward move he identified with French mystic Marthe Robin [5] (Raymond Peyret, 1983:39) who, in an "act of abandonment" on 15 October 1925 dedicated herself to God thus:

> I belong to you without any reservations, forever, O Beloved of my soul. It is you only whom I want, and for your love I renounce all.

For Nouwen (2007:25), "There is a profound difference between the false ambition for power and the true ambition to love and serve. It is the difference between trying to raise ourselves up and trying to lift up our fellow human beings". According to Nouwen (2007:26), "The great paradox which Scripture reveals to us is that real and total freedom is only found through downward mobility". Accordingly, for Nouwen (2007:27) "the 'downward pull' enables us to view life differently since our eyes are opened to the brokenness of our humanity". This new way of *seeing* enabled Nouwen (1981) to persuade first-world priests (and contemplatives) of the need to have a desert spirituality if they are not to be co-opted into the attitudes of success, popularity and self-fullfilment that pervades modern society.

This call for a 'new way of being human' (Nouwen, 2007:27) is in line with Ignatius' "Two Standards" [6] which describe two opposing strategies for living, namely upward and downward mobility. Ignatius' Two Standards are defined as "The Way of the

[5] Peyret (1983:143) reports that from 2 October 1930 Robin received the stigmata and began to undergo the Passion of Christ each Friday every week until her death in 1981.

[6] In *Exercitia Spiritualia* (see 1951). See the edition by Louis Puhl; 1951 and John J English SJ; 1986. *Exercitia Spiritualia* (*Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*) seeks to enable a person to have the interior freedom to serve God (Spiritual Exercise 1, 21); the *leitmotif* of this study.

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World: Upward Mobility" and "The Way of Christ: Downward Mobility". Brackley (1988) uses Ignatius' Two Standards as foundational principle for his discussion of upward and downward mobility.

I wish to quote extensively from Brackley to place Nouwen's distinction between upward mobility and the descending way in context. The point of departure is Nouwen's (1968: 24) premise that upward mobility personifies "our taking world" as opposed to his model (1969, 1972b, 1988, 1996, 1997b) of a "giving world". Brackley (1988) discusses this dichotomy of the "taking" and "giving" world with reference to St Ignatius' Two Standards; a discussion which affirms Nouwen's (1998:71) belief that, "the only way to stay well in the midst of the many 'worlds' is to stay close to the small, vulnerable child that lives in our hearts and in every other human being."

Upward mobility, also referred to as "the world of 'relevance'" by Nouwen (1979:29), is essentially a social class construct. According to Nouwen (1986b:28) it is a conscious attempt by those in society who are "oriented toward efficiency and control to ascend along the social ladder." It is evidenced in people being addicted to relationships, to being important, to work and recognition; "the attitude of entitlement" as Charry (1996:8) has it.

In an upwardly mobile lifestyle argues Nouwen (2007:23), "our whole way of living is structured around climbing the ladder of success and making it to the top. Our very sense of vitality is dependent upon being part of the upward pull and upon the joy provided by the rewards given on the way up". Furthermore, contends Nouwen (1982a:26), upward mobility discloses how our sense of worth is dependent on worldly success and on the opinions of others. It reveals how we have become what we *do* or *what others think* of us. We are indeed "caught in a web of false expectations and contrived needs" contends Nouwen (1982a:28).

Nouwen (1979:58) avers that the upwardly mobile interact "in the midst of a world that wants to offer self-fulfillment." However, in climbing the corporate ladder individuals run the risk of falling victim to "anxiety, strain and distress" according to Jason Houle (2011:758). Such pursuits (i.e. selfish social climbing), perceives Nouwen (1978:58), "[leads] to the subordination of the individual to the collective: we are taught to conceive of development in terms of an ongoing increase in human potential. Growing up means; becoming healthier, stronger, more intelligent, more

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mature and more productive. Consequently we hide those who do not affirm this myth of progress, such as the elderly, prisoners, and those with mental disabilities."

Nouwen's world of relevance finds a resonance in Wilson's concept of "life-enhancement, the pursuit of happiness". Wilson (1995:30) hypothesises that "society tells us to scramble up the ladder of power, wealth and popularity. However, it is only when we go to the bottom rung of the ladder that we meet the poor, marginalised and rejected masses". And, in meeting them we meet Jesus; the classic Two Standards of St Ignatius. For Brackley (1988:20), "While perhaps leading to a real good in the short run, upward mobility can run in the end to moral and spiritual ruin."

With regards to the social implications of Ignatius' Two Standards, Brackley (1988:12) maintains:

> We want to explicate these for the Two Standards, working on the assumption that *the individuals addressed by Ignatius live out their relationship with God in relation to the world and especially to other human beings* (my emphasis).

According to Brackley (1988:18) "The modern individual seeks security through upward mobility. Upward mobility is perceived as a university education, a home in the suburbs, a two-car garage, a good job, etc. achieved through hard work and initiative. It relies on rugged *individualism*." Although every pursuit for security is good and tempting at the same time avers Brackley (1988:19), "upward mobility constitutes a spiritual danger in a peculiar way for at least three reasons: In the first place, even when it means escaping from poverty (a very good thing), upward mobility threatens to become an escape from the poor themselves (a very bad thing)." He is critical of upward mobility because it can ensnare the poor. For Brackley (1988:19), "we can have bread *without justice*, *without community*, *without love*" (my emphasis). Brackley deems authentic "social progress not as upward mobility, but as a kind of *communal forward ability*" (my emphasis).

"In the second place", avers Brackley, "our immediate social context heightens upward mobility." In referring to the American economy as an example, Brackley (1988:19) points out that, "slow economic growth means there will be less economic opportunities in society with fewer social benefits to buffer any setbacks. Under these conditions upward mobility, from the bottom of the social structure, will be rarer than in the past."

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In the third place, contends Brackley (1988:19), even "'legitimate' upward mobility can undermine one's social commitment in the long run, and upwardly mobile individuals frequently serve institutions and social processes that run counter to gospel values."

For Brackley (1988), as for Nouwen (1979), "the dominant metaphor for the human community is the *ladder*." Brackley (1988:22) surmises that the social relations on the ladder are unequal. Those on the social ladder, no matter their status, may presume that others are quite different from them. He believes that, "for the world to work as it does, everything depends on some individuals being more human than others, their differences with others more important than the personhood they share with them."

Brackley (1988:26) conceives of Ignatius's first Standard (The standard of the enemy) "as a disease which [desensitises] individuals to their [neighbours'] humanity which spreads, with a logic conditioned by the social context, to social, economic and political life". Brackley (1988:26) acknowledges, however, that "not all upwardly mobile people are arrogant or power hungry. Neither is pride the driving force behind upward mobility in every instance." This perception speaks powerfully to Nouwen's own "descent". In stark contrast to this upward way, Ignatius proposes a second Standard, "The Way of Christ: Downward Mobility".

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Brackley, like Nouwen (1979, 1982), places "the way of Christ as downward mobility" within the wider framework of what he terms "'forward mobility' [towards] the Kingdom, or Reign, of God." Brackley (1988:29) hypothesises that "Jesus was not sent to mount the cross, but to proclaim and bring about the Reign of God. The way of the cross was the way to do this. The *goal and absolute* value was the Reign of God; *the necessary means* were poverty, insults, lowliness – in the end, the cross."

How, then, does Nouwen define and perceive "The Way of Christ: Downward Mobility"?

Nouwen offers an insightful reflection on the challenge of the religious-spiritual life, particularly the call to imitate Jesus' *kenosis*; perceived by Nouwen as the "downward pull" (1982:27), the "downward road" (1982:33) or the "descending way" (1979:3). The descending way is counter-intuitive to the upward way. Consequently, according to Nouwen, following Brackley (1988:29), downward mobility "is a

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completely different response to our existential insecurity."

Writing a Foreword to *The Selfless Way of Christ*, Robert Ellsberg (2007:7) avers that, Nouwen's "voluntary self-emptying of power, status, and security offered a powerfully counter-cultural statement." Rich Heffern (1994:37) speaking to the counter-cultural downward way, intimates that, "it seems the more we can strip our lives down to essentials, the more deliberately and awake we can live; with few wants and more time for silence and contemplation, the more we can have access to our inner resources. The more lightly we walk on this earth, the more she gives to us. I call these *spiritual gifts inner smiling and outgoingness of the heart*" (my emphasis).

Richard Beck (2013:1), in summarising Nouwen, points out that:

> In contrast to this upward progress Nouwen points to the downward mobility of Christ. The story of our salvation stands radically over and against the philosophy of upward mobility. The great paradox which Scripture reveals to us is that real and total freedom is only found through downward mobility. The Word of God came down to us and lived among us as slave. The divine way is indeed the downward way.

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For Nouwen (1990, cited by Callahan, 1992:129) the descending way equates to "treasuring emptiness, standing naked before God". The descending way is a deliberate act against "This tendency to reject ourselves […], needing affirmation from outside." Freeman similarly highlights the danger of inauthenticity. Freeman (2004:2) perceives the descending way as one that teaches us "how to escape the crowd and become *ourselves in community*." Nouwen (1982a:62) is therefore correct in stating that, "The word *community* generally expresses a certain supportive and nurturing way of living and working together; an experience of at-homeness"; something alien to the upward way.

Merton (1961a:59-60), speaking to the positive aspects of the descending way, maintains:

> You will travel in darkness in which you will no longer compare yourself to other men. Those who have gone by that way have finally found out that sanctity is in everything and that God is all around them.

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> Having given up all desire to compete with other men, they suddenly wake up and find that the joy of God is everywhere, and they are able to exult in the virtues and goodness of others more than ever they have done in their own lives.

Nouwen (1990:22) therefore asks us “to claim [our] irrelevance in the contemporary world as a divine vocation that allows [us] to enter into a deep solidarity with the anguish underlying the glitter of success and to bring the light of Jesus there.”

In essence, Nouwen’s descending way is encapsulated in François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon’s injunction in *Christian Perfection* (see 1947:37):

> What [God] asks is a will which will no longer be divided between him and any creature, a will pliant in his hands, which neither desires anything nor refuses anything, which wants without reserve whatever he wants, and which never wants under any pretext anything which he does not want.

The descending way therefore engenders within humans an understanding of themselves that is rooted in their connectedness to God. Through our adopting of the downward lifestyle “we move from illusion to who we really are” (Nouwen, 2009:41).

Nouwen (1981:12) writing from within the context of priesthood, “persuaded first-world ministers of the need to have a ‘desert’ spirituality if they are not to be co-opted into the attitudes of success, popularity and self-help that pervade modern society.” This is equally true for active-contemplatives in general at which this study is aimed.

Nouwen’s descending way naturally progresses, and is linked, to “polarities” which describes Nouwen’s paradoxical imagery of opposites.

6.4 Nouwen and spiritual polarities [7]

Ford (2002:63), observing Nouwen, concedes that within short spaces of time Nouwen would be “holy and restless, vibrant in the company of friends and lonely, being like a child and being wise. He loved the nature and art but looked more for people than places.” Ford’s observation points to the prevalence of opposing forces

in Nouwen’s life, identified by Hernandez as “polarities” and as “contraries” by Higgins.

[7] The title of this section is taken from Wil Hernandez’s 2012 volume of the same name.

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Nouwen, like Keating, describes various categories pertaining to the life of contemplatives that are in opposition to each other. They include the dichotomies of solitude / community, suffering / glory, stillness / labour, silence / communication, woundedness / wholeness and true self / false self.

Nouwen (1975:39) classifies these polarities ("the inner fields of tension") as "[moving] from loneliness to solitude", "from hostility to hospitality" and "from illusion to prayer". Rolheiser (1999:v), in contributing to the debate about the inner fields of tension, describes Nouwen as "our generation's Kierkegaard" and maintains:

> By sharing his own struggles, he mentored us all, helping us to *pray* while not *knowing how to pray, to rest while feeling restless, to be at peace while tempted,* to *feel safe* while still *anxious*, to be *surrounded by a cloud of light while still in darkness*, and to *love* while still *in doubt* (my emphasis).

For Carter Haynes (2016:19) these distinctions embody Nouwen's "desire to reconcile opposing tensions, either in his own personality or externally in his relations with others." Nouwen (1998:71) makes further reference to moving from "power to powerlessness", "from strength to weakness", "from being creator to being creative", "from greatness to smallness", "from independence to dependence".

Nouwen's categories find a reverberation in Fr Hans Küng's (1974:483) delineation between "independence and obligation, power and renunciation, autonomy and service, mastery and servitude." For Küng (1974) these categories are united in "an enigma of which the solution is love." These polarities have a bearing on how active-contemplatives respond to the *il poverello* [8] of the world. Living from loneliness to solitude, for example, presupposes attentive living that enables us to distinguish "the difference between being present in loneliness and being present in solitude" (Küng, 1974:483). "Thus", surmises Nouwen (1976a:39) "when we live with a solitude of heart, we can listen with attention to the words and the worlds of others".

For Fr Anselm Grüen OSB (2002:4), "we have to live with this tension: between our closeness to and distance from God, between good and poor health, between light and dark, between strength and weakness, between love and emptiness".

Nouwen's polarities build on Fritz Künkel's and Ray Dickerson's (1944) assertion

[8] This is a term for Ignatius of Loyola which occurs in Michael J P Robson (2011:8).

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about opposing forces. Künkel and Dickerson (1944:11-35) “espoused the Jungian view that opposing forces – life and death, masculine and feminine, tension and relaxation – create polarities in the human experience, and they held out religious self-education as *the path that brings balance. Rather than rejecting or demonising the* ‘*negative*’ *side of a dichotomy, individuals must be open to finding the most helpful blending of two extremes*” (my emphasis). Hernandez (2012:14) categorises the most marked tensions (Kunkel’s and Dickerson’s ‘two extremes’) in Nouwen's life in three ways namely, 1) Living with Inward Polarities (*psychological tensions*): true self / false self, self-owning and self-giving and woundedness / healing, 2) Living with Outward Polarities (*ministerial tensions*): solitude / community, compassion / confrontation and presence / absence and, 3) Living with Upward Polarities (*theological tensions*): suffering / glory, present / future and life / death.

According to Hernandez Nouwen did not avoid these tensions, but sought to embrace and befriend them instead. Linking Nouwen’s contemplation and his ministry, Hernandez (2012:17) explores Nouwen's ministry as a three-way process of self-giving [through contemplation and action], mystical / prophetic and compassionate / confrontational. Nouwen (Nouwen *et al*, 1982:60) perceives these tensions to be prevalent in both individuals and in the community with equal intensity. For Nouwen *et al* (1982: 61) two poles of a mature community life in which God’s compassion can become visible are displacement and togetherness. Nouwen *et al* (1982:64) propose that “*Voluntary displacement leads us to the existential recognition of our inner brokenness and thus brings us to a deeper solidarity with the brokenness of our fellow human beings*. Community, as *the place of compassion*, therefore always requires displacement” (my emphasis). *Compassion*, surmises Nouwen (1982a:27), “means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there”.

For Nouwen (1998:145) Jesus’ resurrection account (Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-9) highlights “an ever present tension between presence and absence; a tension between *coming and leaving*, *intimacy and distance*, *holding and letting go*, *at-homeness and mission*, *presence and absence*” (my emphasis). For Nouwen, serving others needs times of solitude, prayer, and absence. Thus, for him (1997c:68),

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> Your community needs you, but maybe not as a *constant presence*. Your community might need you as a presence that offers courage and spiritual food for the journey, a presence that creates the safe ground in which others can grow and develop […]. But your community also needs your *creative absence* (my emphasis).

Through these polarities Nouwen challenges us to make God's *compassion* accessible through the disciplines of contemplation and social action.

I now turn to a discussion of Nouwen's teaching and understanding of the Self.

6.5 Nouwen's teaching on the self

6.5.1 Introduction

Nouwen's teaching on the self is markedly different from Keating's (1986, 2012) and somewhat similar to Merton's (1964). Nouwen's (1979:8) teaching on the self is grounded in his vocation as a Christian priest, writer-poet, contemplative and prophet speaking into the "growing sense of despair, and the paralyzing awareness that indeed humanity has come to the verge of suicide".

Nouwen, following Merton (1961b), perceives self-awareness as connected to our relationship with God. Charry (1996:8) concurs with Nouwen and contends that, in "discovering the true self, we are turned to the service of God" and away from self-gratification. In turning to God we turn into a self whose self-expression is now from and for God. Merton (1961b:63) could propose that, "In order to find God, Whom we can only find in and through the depths of our own soul, we must … first find ourselves".

6.5.2 Nouwen and the true self/false self

Nouwen links the concept 'true self' with the descending way. For Nouwen (2007) the way of the true self is always the way of humility; his downward pull. Benner (2015:143) agrees with Nouwen (2007) in asserting that:

> The true self is who you are and who you are becoming; it is not something you need to construct through a process of self-improvement or deconstructed by means of psychological analysis. Nor is it an archetype … to be actualized. […]. Rather, it is your total self as you were created by God and as you are being

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> redeemed in Christ. It is the image of God that you are […]. We do not find our true self by seeking it. Rather, we find it by seeking God.

Freeman (2004:5) argues that "the true self, our real and fulfilled identity in selflessness, is hospitable. *It dismantles* the great walls of *division, it overcomes oppression* and *forms community* that respects and celebrates individuality" (my emphasis). Tolle (1999) is equally critical of the influence the false self has on the psyche. Tolle (1999:37) regards the false self as the "egoic mind" experiencing "*a deep-seated sense of lack* or incompleteness, *of not being whole*" (my emphasis). This sense of lack could be a conscious or unconscious experience according to Tolle. Tolle (1999:39) therefore maintains:

> If it is conscious, it manifests as the unsettling and constant feeling of not being worthy or good enough. If it is unconscious, it will only be felt indirectly as an intense craving, wanting and needing. In either case, people will often enter into a compulsive pursuit of ego-gratification and things to identify with in order to fill this hole they feel within.

The individual or "disconnected fragment" (Tolle, 1999:126) who is thus disposed will seek recognition through striving after possessions, power, success, so that they can feel better about themselves.

For Nouwen, following Merton (1972:7, 13), "self-transcendence is the gateway from the false self to the true self". Here Küng's understanding of transcendence is quite helpful. Küng (1974:58) believes that, "In order to save man's humanity … in theory and practice there must be genuine transcending, a genuinely qualitative ascent to a real alternative away from one-dimensional thinking, talking and action in the existing society". This transcendence, maintains Rahner (1965:37), "is symptomatic of the secret longing for the spirit that is felt by truly spiritual persons". For, "Again and again these [spiritual persons] are racked by the anxiety to make sure that they have really done with the world and have begun to live in the spirit" (Rahner, 1965:37).

The false self is "trying to run from increasing fragmentation and pain" attests Linda Crockett (2001:19). It does this, maintains Tolle (1999:126), to "escape the underlying feelings of incompleteness, of fear, lack and unfulfillment so characteristic of the egoic state.". Anthony Giddens (1993:80), in turn, perceives that the false self "is marked by the disruption of previously accepted values and patterns of behavior,

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followed by the adoption of radically different ones". This personifies our outer distractions and our inner distractions in Nouwen's (1982a:73) estimate. These distractions are in stark contrast to Nouwen's call for integration and wholeness because, for Nouwen (1982a:73), "the space within us and the space among us are the same space.".

Nouwen (2003a:28) perceives that, "In solitude the barriers and false senses of the self fall away, especially the constructions of self which depend on the affirmation offered by others. We can choose to maintain a sense of self entirely dependent on our own ego … or we can open ourselves to an identity in God and full of God, the house built on rock". In the midst of life, surmises Nouwen (1996), God offers us a 'cup'; something akin to the 'Eucharistic Cup of wine' (Matt. 26:7). For Nouwen (1996:35), the cup God offers us is "[one] full of physical, mental and spiritual anguish. It is the cup of starvation, torture, loneliness, rejection, abandonment and immense anguish.".

Nouwen (2003b:36) thus reminds us that, just like the kingdom of God (see footnote in chapter 5, p. 114), "the Eucharist will always be a paradox of presence and absence; a call to mourning as well as to feasting, to sadness as well as to joy, to longing as well as to satisfaction". These concepts are reminiscent of Nouwen's own life as revealed in his writings (see 1979, 1982a, 1992, 1996, 2002, 2003 and 2008).

Nouwen (1976a, 1982a) perceives emptiness and loneliness as emblematic of the false self. For Nouwen (1981) this loneliness finds an antecedent in feelings of separation, distance and estrangement from others. Consequently, the "secular or false self which is fabricated" (1981:22), promotes indifference and lack of concern, leading to alienation from others. Nouwen proposes that an encounter with Christ bridges this alienation.

According to Nouwen (2003a:61) "The encounter with Christ does not take place before, after or beyond the struggle with our false self and its demons. No, it is precisely in the midst of this struggle our Lord comes to us". For Nouwen (1982a:31-32), when we focus on our shortcomings without taking cognisance of the larger framework of life, our perspective tends to narrow, leading to spiritual dryness and a sense of disconnectedness. Nouwen (1982a:32) perceives that "disconnectedness is experienced as loneliness". The way out of this *disconnected loneliness* (my term) is

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to rediscover “the spiritual delights” (De Sales, 1885; see 1968:323).

Conversely, surmises Nouwen (1976a:38) “connectedness, as a characteristic of the true self, promotes compassion, empathy and perspective taking. Discovering the true self personifies a withdrawal from *a distracting world*” (my emphasis). The encounter with God in the silence allows us to “dismember our distractions” maintains Gary L. Thomas (1999:108). Only by going into this darkness and helplessness of the silence can life be brought forth to sustain us. “This silence, then”, maintains Catherine de Hueck Doherty (1976:108), “will break forth in a charity that overflows in the service of the neighbour without counting the cost”; thereby inviting contemplative activists to become the vulnerable community that stands in solidarity with the marginalised.

This solidarity is the outflow of time spent in contemplative waiting and discernment. Nouwen (1996:92) refers to this as “*the discipline of silence, the discipline of the word and the discipline of action*” (my emphasis). Firstly, for Nouwen (1996:95) “silence is the discipline that helps us to … go beyond the ‘entertainment’ quality [of life]”; i.e. needing something to fill the void within”. Secondly, Nouwen (1996:96) perceives the discipline of the word as “*the need to speak* about what is in our cup” (my emphasis). For him (1996:97) “silence without speaking is as dangerous as solitude without community”. This ‘speaking’ should ideally be done with “loving and caring friends with whom we can speak from the depth of our heart.” Finally, “the third way to drink the cup is action, a discipline that can help us celebrate and claim our true self.” Thus, claims Nouwen (1996:99), “[authentic] action leads us to *the fulfilment of our vocation*” (my emphasis).

Br Roger (2006:67), speaking to the idea of ‘vocation’ and its concomitant concept, ‘grace’, maintains that vocation personifies “the living response to a call from God”. Consequently, surmises Nouwen (2003a:30) “[O]nly in the context of grace we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that *he is our true self*” (my emphasis). According to Nouwen (1979:31) it is in our emptiness – our vulnerability and nakedness – before God that we realise that “we have nothing to hold onto, nothing to protect, nothing to consider as exclusively ours ... then we can, in fact, recognise in the encounter of our solitude all men and women are brothers and sisters.”

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Nouwen (1976a:42) is convinced that in solitude "… we can become present to others by reaching out to them, not greedy for attention and affection but offering our own selves to help build a community of love. Solitude does not pull us away from our fellow human beings but instead makes real fellowship possible." Nouwen (1969:149) acknowledges that we are living in a time when social problems are acute. It is this need for "a radical response to our social conditions" which convinces Nouwen (1996:26) that "contemplative reflection is the essence of being human." This new awareness opens us up to the possibilities for social activism on behalf of the less powerful or underprivileged. For Nouwen, only in this way can we become those who pray for and let God touch them through us.

In speaking to the inter-relatedness of prayer and action, Nouwen (1986a:106) proposes that:

> The disciple is called to follow Jesus not only into the desert and onto the mountain to pray but also into the valley of tears, where help is needed, and onto the cross, where humanity is in agony. If prayer leads us into a deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it will also give rise to concrete acts of service. And if concrete acts of service do indeed lead us to a deeper solidarity with the poor, the hungry, the sick, the dying, and the oppressed, they will always give rise to prayer.

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Nouwen (1996:45) perceives compassionate action birth out of contemplation as "a compassionate-being-with." Moved by the suffering of the "afflicted, captives, oppressed" (Nouwen cited in Jonas, 2009:95) that is so endemic the world over, Nouwen (1996:34) cries in anguish:

> When I look beyond the boundaries of my own city and country, *the picture of sorrow becomes even more frightening*. I see orphaned children roaming the streets of Sao Paulo like packs of wolves. I see young boys and girls being sold as prostitutes in Bangkok. *I see the emaciated prisoners of war* in the camps of former Yugoslavia. I see the naked bodies of people in Ethiopia and Somalia wandering aimlessly in the eroded desert. *I see millions of lonely*, *starving faces all over the world*, and large piles of the dead bodies of *people killed in cruel wars and ethnic conflicts.* It is our cup, the cup of *human suffering* (my emphasis).

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It is therefore imperative for Nouwen that we speak to the social conditions which plague modern society from within the encounter in, and with, silence. Nouwen (1972:89) commends silence as that practice which “makes us pilgrims. It guards the fire within. It teaches us how to speak.” Thus the Word must be heard in the silence within, variously termed as “the inner cloister”, “*poustinia*” and “the cave of the heart” as Esther de Waal (2011:34) points out.

For Nouwen (1976a:125) contemplative silence, the “process of mortification” (Fr Daniel P. Horan OFM, 2014:192), “opens in us the space where the word of [and from] God can be heard.” We respond to this word because, as 17 year old Nobel Peace Laureate Malala Yousafzai (2013:43) has it, “When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful..

Nouwen (1982a:49), drawing from the Desert Fathers, identifies three aspects of silence that has the potential to assist contemplatives to reorient their lives. Firstly, “silence makes us pilgrims. Secondly, silence guards the fire within. Thirdly, *silence teaches us to speak*” (my emphasis). The first two aspects have been discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this study. Speaking to the impact of the paradoxical concept, prayer-in-silence, Nouwen (1976a:137) surmises that:

> Prayer … [b]eing the expression of our greatest love … does not keep pain away from us. Instead, it makes us suffer more since our love for God is a love for a suffering God and our entering into God’s intimacy is an entering into the intimacy where all of human suffering is embraced in divine compassion.
>
> It is then that we meet Christ in prayer, ‘and in him all human suffering. In service we meet people, and in them the suffering Christ’ (1986a:107).

Nouwen (1969:35) contends that for the poor and oppressed life might well be “a trembling little flame between two darknesses.” However, if “man … live from the center of his existence and feel at home with his own self” avers Nouwen (1969:149, 150), then we are able to “make a better world.” Contemplatives are therefore invited by Nouwen *et al* (2010b:36) to explore the possibility of “better-ing” the world, through an exercise Nouwen terms “Going Deeper”. The suggestion is to pray, sitting comfortably with the following statements for ten minutes each:

> Jesus, You are the Beloved. Jesus, I am the Beloved. Jesus, we are [all] the Beloved.

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For Nouwen *et al* (2010b:36), "The instructions for 'Going Deeper' suggest that contemplatives spend the time with the first statement in *non-verbal praise and thanksgiving*. During the second stage, they *let the truth of their belovedness settle in*. During the third stage, *they open their heart to everyone*, excluding no one" (my emphasis). This exercise is reminiscent of Keating's meditation using the "sacred word" (chapter 3.3.2). The difference, however, is that contemplatives do not empty their minds of thought as in the case of Keating's meditation. Furthermore, Nouwen's contemplative prayer exercise is posited within the purely Christian context as opposed to Keating's meditation which leans toward Eastern practices.

Hernandez (2012:21), speaking to the concepts true self and false self asks a number of questions which provide a fitting conclusion to this sub-section. These questions are:

> What specifically would it mean for me to embrace and claim my authentic self?
>
> What difference would that make in my personal journey?
>
> Can I name accurately and honestly the many false selves I have constructed in my life?
>
> Am I able to detect how they manifest themselves in the way I relate to others? In the way I relate to God? (quoted verbatim).

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Answering these questions provide some direction for active-contemplatives who consciously evaluate their motives for engaging in social activism. Such interrogation exposes the true self to "authentic response" (Nouwen, cited in Lanoue, 2000:33).

Nouwen (1972:99) subsequently postulates that, "The minister is the one who can make this search for authenticity possible, not by standing on the side as a neutral screen or an impartial observer, but as an articulate witness of Christ, who puts his own search at the disposal of others." In this way the authentic self "brings union to the active and contemplative dimensions of our spirituality." For Nouwen (2010a:35) "People who [have discovered their authentic self and] pray, *stand receptive before the world*. They no longer grab but caress. They no longer examine but admire" (my emphasis).

Vanier's (2018:2) response to Nouwen is that we are "waiting for the future by living the present moment as much as [we] can".

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6.5.3 Nouwen and the self in contemplation

Nouwen (1979:24) warns against “self-protective or self-serving actions”. Nouwen (1979:28) is swift to point out that contemplatives need to have the correct disposition when they enter the silence, for, “In solitude, we leave behind our many activities, concerns, plans and projects, opinions and convictions, and *enter into the presence of our loving God*, *naked*, *vulnerable*, *open*, *and receptive*“ (my emphasis). For Nouwen (1979:31) contemplating God in silence and solitude embodies “the great encounter.” “Solitude is the place of conversion” for Nouwen (1979:30), because “There we are converted from people who want to show each other what we have and what we can do to people who raise our open and empty hands to God in the recognition that all we are is a free gift from God. Thus, *in solitude, we not only encounter God but also our true self*” (my emphasis). Nouwen (2016b:18) further perceives that “Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self.”

During contemplation the self is challenged to interrogate previously held presuppositions about intimacy, friendship and witness. Nouwen (1982a:37) views this as a “condition of being filled yet unfulfilled” and points out (1997c:15) that:

> You also know that the fulfilment of your burning desire for intimate friendship, shared ministry, and creative work will not bring you what you really want. It is a new experience for you to feel both the desire and its unreality. You sense that nothing but God’s love can fulfil your deepest need while the pull to other people and things remains strong. It seems that peace and anguish exist side by side in you, that you desire both distraction and prayerful concentration.

Reflecting on the two categories of people we encounter in the world; people whom Nouwen separates into “people who came from a world of abundance” and “beautiful people who were radically poor”, Nouwen (1998:68) avers:

> I ponder my experience, and *I recognise once more that the way for us to be in this world is to focus on the spiritual life – our own as well as the spiritual life of each one of the people that we meet* (my emphasis).

Thus, in contemplating the place of the self, there is the presupposition that we are handing over self-will, thereby allowing Christ to live at the centre of our lives. It further implies letting go of our illusions. Catherine Marshall (1961:184), linking self-

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will and self-understanding, perceives the self as one who, with increased self-understanding, is likely to be able to influence the circumstances of their lives. Her insight points to the individual who experiences disjunction at one time or the other in life. Marshall (1961:184) defines the self in contemplation thus:

> When an adolescent is still unsure of his selfhood, he has a horror of being in any way different from his friends. When adults are not in the least concerned about pleasing God, they are desperately concerned about pleasing each other. When we have few inner resources, we hold up masks to hide our poverty. And all the masks seem to be turned out by the same factory – suburbia, the 'organisation man', 'the man in the grey flannel suit', all aided by mass advertising; extended by the media of mass communication.

What is needed is the ability within humans to transcend these limitations. Georg Simmel (1971:374, also cited in Ritzer 1996:161) suggests that, "Life finds its essence, its process, in being more-life and more-than-life". This calls forth an encounter, in prayer and contemplation, with the self, according to Nouwen (1975). This encounter, postulates Nouwen (1975:25), takes place in the desert of the heart; "an inner quality or attitude that does not depend on physical isolation. A man or woman who has developed this *solitude of heart* is no longer pulled apart by the most divergent stimuli of the surrounding world but is able to perceive and understand this world from *a quiet inner center*" (my emphasis).

Nouwen (1981:25), using Matthew 4:1-3 and 8-11 as supporting texts, surmises that 'solitude is the furnace of transformation'. According to Nouwen (1981:25-26):

> Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant ('turn stones into loaves'), to be spectacular ('throw yourself down'), and be powerful ('I will give you all these kingdoms'). There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity ('You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone'). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of the new self.

Nouwen thus interrogates the self, pointing to an inner struggle and the encounter (with God) that is characteristic of the dark night and our 'nothingness'; *noche oscura*

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de alma, *Todo y Nada*.

Contemplative activists, surmises Nouwen, need to walk through situations that bring them to the place of utter dependence on God. For Nouwen (1992:39), social activists – acting from within the context of the God-encounter – have to be "taken, blessed and broken", before they can be given away in service to the dispossessed. Using the analogy of lifting the Eucharistic Cup, Nouwen (1996:44) postulates that "Lifting our cups – means sharing our life so we can celebrate it. *When we truly believe we are called to lay down our life for our friends*, *we must dare to risk to let others know what we are living*" (my emphasis). This is the exact opposite of the "taking mode of existence" avers Nouwen (1968:27).

Teilhard de Chardin (see 1965) provides the *gestalt* to Nouwen's construct of the 'Sacrificial' Cup in his "Mass on the World".[9] Teilhard de Chardin first celebrated the Mass on the World in 1923 in the desert of Odos, China, on the Feast of the Transfiguration. Moved by what he was witnessing Teilhard de Chardin (1965:19) consecrated the whole world to God in these words:

> Since once again, Lord … I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, *I will raise myself beyond these symbols*, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, *will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world*.
>
> Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outermost fringe of the eastern sky. Once again, beneath this moving sheet of fire, the living surface of the earth wakes and trembles, and once again begins its fearful travail. I will place on my paten, O God, *the harvest to be won by this renewal* of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all *the sap which is to be pressed out* this day from the earth's fruit. *My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit*. Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day (my emphasis).

In Teilhard de Chardin's (1965) symbolic act, Nouwen's (1996) cup has been

[9] Keating explores a similar theme in his 2017 DVD teaching series, "God is Love - The Heart of all Creation".

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elevated truly. And so, in Anglo-Catholic practice, "We Adore Thee, O Christ! And we worship".

Nouwen delineates two further, interrelated categories, namely the "fragmented self" and the "wounded self" which I discuss further down. Suffice to say at this stage that Nouwen's mental fragility contributed to his fragmented self.

6.5.4 Nouwen and the self in transformation

Nouwen postulates that the self is transformed when the self undergoes a spiritual awakening; "when everything tangible and describable and perceptible seems to recede into the background of our awareness" (Rahner, 1965:39). Teasdale perceives the nature of transformation in similar terms. For Teasdale (1999:16-17):

> *Transformation means fundamental*, *substantial*, *and permanent change*, *radical alteration* of the inner understanding, will, character, memory, imagination, unconscious mind, and behavior of the person. It is generally the case that a person's view of reality, life, and the world is directly related to their overarching desire – what actually motivates them. Often what they desire, or what motivates them, are selfish goals. *When transformation be-gins*, *a basic shift occurs from a self-preoccupation fixation to other-centeredness*, *a focus on the Divine*, *and other sentient beings*, *one's surrounding community* (my emphasis).

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Teasdale (2014:3-4) identifies six elements of transformation; four of which have a bearing on Nouwen's teaching and understanding of the self in transformation. Teasdale's elements are as follows:

1. There is first a transformation of understanding. The individual expands their view of reality, discovers subtleties, and hidden connections, and begins to grasp everything from a unifying ground, the Divine itself. Transformation of course is an ongoing process [of] growing in knowledge, wisdom, and virtue.
2. Realizing the second element of transformation, that of the will itself, requires a change of priorities. No longer does the person's will assert itself blindly, or choose in a selfish way, but rather aligns itself with God's will in acts of selflessness, and identifies with the sufferings and needs of others.
3. Third, there is a transformation of character that slowly takes root in the person's identity, becoming firmly established in one's behavior, in the way he

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> or she treats others, especially the most vulnerable. The transformed character conforms to love, compassion, kindness, mercy, and sensitivity.
>
> 4. The fourth element of transformation concerns the memory, which undergoes a healing, and a letting go of unneeded memories with negative, destructive emotional contents … and cause them to be stuck in an earlier stage of development. The awakening to a deeper inner life of enlightened awareness of the Divine Reality takes the person to a heightened state of mature identity. A healed memory acts in concert with an expanded understanding … the transformed will and character … and compassionate, other-centered action (quoted verbatim).

Nouwen's transformation is most evident in his decision to leave academia at the height of his fame as writer and academic at Yale. Nouwen (1988:13) chose "the hidden life of 'anonymity'" as opposed to the public life of academic study and reflection. Nouwen (1988:22) describes his decision to leave Harvard University as a difficult one, contending:

> Finally, I realised that my increasing inner darkness, my feeling of being rejected by some of my students, colleagues, friends, and even God, my inordinate need for affirmation and affection, and my deep sense of not belonging were clear signs that I was not following the way of God's spirit.

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Life at the L'Arche Daybreak Community embodies the *hidden* (contemplative) dimension of Nouwen's life. It was while he was living at L'Arche Daybreak that Nouwen reflected on Jesus' question to John and James in Matthew 20:22, namely, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" Nouwen (1996:21) uses the Chalice as "a metaphor to reflect on three images – Holding, Lifting and Drinking – to illustrate the basics of the spiritual life." For Nouwen (1996:26) "Just living is not enough. We must know what we are living." Nouwen (1996:28) encourages us to choose how to live, for:

> It is hard to say this to ourselves, because *doing so confronts us with our radical aloneness*. But it is also a wonderful challenge, because it acknowledges our radical uniqueness (my emphasis).

Nouwen's struggle, following Frère Roger's (1974:89) analysis, evident in the "unknown gulfs of doubt, secret distress […] and things unacknowledged" are

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symptomatic of a fragmented existence. These doubts, fears and anxieties emanate from "the self which we construct and which in turn imprisons us and makes us serve it in varying degrees of misery" according to Pennington (2006:90). The solution, postulates Nouwen (2002:66-67), lies in accepting our brokenness which "will bring about a transformation leading to a life of wholeness." Vanier (1992), writing in *From Brokenness to Community*, supports Nouwen's (1997) notion that our common woundedness opens the way to fellow-beingness, Vanier (1992:37) intimates:

> And I come here to tell you how much life *these people have given me*, that they have *an incredible gift* to bring to our world, that they are a source of hope, peace and *perhaps salvation for our wounded world*, and that if we are open to them, if we welcome them, *they give us life* and lead us to Jesus and the good news (my emphasis).

In contrast to Keating (2008b:29, 2012:139), Nouwen (1996:112) perceives transformation in Christian terms, surmising that "we are transformed into the one body of *the living Christ*, *always dying and always rising* for *the salvation of the world*" (my emphasis). For Nouwen (1996:112) we are essentially transformed through suffering. Central to Nouwen's (1971:85) life and practice is the belief that "all transcendent experience is for the Christian a participation in 'the mind of Christ'" (Philippians 2:5). Nouwen (1971:85), borrowing from Merton's *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (1968b:75), intimates:

> [The] dynamic of emptying and of transcendence accurately defines the transformation of the Christian consciousness in Christ. It is a kenotic transformation, an emptying of all the contents of the ego-consciousness to become a void in which the light of God or the glory of God, the full radiation of the infinite reality of His Being and Love are manifested.

Positing transformation within the context of the Christian community of which he is an integral part, Nouwen (1979) acknowledges that "it is in the midst of this dark world" that the Christian community is being tested. Nouwen (1979:8) asks a number of insightful questions to stimulate debate among the Christian contemplative community:

> Can we be light, salt, and leaven to our brothers and sisters in the human family? Can we offer hope, courage and confidence to the people of this era?

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> Can we break through the paralyzing fear by making those who watch us exclaim, ‘See how they love each other, how they serve their neighbour, and how they pray to their Lord?’

Nouwen (1979:57) believes that answering these questions with integrity will provide the impetus for active-contemplatives to “be more available to our fellow human beings [encouraging] us to share our gifts with many people and … [making] us more able to move freely to different places where the human need asks most urgently for pastoral response.” Moved by the impulse for transformation of the self, Nouwen (2008:53) is constrained to pray:

> Dear God,
>
> I am so afraid to open my clenched fists!
> Who will I be when I have nothing left to hold on to?
> Who will I be when I stand before you with empty hands?
> Please help me to gradually open my hands
> and to discover that I am not what I own,
> but what you want to give me.

Like Merton (1973b:10, 25) Nouwen (2016b:29) believes that “the spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it.” For Callahan (1992:122), “[Nouwen] realized in a more radical way that he was called to contemplative prayer, silence, solitude, and detachment.” This realisation was born out of his “discovery of his true self”, for as Benner (2015:99) has it:

> God’s will for us is that we live out the harmonious expression of our gifts, temperament, passions and vocation in truthful dependence on God. Nothing less than this is worthy of being called our true self. Nothing less than this will lead to our deepest fulfillment. And nothing less than this will allow us to show the face of Christ to the world that we have been called from eternity to show.

Benner’s thesis is therefore that God invites active-contemplatives to respond to universal suffering as Nouwen’s life so richly illustrates. Nouwen, in accordance with Rahner’s (1965:38) perception, “… know[s] well that God’s grace can also bless the dull round of daily tasks well done, and bring doers a step nearer to God.” Nouwen, the contemplative activist, is challenged by his friend Fred Bratman to *speak* into life situations that beset modern humans. The challenge, attests Nouwen (2002:18),

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becomes “the most pertinent and the most urgent of all demands.” For Nouwen the active-contemplative is tasked to move progressively from the head (conscious thought), to the heart (contemplation), to the hands (social activism). Rahner (1965:37) argues that if such an experience ever came our way, “[we] may be sure that the spirit was at work within us, and eternity and ourselves had a brief encounter.” Nouwen (2002:18) is subsequently instructed to:

> *Speak to us about the deepest yearning of our hearts*, about our many wishes, about hope; not about the many strategies for survival, but about trust; not about new methods of satisfying our perspectives and about a voice deeper than the clamourings of our mass media. Yes, speak to us about something greater than ourselves. Speak to us about … God (my emphasis).

Rahner (1965:38) therefore hypothesises, in the context of the lives of the saints of ages past and present, that:

> [T]hey realize that *man, inasmuch as he is a spiritual being, is really and truly* (and not just theoretically) *standing midway between God and the world, between time and eternity* … (my emphasis).

Contemplative activists, exercising a creative *orthopraxis*, “[stand] midway between God and the world” (Rahner, 1965:38) enabling them to move to “the matrix of the heart where God, self, other and world inter-penetrate” (Fournier, 1996:4). Grüen (2002) [10] highlighting the essence of prayer which takes place in great silence (Nouwen’s “furnace of transformation”) maintains:

> But firstly prayer means that I present my life to God. I can't pray to God without facing my own reality. While praying, I come face to face with my dark side, my repressed anger, my disappointments, my pain, my fears, my discontent, my sorrow, my loneliness. To me praying means that I show God my real identity.
>
> If I show God all of myself, I will experience God's unconditional love. [God’s] all embracing, healing and loving presence.

Nouwen, in turn, perceives prayer as an attentive, hopeful and joyful waiting for God. Here in the desert of the heart we become aware of God's healing presence. Since this waiting reaches its zenith in communal togetherness, Nouwen (1976:136)

[10] From the Third “Henri Nouwen Lecture” presented by Fr Anselm Gruën on 12 October 2002 in Toronto.

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proclaims:

> This would remove all the pressure to rid myself of my fears and to overcome all my inadequacies.
>
> Just because prayer asks for a patient waiting in expectation, it should never become the most individualistic expression of the most individualistic emotion, but should always remain embedded in the life of the community of which we are part.

The community-at-prayer, by its very nature, consists of individuals of varied and diverse backgrounds and experiences. As this community-at-prayer gathers in contemplation of God, there is the possibility, postulates Nouwen (1976:142), "[that] by transcending the many individual differences … we become witnesses of God who allows his light to shine upon poor and rich, healthy and sick alike. But it is also in this encounter on the way to God that we become aware of our neighbour's needs and begin to heal each other's wounds." The true source of ministry for Nouwen (1997c:106) is encapsulated in the command to "Give every part of your heart and your time to God and let God tell you what to do, where to go, when and how to respond. God does not want you to destroy yourself. […]. God desires to give you a deep sense of safety in God's love. Once you have allowed yourself to experience that love fully, you will be better able to discern who you are being sent to in God's name."

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Nouwen's "self in transformation" calls us to other-centredness; a crucial facet in the call to social activism as I shall show in section 6.6. For now, however, it serves us well to consider the contemplative response to fragmentation.

6.5.5 Nouwen and the self in fragmentation

Both Keating and Nouwen perceive the "fragmented self" as personified in the unraveling and disintegration of egocentricity or the egoic self.

The self becomes fragmented, suggests Nouwen (1997c:6), when we "become entangled in countless often contradictory thoughts, feelings, and ideas and lose touch with the God in you." The way out of this "conflictive inner zone" (Crockett, 1995:32) is possible, maintains Nouwen (1997c:6), by "attending constantly to the inner voice … [for only then] can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy."

Nouwen (1997c:xi) writes with great perception and avowed pain about the

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fragmented self which he perceives as "… extremes [which touch] each other." According to Nouwen (1997c:13-14) the fragmented self personifies "an inner duality; your emotions, passions, and feelings seem separate from your heart. The needs of your body seem separate from your deeper self. Your thoughts and dreams seem separate from your spiritual longing." It is further evident, maintains Nouwen (1997c:77), in "[discovering] in your own soul the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

According to Nouwen (1997c:ix) the fragmented self experiences "a time of extreme anguish", a state during which it "[wonders] whether [it] would be able to hold on to life."

The fragmented self, surmises Nouwen (1997c:8), is "overwhelmed by distractions, fantasies, the disturbing desire to throw yourself into the world of pleasure. But you know already that you will not find there an answer to your deepest question." Nouwen's (1997c:ix) fragmented self perceives life as "a bottomless abyss." There is an emptiness or "inner vacancy" as Nouwen (1979:109) defines it. The fragmented self is in constant competition with itself; leading to inner disequilibrium. This inner strife is characterised by bouts of exhaustion, burnout and depression, desolation and fear (the classic *dark night*). Clearly, maintains Nouwen (1997c:87), "exhaustion, burnout and depression are not signs that you are doing God's will".

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Marshall (1961:185-186), cites Künkel and Dickerson (1944) who surmise that there is no maturity or fulfillment of man's personality apart from the slaying of egocentricity. Künkel and Dickerson (1944:67-68) speak to the concept egocentricity by making reference to specific human relationships such as mother-child (or child-caregiver) relations. H. Barrow (1988:63) in turn cites Künkel (1984:68) who "called his approach 'We-Psychology' to emphasise the importance of relatedness with both other people and the Divine."

For Künkel (1984:68) "egocentricity disrupts both child-caregiver and human-divine relationships. As people encounter 'maturing We' experiences (i.e. life crises), their relationships can become more objective and whole." Künkel (1984:68) "saw 'We-ness' as the main force of healing and reconciliation for humanity." Haynes (2016), in turn, cites Steere (1985:150) who perceives We-experiences as,

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actions and reactions which remain unconscious for a certain time or even forever. Suppose you try to comfort a person who has lost his father by death. You will be aware of your compassion in general. You will be touched or even deeply moved, and all your words and gestures will be, as it were, imbibed by your We-feeling. You will be conscious of the fact that you are motivated not by private emotion, but by a common reaction to a common loss. Yet the We-experience may reach much deeper. You may not until much later understand that the person you comforted has become your brother, and that you are connected with him to a new unit, since you have looked together into the depths of human life. That is We-experience.

Künkel & Dickerson (1944:105, 114) further postulate that:

Egocentricity in any form … always lead to difficult experiences which we call crises […]. The more we are egocentric, and therefore right, the less we are able to bear life's burdens. […]. Increasing egocentricity destroys itself! He who tries to save his life kills himself. This is as it should be, since *the breakdown of the Ego – the collapse of the system of mistaken ideas which like a shell encase the Self and limit the expressions of its power – is one basic aim of human destiny* (my emphasis).

Künkel & Dickerson consequently aver that there will be a crisis or series of crises if the egoic self is not subjugated. Only then can life be integrated into a single whole. Nouwen (1990:21) highlights the sense of futility that is characteristic of the fragmented self in these almost-fatalistic words:

While efficiency and control are the great aspirations of our society; the loneliness, isolation, lack of friendship and intimacy, broken relationships, boredom, feelings of emptiness and depression, and a deep sense of uselessness fills the hearts of millions of people in our success-oriented world.

Although this observation is made in reference to others, we see evidence of Nouwen's (1976b:90-91) own fragmented self in a lengthy passage where Nouwen asks:

What do you do when you are always comparing yourself with other people? What do you do when you always feel that the people you talk to, hear of, or read about are more intelligent, more skillful, more attractive, [gentler], more

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generous, more practical, or more contemplative than you are? What do you do when you can't get away from measuring yourself against others, always feeling that they are the real people while you are a nobody or even less than that?

I talked about this with John Eudes today. […]. We talked about the vicious cycle one enters when one has a low self-esteem or self-doubt and then perceives other people in such a way as to strengthen and confirm these feelings. It is the famous self-fulfilling prophesy all over again. I enter into relationships with some apprehension and fear […]. *My general abstract feeling of worthlessness becomes concrete in a specific encounter* […].

What do you do? Analyze more? *It is not hard to see the neurotic dynamism* (my emphasis).

With this acknowledgement, Nouwen is able to traverse to a matured, fulfilled life.

There is an element of despair in Nouwen's search for acceptance and love. Nouwen articulates this pursuit for unreserved love in the homecoming scene from *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1994:105-107). Nouwen (1994:109) observes:

In his painting of the father, Rembrandt offers me a glimpse of [God's inexhaustible, unlimited motherly and fatherly] love. *It is the love that always welcomes home and always wants to celebrate* (my emphasis).

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This drastic change in perception could be described, partially, as a result of Nouwen (1997c: ix) coming "face to face with [his] own nothingness". This is affirmed by Robert Ellsberg (2007:10) who points out that, "Though [Nouwen] tried to maintain a simple life, rooted in prayer and obedience to the disciplines of 'the church, the Book, and the heart' still he suffered doubts about his own middle-class life." This self-doubt was exacerbated, maintains Nouwen (1997c: ix) by "life in universities, where I never felt fully at home". Nouwen (1997c: x) contends that "I saw the endless depth of my human misery and felt that there was nothing worth living for." Crucially, though, this disjointedness – the fragmenting of the self – was primarily in response to unrequited love.

Healing from "self-chosen pain" during these "winters of our grief", (Gibran, 1983:59) is possible. In this fragmented state, postulates Ford (1999:130), "Nouwen yearned for God but failed to realize that God was so close to him, because he was always

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ahead of him." Roused by this experience where the self is in disequilibrium, Nouwen (1997c: x) is challenged "to move gradually from crying outward – crying out for people who you think can fulfil your needs – to crying inward to the place where you can let yourself be held and carried by God who has become incarnate in the humanity of those who love you in community". Nouwen (1976:56) is further inspired to contemplate the possibility that, "In times of doubt or unbelief, the community can 'carry you along', so to speak; it can even offer on your behalf what you yourself overlook, and can be the context in which you may recognize the Lord again."

Observing Nouwen during the celebration of his close friend, Dean Naus's, and his wife Anke's, twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, Higgins (2016b:12) [11] makes this acute observation:

> I was struck by Nouwen's awkwardness in the moments when he wasn't presiding ritually, and realized how shy he was, an introvert in an extrovert's clothing.

Nouwen's struggle with self-doubt and fears of rejection is further encapsulated in a further observation by Higgins (2016:7) who writes, "Nouwen's personal crisis and feeling of being rejected by a close male friend and by God became a Dark Night of the Soul in which he felt at a dead end. He took an extended Sabbatical, which included seeking support from two spiritual counselors. During this time he kept a secret journal which … was published as *The Inner Voice of Love*". Robert Jonas' (2009: lviii) perceptive analysis of Nouwen's struggle with his sexuality is therefore worth mentioning.

According to Jonas, Nouwen was ashamed of his own sexuality and suffered great guilt feelings. Jonas (2009:lv) maintains that, "Nouwen always had a difficult time listening to his body" since "[h]e was much more interested in the life of the mind and tended to see his body as an encumbrance." This is in line with Catholic teaching on sexuality with its focus on the body versus spirit dualism. For Jonas (2009:lv)

[11] Higgins co-authored *Impressively Free*: *Henri Nouwen as Model for a Renewed Priesthood*. This volume is important both in terms of studies on Nouwen and as an opportunity for reflection within the Roman Catholic Church dealing with the fall-out of the clergy abuse scandals. On 20 September 2018 Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York (in line with a decision by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops) announced that his Archdiocese had constituted a Tribunal, chaired by Judge Barbara Jones, to investigate the priestly scandals in the church. Pope Francis subsequently called an abuse prevention summit in February 2019. [See the comment in 6.7, p. 192 on Nouwen's continued impact as a further observation in this regard].

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Nouwen's recovery and therapy in Winnipeg provided an opportunity for him to learn "the importance of allowing himself to be held and to know that such holding did not connote eroticism." Here there are glimpses of Nouwen's fragmented self experiencing the onset of healing and wholeness.

Higgins too writes with great insight about Nouwen's fear of rejection by those from whom he was seeking love and affirmation, that it warrants a further, more extensive, quote. According to Higgins (2016b:11) Nouwen's loneliness and self-doubt was exacerbated by the fact that he was gay, and it was a source of anguish for him. Higgins (2016b:11) perceives Nouwen as:

> A product of a culture and time – to say nothing of an ecclesiastical regime – that engaged in collective denial around homoerotic desires, he was also personally passionate and theologically conservative: in short, an emotional breakdown just waiting for a trigger. That trigger came in the form of a friendship with a L'Arche co-worker toward whom *Nouwen felt a suppressed sexual feeling, an attachment that grew from an infatuation and demanded more*.

Higgins (2016b:11), in referening Nouwen's anguish, highlights this extract from Nouwen's diary (1997c:10-11) *The Inner Voice of Love*: *A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*:

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> This deeply satisfying friendship became the road to my anguish, because I soon discovered that the enormous space that had been opened for me could not be filled by the one who had opened it. […]. [W]hen the friendship finally had to be interrupted, I fell apart.

Higgins (2016b:11) surmises that Nouwen was "caught in an emotional maelstrom that reduced him to a shattered state." This necessitated a resolve within Nouwen to regain his equilibrium and resolutely setting out to get his life back together again. Higgins (2016b:11) contends that, "*Out of the morass of conflicting feelings*, and via several months of intensive therapy, *emerged a healthier if still fragile* Nouwen. And once again, *his personal crisis informed his writing*. Through this at times devastating chain of events, *Nouwen lived the paschal cycle* …" (my emphasis).

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In response to this traumatic event, [12] Nouwen (1997c:51), contends:

> The question is, 'Can you stand erect in your pain, your loneliness, your fears, and your experience of being rejected?'

For Nouwen (1997c:73), "as long as our wounded part remains foreign to our adult self, our pain will injure us as well as others. In our wounded state we are encouraged to take up our cross; for taking up our cross 'means, first of all, befriending your wounds and letting them reveal to you your own truth. Once you have taken up that cross, you will be able to see clearly the crosses that others have to bear'."

Giddens concurs with Higgins. Giddens (1993:88) maintains that, in "[certain] circumstances, *involving a marked alteration in the social environment of an individual or group*, *people may undergo processes of resocialization*. Resocialization refers to *a restructuring of personality and attitudes*, *consequent on situations of great turmoil and stress*" (my emphasis).

Writing from within a different context, i.e. the death of Adam Arnett (see *Adam, God's Beloved*), Nouwen (1997a:84) proposes a "radical call to accept the truth of our lives." This is as true of Adam as it is true of Nouwen (1997a:79) who, as a result of his emotional breakdown had to accept that "he was emotionally out of control, weak, dependent, needy and vulnerable." This bout of severe depression and loneliness provides the context for Nouwen's fragmented state, perceived as his "spirituality of imperfection" (Hernandez, 2006).

For Rachel Remen (1996:36), the spirituality of imperfection reminds us that the "parts of ourselves which we may have hidden all our lives out of shame are oftenour source of our healing." Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham (1992:2) observe that, "The spirituality of imperfection acknowledges that embracing our weaknesses and our 'torn-to-pieces-hood' is a path to wholeness and self-acceptance. This spirituality is built upon the principle that to deny our errors is to deny our self, for to be human is to be imperfect, somehow *error-prone*. To be human is … to be broken and ache for wholeness, to hurt and to try to find a way to healing through the hurt."

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[12] Nouwen (1997a:78-79) reports that the rejection to his advances by Nathan Ball, his close friend and colleague at L'Arche, plunged him into a psychological breakdown which necessitated a move away from L'Arche.

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Nouwen (1997a:133) conjectures that, “The fragmented self will be healed and perfected if we know ourselves to be fully loved by God.” God's love keeps the shattered fragments together. “If we expose our wounds to God's love”, the injured self will be healed and made whole (Nouwen, 1997a:133). Grüen (2002:3) cites Nouwen who maintained that, “My wounds make me sensitive to similar ones of my fellow humans; I acknowledge my broken self. I experience God most truly at the sites of my wounds.” Referencing this shared-woundedness Nouwen (1997c:7) consequently proposes that healing of the fragmented self can take place most successfully in community. For him community implies right social relations; for “the community can truly hold you.”

Nouwen attests that, in his fragmented state, he fluctuated between hope and despair. Nouwen (1997c: ix) had gravitated to a space and place in life where:

> Just when all those around me were assuring me they loved me, cared for me, appreciated me, yes, even admired me, I experienced myself as a useless, unloved, and despicable person. Just when people were putting their arms around me, I saw the endless depth of my human misery and felt that there was nothing worth living for. Just when I had found a home, I felt absolutely homeless. Just when I was being praised for my spiritual insights, I felt devoid of faith. Just when people were thanking me for bringing them closer to God, I felt that God had abandoned me.

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The fragmented self is transformed, maintains Nouwen (1997c:6) when we “trust the inner voice that shows the way.” For Nouwen (1997c:84) we “have to keep unmasking the lie and think, speak, and act according to the truth that [we] are very, very welcome.” Failure to do so, will result in “the fragmentation of humanity and *its agony* [will] *grow from the false supposition that all human beings have to fight for their right to be appreciated and loved”* observes Nouwen (1986b:27) (my emphasis). The fragmented self, postulates Nouwen (1982a:71), will “in crisis situations… depend on [its] own unredeemed ramblings; birthing inner disquiet.” Nouwen (1997c) proposes that the inner disquiet of the fragmented self can be stilled in undertaking “a journey through anguish to freedom” (Sub-title of current volume under discussion here). When this happens, affirms Nouwen (1997c:16), “[y]ou know that something totally new, truly unique, is happening within you. It is clear that something in you is dying and something is being born.”

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Central to the healing of the fragmented self contends Nouwen (2009:28), is God the "personal, intimate, and loving Presence who lets each of us go and welcomes each one home, all in amazing generosity and forgiveness." This healing of the fragmented self is evident in our "willingness to let go of the desire to control" our lives as both Gibran (1983) and Nouwen (1989:13) propose. Gibran (1983:59) opines:

> Much of your pain is self-chosen.
>
> It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.
>
> Therefore trust the physician, and drink his remedy in silence and tranquility:
>
> For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided by the tender hand of the Unseen,
>
> And the cup he brings, though it burns your lips, has been fashioned of the clay which the Potter has moistened with His own sacred tears.

For Nouwen (1997c:26):

> The more you relinquish your stubborn need to maintain power, the more you will get in touch with the One who has the power to heal and guide you. And the more you get in touch with that divine power, the easier it will be to confess to yourself and to others your basic powerlessness.

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Nouwen (1997c:97) proposes that the fragmented self can undergo a radical change where wholeness is possible, for he had progressed "through *anguish to freedom*, through *depression to peace*, through *despair to hope*" (my emphasis). He perceives this as a time of *purification*. Nouwen (2009:79) accepts that Christ is the epicentre of this transformation. For Nouwen (2009:79) Christ's "invitation [to the wounded] is a call to abandon relational safety zones and become vulnerable, interdependent, and obedient to the voice of unconditional love." As a consequence, wholeness and healing from the fragmented self is possible, suggests Nouwen (1982b:20) because,

> The compassion Jesus offers challenges us to give up our fearful clinging and to enter with him into the fearless life of God himself. Jesus… asks us to love one another with God's own compassion. A divine compassion is acompassion without the slightest tinge of competition. Therefore, only God can be wholly compassionate because only he is not in competition with us.

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As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1965:44) avers, “One must withdraw and be still in order to hear. Solitude is a necessary protest to the incursions and the false alarms of society’s hysteria […].”

Through his inner disquiet and poignant self-disclosure – prevalent in his most important writings – Nouwen offers us an opportunity to develop ourselves and build inner resolve so that we can have a mind that remains stable and calm, a heart that is loving and content. It is out of this *wholeness* – the healing of the fragmented self – that we can be effective in social activism on behalf of the poor, “socially” handi-capped or ostracised ones to whom Jesus was particularly partisan (see Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 5:3-11).

Ben Zion Bokser (1999), cited in Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein (1999), “offers a mystical path towards redemption from and transcendence” out of our fragmented everyday lives. According to Bronstein (1999:40) Bokser (1999:36) proposes that:

> [E]mperical existence appears fragmented, beset by endless conflicts and contradictions between individuals and groups; the values on which it tends to focus are material things. The mystic is a sensitive spirit who rebels against such orientation in life … [his/her] goal is not to gain conceptual knowledge [or] to find confirmation that the higher reality exists […]. Rather, [the mystic] seeks to … embrace the vibrations of the higher reality which pulsate through existence. [The mystic’s] goal is to establish *d’vaykut*, union with, or as Jewish mystics prefer to define it, cleaving to, God.

Nouwen (1972:46), reflecting on a crucial stage in the life of Merton when he was wrestling with the decision about the call to the eremitic life, intimates that, “This *heavy darkness* appeared to be *a purification which prepared him for a new task*” (my emphasis). What Nouwen perceived of Merton, is strangely evident in his own life. Nouwen (1998:24 -25) is moved to confess:

> No one can ever heal this wound, but when I can talk about it with a good friend I feel better […]. It is such a familiar wound. […]. I don’t think this wound – this immense need for affection, and this immense fear of rejection – will ever go away. It is there to stay, but may be for a good reason. *Perhaps it is a gateway to my salvation*, *a door to glory*, *and a passage to freedom*! *I am aware that this wound of mine is a gift in disguise*. These many short but intense experiences

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> of abandonment lead me to the place where I am learning to let go of fear and surrender my spirit into the hands of the One whose acceptance has no limits (my emphasis).

For Nouwen (1989:13), the fragmented self undergoes a metamorphosis from thinking, speaking or “[writing] *about* the heart of Jesus” to a place where it “[begins] to discern a real desire to speak *to* the heart of Jesus and be heard.” Nouwen (1997a:44) subsequently shows that, “Maybe the great challenge is to trust so much in God’s love that I don’t have to be afraid to enter fully into the secular world and speak there about faith, hope, and love.”

Nouwen’s life and practice invite us to experience what Ernest Hemingway (1929: 249) proposes, namely, “The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places.”

Nouwen’s fragmented state is characterised by struggles, doubts, fears and anxieties. Out of this experience of fragmentation arises introspection, aimed at finding a solution to the crises that beset humanity at the start of the third millennium. The solution, postulates Nouwen (2002:66-67), lies in accepting our brokenness which “will bring about a transformation leading to a life of wholeness.” The systematic progression from fragmentation to wholeness ushers in the world “of the heart, of compassion and of caring” (Burns, 2016:7). This premise serves as an introduction to Nouwen’s metaphorical concept of the self as “wounded healer”.

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6.5.6 Nouwen’s self as wounded healer

Nouwen’s lifelong struggle with depression, anxiety, loss and sexuality personifies his woundedness or “injured self” (Grüen, 2002), with its related terms of brokenness [13]and vulnerability. For Nouwen (1972), *woundedness* implies psychological, spiritual and emotional crises that we undergo in our lifetimes. Nouwen (1972:58) asserts that our wounds become conduits to connect us to others.

Writing in *Life of the Beloved*, Nouwen (2002:30) asks,

> Aren’t you, like me, hoping that some person, thing, or event will come along to give you that final feeling of inner well-being you desire? Don’t you often hope:

---

[13] Jonathan Jansen (2008:25) perceives brokenness as “the realisation of imperfection, the spiritual state of recognising one’s humanness before the forgiving and loving power of God. But brokenness is even more than this; it is the profound outward acknowledgement of inward struggle done in such a way as to invite communion with other people and with the divine”.

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> May this book, idea, course, trip, job, country or relationship fulfill my deepest desire. But as long as you are waiting for that mysterious moment you will go on running helter-skelter, always anxious and restless, always lustful and angry, never fully satisfied. You know that this is the compulsive-ness that keeps us going and busy, but at the same time makes us wonder whether we are getting anywhere in the long run. This is the way to spiritual exhaustion and burn-out. This is the way to spiritual death.

S Philip Nolte and Yolanda Dreyer (2010:8), responding to Nouwen (2002:30) points out that, "as Nouwen has shown, our woundedness can serve as a source of healing. Because stories can heal, the wounded healer and wounded storyteller are not separate, but are different aspects of the same figure." Nouwen undoubtedly fits both categories. In this regard, Higgins (2016b:12), speaking to the richly faceted dimensions of Nouwen's life, makes the following observation:

> [Nouwen was] a Pierrot-like figure with many masks: a solo artist and yet needy companion; a man born for the stage and yet deeply unsure of his own authenticity; a marvel and a misfit; a Joseph with a many-colored dreamcoat.
>
> In his ability to turn personal vulnerability into spiritual exploration lies the broad appeal his writing made – and continues to make – to his devoted readers. *Nouwen addressed other people's pain by nakedly sharing his own*; *he spoke of our* '*woundedness*' *because he knew what that meant in very personal and even visceral terms*. Whether counseling students, attending to the sick and the dying, or comforting the despairing, *Nouwen drew from the well of his own anguish*. *He saw his own pain as a conduit of grace*, *a generative source of compassion and ground for human solidarity*, *an opening to heal others* (my emphasis).

Drawing from his *own anguish* Nouwen (1996:44; following Vanier, 1979:104) argues that the outcasts personify "a fellowship of the weak". Nouwen further postulates that nobody escapes being wounded. According to Nouwen (1972:34), "everyone has been wounded during the course of their lives. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually." Nouwen (1997c:37) is emphatic in his assertion that:

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> You have been wounded in many ways. The more you open yourself to being healed, the more you will discover how deep your wounds are. You will be tempted to become discouraged, because under every wound you uncover you will find others. *Your search for true healing will be a suffering search* (my emphasis).

Since Nouwen "was authentic and vulnerable in his own suffering" (Ford, 1999:63), Nouwen (1972:43) contends that the main question is not "How can we hide our wounds?" so we don't have to be embarrassed, but "How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?" Crockett (1995:34) has similar views in postulating that, "We will not realize wholeness on a personal or collective level until we are able to share our brokenness, allowing our wounds to be seen and healed by others. When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers." This is possible, according to Nouwen (1972:43-44) because "Jesus is God's healer: through his wounds we are healed. Jesus' suffering and death brought joy and life. As followers of Jesus we can also allow our wounds to bring healing to others."

Gary Thomas (1999:89), too, speaks to this idea of woundedness in maintaining that "Many of us carry wounds that need to be healed before we can embrace [the truth of God's goodness]. Since surrender is fundamental to the Christian faith, we need to do the soul work that is necessary to arrive at an understanding of God's goodness […]." Nouwen subsequently prays that "[his] wounds become one with the wounds of [the] crucified and risen Lord."

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Jonas (2009: xiv), in turn, maintains that, "Many of us would have preferred that Henri's human woundedness be less visible. But somehow, we know that his ever-present, accompanying shadow was there only because of the light in which he walked." Brokenness and vulnerability (Nouwen's 'undisguised fragility') therefore open us up to become bread for a broken world (see *Bread for the Journey*, 1997b); for "we are to stand in this world with nothing to offer but [our] own vulnerable self" maintains Nouwen (1990:17). Nouwen's vulnerability, though, is one of hope.

Nouwen uses a concrete model of how we can be healed from our brokenness with reference to Adam Arnett, the profoundly disabled young man he took care of. According to Nouwen (1997a:30), "Adam was chosen to witness to God's love

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through his brokenness. […]. He had few distractions, few attachments, and few ambitions to fill his inner space." (Here there are elements of Nouwen's 'descending way'). Nouwen hypothesises that Jesus "asks us not to reject our brokenness as a curse from God that reminds us of our sinfulness, but to accept it and put it under God's blessing for our purification and sanctification."

For Nouwen (1997a:34) the most obvious "response to our brokenness is to face it squarely and befriend it." According to Nouwen (2002:68), "This may seem quite unnatural. Our first, most spontaneous response to pain and suffering is to avoid it, keep it at arm's length; to ignore, circumvent or deny it. Suffering – be it physical, mental or emotional – is almost always experienced as an unwelcome intrusion into our lives […]." The solution out of this stalemate lies in accepting our brokenness as a friend for as Nouwen postulates (2002:68):

> [M]y own pain in life has taught me that the first step to healing is not a step away from the pain, but a step toward it. […]. [We] have to find the courage to embrace our own brokenness, to make our most feared enemy into a friend and embrace it as an intimate companion.

Nouwen (2002:67*)* therefore contends that, "if the walls of self-sufficiency were breached, a form of divine empathy could be discovered. We are all bound by our brokenness, and yet our brokenness is bound by God."

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Both Nouwen (1996:45) and Vanier (1979) invite us to connect our own vulnerability with the vulnerability of the suffering poor. Writing in *Community and Growth*, Vanier (1979) invites us to open the doors of our hearts and become vulnerable. For Vanier (1979:197), vulnerability is "… to be concerned for others, attentive towards them, and to help them find their place in Community or in life itself." It is then that the dispossessed, claims Nouwen (1969:36), can believe that, "It is safe to be weak because we are surrounded by a creative strength." Here the focus is on social activism on behalf of the disadvantaged; with active-contemplatives aligning themselves with Teilhard de Chardin (1957:22) who was against "abandoning the world", but instead sought "active participation" in building it up. This is achieved, suggests Religious Sister of Mary, Maureen Conroy RSM (1995:24), through incorporating "… the dynamics of prayerful discernment into our daily life." The wounded (or fragmented) self, in contrast, tends to be inward-looking.

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According to Nouwen the fragmented self experiences acute suffering. Nouwen (1982b:21) perceives that, "the suffering we most frequently encounter … is a suffering of memories. These memories wound because they are often deeply hidden in the center of our being and very hard to reach." Healing of the *wounding* memories, according to Nouwen (1982b:25), "does not primarily mean to take pains away but to reveal that our pains are part of a greater pain, that our sorrows are part of a greater sorrow, that our experience is part of the great experience" of Jesus' suffering. For Nouwen, "what is forgotten is unavailable, and what is unavailable cannot be healed." The "suffering search" (Nouwen, 1997c:37) for wholeness, opens us to the possibility of "memory" becoming *The Living Reminder* (1982b).

Nouwen (1982b:25) hypothesises that healing of the wounded self is possible when we "[lift] our painful forgotten memories out of the egocentric, individualistic, private sphere." By viewing our woundedness as "part of God's ongoing redemptive work" in society, opines Nouwen (1982b:25-26), "memories that formerly seemed only destructive are now reclaimed as part of a redemptive event." Nouwen (1982b:22) proposes a first step out of our woundedness, and a way to healing, as:

> We are healed first of all by letting [wounding memories] be available, by leading them out of the corner of forgetfulness and by remembering them as part of our life stories.

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Nouwen (1968:49) cites psychologist Anton Theophilus Boisen (1962) who perceives every client as "living human documents". Being a living document opens us up to the possibility that one can deploy "one's own personal wounds as an opening to healing and integration." Therefore, when our loneliness is embraced the "broken-woundedness" of our life is healed. Writing a Foreword to *Adam*, *God's Beloved* Nouwen (1997a:18) concludes with great assurance that, "I also write with the deep hope that many others, through Adam's story, will be enabled to *recognize God's story among us and so be empowered to say in a new way*, '*I do believe*'" (my emphasis).

Nouwen's distinctions/categories (see 6.4) imply that the route to healing and wholeness is via brokenness or woundedness; the predominant theme in his life and his works. "Our service will not be perceived as authentic", warns Nouwen (1972:4), "unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which we speak. Thus,

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nothing can be written about ministry without a deeper understanding of the ways in which ministers can make their own wounds available as a source of healing."

In response to Nouwen's position, Crockett (1995:34) suggests that:

> Most of all, healing should not lead us away from the struggles for justice in which we are engaged. On the contrary, our willingness to become vulnerable, to articulate our suffering and work for our own liberation, will open the door for us to advance into a deeper and more mutual level of solidarity with other people.

For Earnshaw (2011:6-10), Nouwen's attempt to understand "the connections between theology, spirituality and the human psyche" has positioned him as an important contemplative activist. Nouwen (1982b:22), using Jesus' injunction in Mark 2:17 as ground for exploration, surmises that "Jesus affirms that only those who face their wounded condition can be available for healing and *so enter into a new way of living*" (my emphasis). According to Nouwen (1982b:26) active-contemplatives are challenged to help people in very concrete situations – "people suffering from poverty and oppression, people caught in the complex networks of secular or religious institutions – to see and experience their story as part of God's ongoing redemptive work in the world."

Nouwen's activism is encapsulated in the Latin motto, *Lutte et Contemplatio* (i.e. struggle and contemplation). Thus, contemplative prayer (*contemplatio*) should lead to contemplative living (*lutte*). As Alan Ecclestone (1975:37) maintains, "Contemplative living is really a matter of learning to see and to see with new-opened eyes the world in which we live." For Nouwen (1997c:30), this implies "a spirituality, in short, which helps us to distinguish service from our need to be liked, praised, or respected"; an ideal lived out by Nouwen in "the second half" (Rohr, 2012:2) of his life. Nouwen's (1982b:33) contemplative activism presupposes "a growing intimacy with Christ [as] the source of all [our] actions." This intimacy is birthed, undoubtedly, when we actively seek silence in our noisy world.

Towards the end of his life's journey Nouwen (1998:ix) "was swayed between the desire for solitude and prayer and the desire for active ministry. He also longed for a new freedom beyond his identity as Catholic priest and beyond the expectations of family and friends." However, despite this request Nouwen, like Fr Josef Kentenich,

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[14] is undoubtedly *Dilexit Ecclesiam*.

There are uncanny similarities between Merton's "contemplative struggle" and that of Nouwen. Ford (2002:60) postulates – with perceived certainty – that Nouwen is undoubtedly "a priest to the marginalized". The section which follows seeks to highlight how Nouwen's contribution can aid us in the current debate about contemplative prayer and the encounter with the marginalised "other".

6.6 *Id quod est*: Nouwen as active-contemplative

The title of this chapter suggests that the focus is primarily on social action flowing from contemplation. Nouwen (1975, 1979), however, does not collapse contemplation and action into one, but seeks, instead, to express the tension between these two "'polarities" (Hernandez, 2012) at the same time.

Pope Francis (2015:16) maintains that "The poor cry out, and with them, the earth." There is therefore the need, intimates Jacques Maritain (2015:19), in his defining volume, *Liturgy and Contemplation*, for "… contemplatives [to] thrust straight into the world and the world's misery." Maritain's premise is reminiscent of Nouwen's social activism. Nouwen (1979:109) surmises that "all men and women [should] experience the urge to be alone with God, to create space for him in the center of their lives, to lift up all the needs of the world to him, and to see more clearly where he reveals himself." In this way, postulates Nouwen (2007:14), they will be encouraged to plunge into the world "organizing and struggling to alleviate the suffering of our fellow human beings."

The thrust of Nouwen's activism is encapsulated in the motto, *Pro Utilitate Hominium* (In Service of Humanity). As a social activist Nouwen takes great care to link the contemplative life with social concerns, "not allow[ing] the inner life to become divorced from our outer life of public responsibility" (Allchin, 1996:150). For Nouwen (2007:15-16) "Living a life of ministry is witnessing to [God] in the midst of this world. It is opening the eyes of our brothers and sisters in the human family to his presence

[14] Fr Josef Kentenich, the founder of the Shrine of Schoenstatt, was born in Gymnich near Cologne, Germany on 18 November 1885. He was ordained priest on 8 July 1910. On 18 October 1914 Fr Kentenich made a covenant of love with Our Lady in the shrine at Schoenstatt. Ever since then the shrine at Schoenstatt in Constantia (Cape Town) has become a place of grace and the origin of an apostolic movement of renewal. Fr Joseph died on 15 September 1968 immediately after celebrating the Eucharist in the Church of the Blessed Trinity on Mount Schoenstatt, Rhein, Germany (Information culled from the Fr J Kentenich Secretariate; 1969, 1970).

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among us.” This section will subsequently explore how Nouwen fulfills these prescriptions in his life and practice as active-contemplative.

Polter (1995:10) is correct in her assertion that “For people of faith, a non-negotiable biblical concern is the call to *speak on behalf of the poor*, not the powerful, *to demand justice as well as righteousness*” (my emphasis).

This faithfulness to our vocation maintains Nouwen (1997a:50) is possible if we have developed, like Adam Arnett, “a heart where the *Word* of God [is] dwelling in intimate *silence*” (my emphasis).

Nouwen’s activism embodies an active life of engagement in social causes which is undergirded by “selfless service and compassionate response to the suffering of others.” As such, he subscribes – as do all active-contemplatives – to the injunction *Intus monachus, foris apostolus* (a monk in one’s heart, an apostle by one’s active work). For Nouwen (1997c:81), compassion and service will shape our lives and “[reveal] to [us] how [we] are called to live in solidarity with the broken human race.” *The Constitutions* of the Augustinian Sisters of Mercy encompass a similar thrust in pointing out that:

> We know that each person needs to encounter the Tenderness and Mercy of God in a tangible way. In showing this Tenderness and Mercy to others we will give Love a human face (*Constitutions* 119).

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Nouwen (1979:83) encourages contemplative activists to “offer care in a less bifurcated and more integrated way”. Nouwen, in inviting contemplative activists to reflect deeply on the purpose of their social activism on behalf of the disenfranchised and voiceless masses, provides both the context and the courage for such activism. According to Nouwen (1992:20), we need to:

> *Speak from that place in your heart where you are most yourself*. Speak directly, simply, lovingly, gently, and without any apologies. Tell us what you see and want us to see; tell us what you hear and want us to hear […]. Trust your own heart. There is nothing to fear. *Those who need you most will help you most* (my emphasis).

In this “one-dimensional world of unfreedom” Nouwen calls forth a “movement of protest and awaking” (Küng, 1974:58) in favour of the *hombré inutil.* For Nouwen (1998:61) this personifies a “true *politeia*; care for the people” who exist on the

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fringes of society. Nouwen (1969), quoting a student [15] who had participated in one of his studies, renders quite powerfully what is at the heart of the struggle of the silent, suffering masses. Nouwen (1969:48) reports:

> I just know that I'll find you in the Others and in my Self.

Then, with added poignancy, this observation:

> Who knows, maybe You are what is best in each of us.

Nouwen would agree with Crockett (1995:34) who, in clamouring for "a strong model of hope in the face of untold suffering", comes to the conclusion that such suffering opened her to her own pain and also gave her the impetus to face her suffering and experience healing. Fanny Howe (2006:62), in turn, postulates that, "It would be a strange person who did not know that suffering was a way to stay alive." Earnshaw (2011:5) perceives Nouwen as "a compelling and committed advocate of disarmament, the poor, and contemplative nonviolence" as shall become evident in the discussion which follows.

For Nouwen, the crux of any social activism is on how to integrate a life of responsible action and service with a contemplative life; thereby creating an intentional community finding its way in the contemporary world. Nouwen (1979), using Evagrius Ponticus as foil, explains the difference between "*theoria physike*, the vision of the nature of things, and *praktike*, the discipline of prayer." He refers to the *theoria physike* as the contemplative life and the *praktike* as contemplative prayer. For Nouwen (1979:107) following Evagrius,

> *praktike* and *theoria physike* find their culmination in *theologia*. The *theologia* is the direct knowledge of God that leads to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. Here we go beyond the practice of contemplative prayer, and even beyond the vision of the nature of things, and enter into a most intimate communion with God himself. This *theologia* is the greatest gift of all, the grace of complete unity, rest and peace. It is the highest level of spiritual life, in which the created world is transcended and we experience directly our being lifted up into God's

[15] Nouwen conducted this experiment with a group of students at Yale University. He refers to their responses as "the student-prayers" thereby implying that the depth of their responses can be equated as prayers on behalf of the oppressed, suffering ones.

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> inner life. In this experience, the distinction between ministry and contemplation is no longer necessary, since here […] all has become seeing.

At the heart of Nouwen's active contemplation – in line with the above explication – lie the dual facets of compassion and openness (see 1981b, 1997c). For Nouwen (1997c:37) it is a call for identifying with and "[feeling] deeply the loneliness, alienation and spiritual poverty of [our] contemporaries." These are the *anawim*; those unfortunate ones whom society has abandoned. Nouwen's call resonates with Robert A Seiple (2004:180), who has argued persuasively that "The Jericho Road of the twenty-first century is littered with bodies – bruised, hurting, stripped of dignity, hungry, despairing – waiting for our intervention. Passion is not enough. We need to choose carefully how we augment our individual resources to replicate what constitutes our best – theologically, philosophically, developmentally and pragmatically."

For Brackley (1988:36), "solidarity with the outcasts includes taking up their cause" since the dispossessed, suffering ones are part of a community; and for Loomis (1961:69):

> The community suffers together with [the individual] whether he suffers in an aspect we call mind, or an aspect we call spirit. Whatever their genesis, *the wounds of the individual are those of the community* (my emphasis).

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In view of this Nouwen (1982a:24) suggests that "Greed, the craving of pleasure, [and] the idolatry of power – the triple concupiscence which marks history and is also at the root of present evils – can be overcome only if the Gospel values of poverty, chastity and service are recovered." We are asked by Nouwen to stand alongside those who are suffering unjustly, thereby creating a community in action. This is achieved when, suggests Nouwen (1982a:124), "the illusion of power [is] unmasked, idolatry [is] undone, oppression and exploitation [are] fought, and all who participate in these evils [are] confronted."

Community is further exemplified in Nouwen's thesis in his volume, *Home Tonight*, which provides 'further reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son'. Nouwen (2009:xiv) suggests that we enter into the story in solidarity with all of humanity here on earth. Nouwen would concur with Küng (1974:263) that "humility, having the courage to serve [regardless of rank], is the way to true greatness. […]. A resolute

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renunciation of all that hinders readiness for God and neighbor is required." This is a call, maintains Nouwen (1981:20), "to let our false, compulsive self be transformed into the new self of Jesus." This is possible, surmises Nouwen (1982b:63), when contemplative activists "concentrate on the real but often *hidden event of God's active presence in their lives*" (my emphasis).

Since Nouwen (1966:43) regards the interior life as a crucial aspect of our activism, he calls for a paradoxical "ministry of presence" which might at times, demand a "creative withdrawal" (1966:44). Nouwen (1982b:34) observes that, "a prayerful life lived in connection with Christ, should be our first and overriding concern. It implies that in a life of connectedness with Christ the needs of our neighbors and the nature of our service are disclosed." Nouwen stresses the importance of silence and solitude for they become means to encounter God, leading to engagement with the world. Since solitude is such an indispensable and integral part of active contemplation, Nouwen (1982b:34) proposes that:

> In solitude we take some distance from the many opinions and ideas of our fellow human beings and become vulnerable to God. There we can listen carefully to him and distinguish between our desires and our task, between our urges and our vocations, between the cravings of our heart and the call of God.

Nouwen's life, following Merton's (1973a:384) analogy, like that of Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42), can therefore be likened as "a life of solitary attentiveness, interior purification, interior disposability, openness, readiness to be spoken to, an interior sensitivity, an interior awareness, all of which is cultivated in prayer". Nouwen (1997a:48) attests to the efficacy of solitary silence in stating that it "became my quiet hour, the most reflective and intimate time of the day". Here there are elements of Ignatius' *Contemplatio ad amorem*.

Smith Shappell, (cited in Owers, 2016:4) is correct in concluding that, "What we can learn from Henri is to continually listen to God's call to deepen our attention to prayer and contemplation and to find ways to heed the call to action in response to injustice." In this regard Nouwen (1987:30), positing his thesis in the context of Jesus' command in John 15:13 to, "lay down [your] life for [your] friends", avers that, "When you come to see Jesus more and more as the compassionate God, you will begin increasingly to see your own life as one in which you yourself want to express

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that divine compassion. What can happen then is that you feel a deep longing grow within you to make your own life a life for others."

If the way of Christ today is a commitment to work for a society with no outcasts (Brackley, 1988:37), then Donald A Postema's take on the debate is important. In his volume, *Space for God*, Postema (1983:18) alludes to the most appropriate response to social activism, maintaining that the "world really doesn't need more busy people, maybe not even more intelligent people. It needs 'deeper people'", people who know that they need:

> *solitude*, if they are going to find out who they are;
>
> *silence*, if their words are to mean anything;
>
> *reflection*, if their actions are to have any significance;
>
> *contemplation*, if they are to see the world as it really is;
>
> *prayer*, if they are going to be conscious of God, if they are to 'know God and enjoy God for ever' (my emphasis).

Nouwen's (1981b:12) activism is premised on the question, "What is required of a man or a woman who is *called to enter fully into the turmoil and agony of the times and speak a word of hope*?" (my emphasis). Nouwen's active-contemplative thrust after the manner of Frère Roger (2006:38) encourages a "humble giving of oneself, in order to understand others with kind-heartedness." This is an articulation (of intent) which supports a prophetic witness and action for social justice. The latter is an active call, in line with the vision of Abbot Wendelin (Francis) Pfanner CMM, "for renewing, uplifting, developing and sustaining the human spirit, as a response to the signs and needs of the time." [16]

For Nouwen (1997c:15) an active stance is birthed when we "are called to go towards solitude, prayer, hiddenness, and great simplicity." This perception is linked to Merton's understanding of prayer and solitude; particularly in his 1959 (revised 2003) volume, *The Inner Experience*. In this volume Merton's "[inquiry] into contemplation embodies what he understood as the very essence of being human." Nouwen (1976b:105) cites Merton (1964:142) who intimates:

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[16] See Richard Elphick *et al* (1997:199). Abbot Pfanner established the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannhill (KwaZulu-Natal) in 1882. The Trappist monastery of Mariannhill was founded in June 1882.

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> I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this!
>
> This changes nothing in the sense and value of my solitude, for it is in fact the function of solitude to make one realize such things with a clarity that would be impossible to anyone completely immersed in the other cares, the other illusions, and all the automatisms of a tightly collective existence (my emphasis).

Nouwen's social activism is essentially one of active *diakonia*. His activism offers us the possibility of building bridges to assert our common humanity. It offers us "an opportunity", surmises Küng (1974:505) "of exercising an unconstrained and non-violent 'ministry'. This it does by intervening constantly and effectively for the socially neglected or ostracised groups, for all despised, downtrodden, abandoned people in the world […]." Such a premise is evident in Nouwen's participation in 1965, while studying at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, in Martin Luther King II's 1965 Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery. His participation exemplifies Nouwen's *active* stance on contemplative non-violence. Callahan (1992) perceives Nouwen's search to live in solidarity with the poor as being closely connected to his call to peacemaking. This solidarity found its fulfillment in the Gandhi Peace March [17] in which he participated, thus spreading the message of peace in the contemplative tradition.

Nouwen (2009:109) reminds us that, "The Creator of the galaxies lives, whispers uniquely good things about us in our hearts, and urges us to rise up and use our freedom to become compassionate peacemakers in our world"; thus, opines Nouwen (1997c:83), "calling [us] to obedience, radical commitment, and service." According to Callahan (1992:123) "[Nouwen's] sense of mission impels him to see peace as a gift received in prayer, to resist all the forces of death, and to affirm the signs of life joyfully." [18]

[17] According to The World Movement for Nonviolence (1990:2) both these marches are commemorated between 30 January and 4 April every year.

[18] Callahan quotes from Nouwen's 1985 series of articles on "Peacemaking" published in New Oxford Review 52.

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This contemplative stance “becomes an entry into accompaniment of the poor” reports Crockett (2001:20); precisely because the poor cry out like William Butler Yeats’ (1899, see 1912) suffering one in “He wishes for the cloths of heaven”:

Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths,

I would spread the cloths under your feet

But I, *being poor*, *have only my dreams;*

I have spread my dreams under your feet;

Tread softly because you tread on my dreams

(my emphasis).

In light of this cry of distress Nouwen (1986b:27) believes, “As prayer leads us into the house of God and God’s people, so action leads us back into the world to work there for reconciliation, unity, and peace.” Here we see clearly his focus on both the centrality of prayer and contemplation and the inter-connectedness between action and contemplation. For Nouwen (1986b:27), social activism “is not an anxious human effort to create a better world. It is not a fearful attempt to restore a broken order. It is a joyful assertion that in Christ all order has already been restored. It is not a nervous effort to bring divided people together, but a celebration of an already established unity.”

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A distinction needs to be made at this point about Nouwen’s activism. His activism is not political activism, but rather activism birthed in prayer and contemplation of God.

Nouwen (1966:49) intimates that silent, waiting prayer stems from the “day of solitude, [the] day in the hermitage, [the] desert day.” Nouwen, like Murray (1887, see 1981:25), believes that, “The secrecy of the inner chamber and the closed door, the entire separation from everything around us, is an image of the inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God’s tabernacle. It is there within the veil that our spirit truly comes into contact with the Invisible One.” Accordingly, observes Nouwen (1966:51), “it is in the silence and solitude of prayer” that anything worthwhile happens. This is God’s work and not ours, for “only in and through God does service become possible” (Nouwen, 1966:32). Nouwen (cited in Jonas, 1999:77), subsequently proposes that active contemplatives “make [their] lives into an unceasing prayer”, out of which could emanate social action. This identification with the plight of the poor

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leads active-contemplatives "to a holy thoughtlessness" for self (Murray 1887, see 1981:27). As such, active-contemplatives dare not for a moment develop "a momentary anesthesia of the heart" (Bergson, 1956:4).

Merrill (2009:135) in turn postulates that, "We come to know the power of Silence in deep meditation. Here True Wisdom [19] emerges silently, rising up from the Mystery of the unseen Source within all." Fr Michel de Verteuil CSSP (1996:8-9), linking wisdom with *Lectio Divina*, believes that:

> The wisdom which emerges from *Lectio Divina* is felt not in the head but in the heart. *We experience it as a gift of God and we feel touched and deeply grateful* – even though we know we have come to it from our own experience.
>
> The wisdom moment of *Lectio Divina* does *have moral implications* but they are implicit: if good shepherds are like this [i.e. leaving the ninety-nine for the one] then it has implications for [us] as parent, teacher or priest.
>
> So the wisdom moment leads to a commitment to do things differently from now on (my emphasis).

In his poem, "Late Fragment", Raymond Carver interrogates the "moral implications of [doing] things differently". Carver (1989:24) asks:

> And did you get what
>
> You wanted from this life, even so?
>
> I did.
>
> And what did you want?
>
> To call myself beloved, to feel myself
>
> Beloved on the Earth.

Carver's summation is that we can live with purpose if we live our spirituality by engaging the poor with their myriad of problems through justice, compassion and mercy. Grüen speaks to this 'living with purpose'. Grüen (2002:4) intimates that,

[19] Wisdom (*Sophia* in the ancient Greek philosophical texts) is used here both in the context of a metaphor for spiritual discernment and gaining insight about a particular situation in order to make an informed decision.

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> When we pray, sing and are silent together, we help one another to imagine and become aware of God's presence. We are surrounded by God's healing presence. It is a healing space in which our heart comes to rest.

Writing the subsection "Our Greatest Gift", Nouwen (cited in Jonas, 2009:68-69), observes that:

> The real question before our death, then, is not How much can I still accomplish, or How much influence can I still exert? But, How can I live so that I can continue to be fruitful when I am no longer here among my family and friends?

According to Nouwen, and in line with the *charism* of the Order of the Servants of the Holy Childhood of Jesus OSF [20] "the self-giving love of Jesus is what impels us to be especially close to the poor", thereby "[doing] things differently" (De Verteuil, 1996:9). In this kenotic love, our service becomes fruitful; respecting and protecting the indestructible dignity of every person. These persons, maintains Quoist (1971:22), are "the great mass of people, those who are condemned to live in the hurly-burly of the world, jostled, crushed, sacrificed; who are able from time to time, by a heroic act of the will, to tear themselves away and, despite a thousand worries and distractions, to catch a glimpse of Christ."

Nouwen subsequently invites us to look through another person's eyes and ache for him [sic]. According to Michael O'Laughlin (2005:83), "Nouwen had a sincere yearning and true insight into God's presence in the world. God was in the fields, in the alleyways, in the glance of an old seaman or the tilted bonnet of a faded beauty." This revelation is reminiscent of Ignatius' concept of "finding God in all things" (*Spiritual Exercises*, 235 - 236).

Nouwen was prophetically engaged in the struggles of the vulnerable, under-served, and homeless poor. As such Nouwen (1997c:85) "speaks into human suffering by equating Jesus' suffering as the suffering of all humanity. For him Jesus' pain was *the* pain." Nouwen (1997c:86) postulates that "once you discover that you are called to live in solidarity with the hungry, the homeless, the prisoners, the refugees, the

[20] The Order of the Servants of the Holy Childhood of Jesus OSF was founded by Sr Antonie Werr in1855. The Order traces its roots back to St Francis (1209). This accounts for the addition of OSF in their title. Barbara Albrecht has written a definitive volume on Werr, titled *The Spiritual Legacy of Antonie Werr.*

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sick, and the dying, your very personal pain begins to be converted into *the* pain and you find new strength to live it." In the final analysis, Nouwen (1997c:29) asks us to "[leave] humanity with *gifts that could heal the minds and hearts of many generations* of people" (my emphasis).

"In and through Jesus", surmise Nouwen *et al* (1982:45), "it becomes possible to be effective witnesses to God's compassion and to be signs of hope in the midst of a despairing world." "The love of Jesus", maintains Nouwen (1997c:77), "will give you an ever-clearer vision of your call as well as the many attempts to pull you away from that call. The more you are called to speak for God's love, the more you will need to deepen the knowledge of that love in your own heart. *The farther the outward journey takes you*, *the deeper the inward journey must be*" (my emphasis).

We stand at the point of intersection where human need and God's (loving) concern meet. Nouwen (1972:65) is therefore correct in surmising that, "The emptiness of the past and the future can never be filled with words but only by the presence of a man" [sic]. For McNamara (1981:153) this implies "personal passionate presence". There is, subsequently, the need for contemplative activists to "be present" to the marginalised masses, for as Socrates has it, infers Harold North Fowler (1966:38a), [21] "The unexamined life is not worth living."

I introduced this chapter by pointing out that Nouwen is contemplative, pastor, teacher and prophet. Nouwen was all of these and so much more. Nouwen highlights these professions and distinguishes his role and that of fellow-ministers "as pastor, as priest, and as prophet." For Nouwen (1990:75-76), "'profession' refers to professing, witnessing, proclaiming, announcing." According to Nouwen (1990:75) these vocations can be summarised thus:

> As pastors, *ministers heal the wounds of the past*; as priests, *they sustain life in the present*; and as prophets, *they guide others to the future*. They do all of this in memory of him who is, who was, and is to come (my emphasis).

Odgers (2004:3), writing as if he had had a divine *epiphāneo*, "sees" a notice "[that] said that as I passed through the gateway, I would begin to hear, as never before, the cries of the poorest and the most excluded on this planet – *cries for food*, *cries*

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[21] Fowler (1966) referencing Plato in *Apology* (38a, ll. 5-6) points out that this is "The famous dictum uttered by Socrates at his trial for impiety and corrupting youth for which he was sentenced to death; described by Plato in *Apology*" (38a 5-6).

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for mercy, *cries for rest*, *cries for justice*, *cries for love*. My love" (my emphasis). In response to Odgers (2004:3) it could be said that Nouwen (1972:47) invites Christian leaders, including contemplative activists, to be "contemplative critics" who, through their activism, become "people of hope". Nouwen (1969:125) challenges contemplative activists to critique "actual social conditions in all their complexity."

Drawing from, and expounding on, Boisen (1962:185), Nouwen (1969:124) speaks of the interaction between humans as moments of confrontation with "living human documents". This concept is "definitive of social relations" according to Boisen (1962:185) and casts a light on how active-contemplatives view the "destitute, afflicted, ill-treated" ones (Psalm 82:3-4, Hebrews 11:37b). Only in this way do contemplative activists function as "[advocates] of equality of rights in the world" according to Küng (1974:483).

Nouwen, in calling us to be integral participants of shared silence and prayer, anticipates that the encounter in silence will shape our way of being in the world. Gathering as the community-at-prayer, we "create a free space where all the suffering people in the world can be received and lifted up in unceasing prayer" according to Nouwen (1979:34). The suffering poor are none other than our neighbour. In affirming the dignity of the neighbour (Luke 10:29-37), we are affirming that they have value (Merton, 1961a:80 and Nouwen, 1997a:79). Nouwen fulfills, with equanimity, the 2007 injunction of Pope John Paul II to the Carmelites on their eighth centenary of the *Formula Vitae* given by St Albert of Jerusalem to the hermits on Mount Carmel.

John Paul II (2007:2) reminded them that, "[They] have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also *a great history still to be accomplished*" (my emphasis). This story is being relived daily surmises Nouwen (1979:19) whenever and wherever contemplative activists engage with God and the "[many] wounded individuals." Through this engagement, suggests Nouwen (2007:16), we become "servants in the city" speaking to the spiritual hunger of our hurting society. Hermit Br Ramon SSF and Bishop Barrington-Ward (2001:91) surmise that this is a call for contemplative activists to be "rooted and grounded in prayer in the hidden contemplation of the presence of Christ" among them.

Nouwen (1979:32), speaking from within the context of Ramon's and Barrington-

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Ward's premise, postulates that, "When we remain aware of the countless people who can be embraced by our prayers, we can live joyfully and gratefully." In the last few lines of *The Inner Voice of Love*, written in 1996 and released on 21 September 1996, the day of his death, Nouwen (1997c:133) expressed, with joyful hope:

> *I am not a young man anymore*. *Still*, *I may have quite a few years left to live*. Can I live them gracefully and joyfully, *continuing to profit from what I learned in my exile*? […]. Many friends and family members have died during the past eight years, and *my own death is not so far away*. But *I have heard the inner voice of love*, deeper and stronger than ever. I want to keep trusting in that voice and *be led by it beyond the boundaries of my short life*, to where God is all in all (my emphasis).

Here Nouwen, unbeknowns, speaks almost prophetically of his untimely death and echoes Merton (1953:254) who observed:

> My heart is troubled within me: and fear of death is fallen upon me. Fear and trembling are come upon me: and darkness hath covered me. And I say who will give me wings like a dove, and *I will fly and be at rest*? Lo, I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness. *I waited for him that hath saved me from pusillanimity of spirit and a storm* (my emphasis).

This too is a *misericordia dei*.

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In line with the worker-priest movement, [22] Nouwen (1981:34) advises active-contemplatives "to enter into solidarity with those who suffer". Their suffering must touch the heart, for:

> In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, that cares, that reaches out and wants to heal. In that heart there is no suspicion, no vindictiveness, no resentment, and not a tinge of hatred. It is a heart that wants only to give love and receive love in response. *It is a heart that suffers immensely because it sees the magnitude of human pain and the great*

[22] Although not directly aligned to it, Nouwen nevertheless stands in the tradition of the now defunct worker-priest movement (see Stan Windass; 1966:58, 76 and James and Leslie Francis; 1998:137). His work in Central America contains elements of the modus oprandi of the worker-priest movement.

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> *resistance to trusting the heart of God who wants to offer consolation and hope* (my emphasis).

Despite his visibly public 'social justice' activism, Nouwen nevertheless deliberately avoided the designation of 'social activist'. The final word belongs to Nouwen (1966:78):

> And so we keep returning to our people, faithful to our vocation, and growing in humility and love.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the life, teaching and practice of Nouwen as a contemplative activist. We noted that Nouwen's activism calls for intense empathy with those who are "a stranger to this place" (Colin Sharingham and Pheroza Daruwalla, 2007:42).

I began the chapter with an introduction (6.1) in which I provided the context for an exploration of Nouwen's theology and spirituality personified in concepts such as "polarities", "vulnerability", "woundedness" and "contemplative struggle". This was followed by a biographical sketch of Nouwen (6.2) to place his life, practice and social activism in context. I pointed out that Nouwen's life is best described as spiritual guide, priest-psychologist, writer, prophet and "monk". Nouwen's practice is to be understood as one who leaves the world temporarily to contemplate God and re-enter the world to engage in meaningful social activism. The latter premise points to Seán Dunne (1994:77) who reminds us that, "There is a monk in everyone: solitary, silent, faced with questions of belief and eternity and the need to know God. The monk is the other side of our nature and for those who live in Mount Mellary and elsewhere, it is the whole of it."

This biographical sketch was followed by a comprehensive discussion of the "descending way" (6.3) in which the focus was on Nouwen's conscious decision tolive a life that is counter-cultural to society's obsession with prestige, recognition and status. I pointed out that the prevailing social contexts heighten upward mobility's ambiguity. On the one hand there are those at the top of the social ladder who adheres to "the fundamentalism of the market, the deification of profit, the association of dignity with profit, the reduction of the human being to *homo*

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oeconomicus and the subordination of the human person to the tyranny of needs" (Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople cited in Wooden, 2018:3). On the other hand there are those at the bottom of the strata who strive to attain the same privileges as the "titled classes", but who are faced with "less economic opportunity and more losers in society with fewer social benefits" (Brackley, 1988:19).

However, as in Nouwen's (1996:44) descending way, "The joy that comes from living together in a fellowship of the weak makes the sorrow not just tolerable but a source of gratitude". This is a natural outflow of the Two Standards which Ignatius describes as two ways of being in the world. In section 6.4 the focus was on spiritual polarities, Nouwen's classification of opposites. I pointed out that, although these 'contraries' are in tension with each other, they nevertheless complement each other.

Section 6.5 offered a glimpse into Nouwen's teaching on the True Self/False Self. I hypothesised that Nouwen, like Merton and Keating, perceives "the true self as the deepest part of our being that is united with God and reflects divine love and grace." The false self, in contrast, is not innate but acquired. "It is out of tune with God's active presence and, as a result, reflects darkness, sin and selfishness" (Merton cited in Sandman, 2000:33). This section laid the groundwork for the discussion on the Self in Contemplation and the Self in Transformation; section 6.5.2 and 6.5.3 respectively.

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Contemplating the self involves an encounter with God and the true self in silence and solitude. In the silence the self is challenged to interrogate presuppositions about its place vis-à-vis friendship and intimacy. The self is subsequently challenged to fill the void (i.e. our deepest need) within with God's love, while also acknowledging the push and pull of people and external forces on us. The Self in Contemplation, in line with Merton (1974:308), comes to the realisation eventually that "What we have to be is what we are." Implicit in the transformation of the self, according to Nouwen (1992), following Merton, is the understanding that a person's view of life and the world is related to what motivates them.

For Nouwen (1992:75-76) the Self in Transformation undergoes a spiritual awakening that leads to a radical change of interiority (or inner understanding). The self undergoes a shift from self-centredness to other-centredness, making conscious choices about *what* we are living as opposed to *just* living. The self in transformation

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experiences the interplay between broken-woundedness and wholeness at an acute level. Thus, accepting our brokenness leads to wholeness; a transformed consciousness evolving from the transformation of the self.

In section 6.6 I explored Nouwen's social activism on behalf of the poor; an activism where we are asked "to take up life in the ruins" (Norris, 1987:3). For Nouwen (cited in Garvey, 2006:57), our social action is thus born out of the realisation that, "You are Christian only so long as you … *constantly pose critical questions to the society you live in*, so long as you emphasize the need of conversion both for yourself and for the world, […] so long as you stay unsatisfied with the *status quo* and keep saying that a new world is yet to come. You are Christian… *when you urge everyone you meet with a holy unrest to make haste so that the promise might soon be fulfilled*" (my emphasis).

According to Nouwen (1979:9), effective social activism hinges on the "indispensability of solitude", silence and reflection by the contemplative community. This is crucial since "Community [personifies] obedience practiced together" according to Nouwen (1982a:87). Nouwen therefore reminds us that we are human in a given time, space and place. As such we are called upon to assist the *hombré inutil* to migrate out of "the frozen darkness of this world" (Grüen, 2002:5) "of division and despair" (Vanier, 1985:1). Here Grüen and Vanier couch their recommendations in the language of clinical psychology as is also evident in the next observation by Nouwen. Nouwen (1972:51), citing Timothy Ware (1969:13) perceives contemplative activists as being "diagnosticians of the soul who can distinguish the Holy Spirit from the unholy spirits and so guide people to an active and vital transformation of soul and body."

Nouwen's activism is characterised by social action that is nurtured by contemplative practice. The question could then be asked, "What is the ultimate goal for Nouwen vis-à-vis contemplation and action?" Is the purpose of contemplation appropriate activism for the sake of God's reign? Or is the purpose of activism God's reign so that we can live a life of contemplation? In my summation, Nouwen leans towards the former position in his life, teaching and *praxis* as a contemplative activist.

Nouwen's life and practice as contemplative activist encompasses the counter-intuitive message that "we grow spiritually much more by doing wrong than by doing

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right" (Rohr, 2012:xxii). His *praxis* perceives the dynamics of contemplative prayer as consisting of speaking and listening (in the contemplative-community-at-prayer), followed by waiting (in stillness and silence) and hearing God's voice (encouraging social action). Nouwen's activism exemplifies a spirituality in which contemplation and apostolic life are so intertwined that each gives life to the other.

In summing up Nouwen's life and practice, we can surmise that Nouwen offers us an opportunity to develop ourselves and build inner resolve so that we can have a mind that remains stable and calm, and a heart that is loving and content. It is out of this "wholeness", the healing of the fragmented self, that we can be effective in our vocation as contemplative activists. As Nicolas-Sebastien de Chamfort, [23] the author of *Maximes et pensées*, indicates, "The heart must either break or turn to lead." As such, contemplative activists live every day with purpose. It is a simple life characterised by self-sacrifice (Eph. 5:1-2); a choice based on Christ's *kenosis*; a daily emptying of self for others (Phil. 2:7-8). *Vacete et videte quoniam ego sum deus*!

If Chittister (2016:1) is correct and "Spirituality is about the hunger in the human heart, it is a commitment to immersion in God, to the seeking that has no end", then in Nouwen, "we are faced with Jesus Christ toward our suffering world in loving service and just action." For Nouwen (1979:101) the "whole world is a sacrament." As such, active-contemplatives are asked to immerse themselves in the suffering of the world, thereby challenging personal and societal values that are self-seeking. This contemplative stance enables us to look critically at Nouwen as a contemplative activist who invites us to witness to the ways of God acting in the global village.

Nouwen, cited in Garvey (2006:18), in challenging us to stand with "those people who make us uncomfortable and who seem so inconvenient", is moved to pray:

> Therefore, Lord, I promise I will not run away, not give up, nor stop praying, even when it all seems useless, pointless, and a waste of time and effort. I want to let you know that I love you even though I do not feel loved by you, and that I hope in you even though I often experience despair. Let this be a little dying I can do with you and for you as a way of experiencing some solidarity with the millions in this world who suffer far more than I do.

[23] The quote appears in Valencia and Bismarck (2011).

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One can therefore see how the extract from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Article 50 quoted at the beginning of this chapter, finds a reverberation in Nouwen's life. We, like Nouwen, have returned to the paradox of the spiritual polarities; the separateness yet interconnectedness of prayer and action. *Tikkun olam*! (*te-kün*; to heal, repair and transform the world. All the rest is commentary). [24]

The Augustinian Sisters of Mercy, exercising their apostolate from within the South African context foresee a movement where social activism is characterised as one where:

> We shall help to heal the hurts and wounds caused by an unjust system. Some of the challenges that await us are: adapting to a new society … being involved in the pastoral care of people, e.g. animating, affirming and building communities. Is not the tragedy of all those who suffer, who are lonely and oppressed a 'cry from the heart to our hearts?' The 'poor for us are the […] stranger, the social outcast, believer or unbeliever' (*Constitutions* 119).

Callahan (1992:119) argues that through his writings, Nouwen "reaches out to love others, painfully conscious of his own needs for affection and reconciliation." It has been asserted that Nouwen continues to "accomplish much" and "still exert[s] much influence" among us. For Hernandez (2012:2, 12), Nouwen "continues to be fruitful here among family and friends."

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As I conclude this chapter, I am reminded of Brackley (1988:63) who intimates, "I invite you to discover your vocation in downward mobility. It's a scary request […].

The world is obsessed with wealth and security and upward mobility and prestige. *But let us teach solidarity*, *walking with the victims*, *serving and loving*" (my emphasis).

The final word belongs to Fr Henri Josef Machiel Nouwen (1966:78) who maintains:

> And so we keep returning to our people, faithful to our vocation, and growing in humility and love.

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[24] This definition is culled from the title page of *Tikkun Magazine*, 1999:1.

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Chapter 7: Contemplative spirituality in the South African context

> The Spirit has called me into the world to live a spirituality of engagement with those who suffer, and that's all of us (Teasdale; 2002:xxx).

7.1 Introduction

An analysis of present-day South Africa reveals that there is a myriad of societal problems which cripples the country. These enormous challenges are symbolised by the Nkandla, SassaGate, Guptagate and State-capture scandals. The unjust scourges of poverty, economic disempowerment, landlessness and human rights abuses add to an already tenuous situation.

Jonathan Jansen (2008:15) consequently warns that the fabric of social cohesion is at risk in present-day South Africa. According to Jansen (2008:16) the degradation of our social fabric could lead to the undoing of "the social contract" (à la Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762; see 1893:24, 47).

The lack of a prophetic voice in the current socio-political discourse further exacerbates the problem for, as Eliot (1963:218) has it, "[L]ast year's words belong to last year's language, and *next year's words await another voice*" ("Little Gidding", Stanza II, Ll 67-68) (my emphasis).

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It is within these contexts that active-contemplatives are encouraged to be agents of solidarity and renewal; a people responsible for changing societal structures which perpetuate poverty, oppression and the marginalisation of certain sectors of society. This contemplative togetherness makes of us a *Sagrada familia* as contemplative activists agitate for programmes of reform and/or social change.

7.2 The need for social activism

The observations which were highlighted in 7.1 above require critical reflection on how we could redress the broader social injustices that pervade South African society at present. Despite this pressing need, though, there is a perception that the South African populace, which includes active-contemplatives, is disinclined to take action.

Such responses from the South African citizenry, contemplative communities and

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centres in the Western Cape highlight the moral ambiguity of our prayer and action. It is to be noted that the thrust of St Dominic's *contemplata aliis tradere*, resides precisely in "communicating to others what we ourselves have learned from our own experience of faith and contemplation" (Nolan, 2010:23). It is in this regard that Nouwen's practice of human becoming and human caring [1] point to a process of care for the marginalised. Nouwen (1966:31) reminds us that it is in God we find our neighbours and discover our responsibility to them.

However, my experience in Christian Listeners, the Julian Meetings, Contemplative Outreach (Western Cape Chapter), Quiet Gardens and Open Door Retreats in the Western Cape points to a tendency among members to be inward-looking and concerned with self-improvement only. This is borne out by Fr Luke Pato (2000:93) who concedes that in such cases spirituality comes across as, "an experience that prohibits people from going out or to exist in the full dynamic sense. The outcome of this kind of spirituality is often perceived as personal, private and individualistic, and as human achievement". There is the risk, as Kay Lindahl (1999:68) points out, of "[these] groups becoming a forum for theological, therapeutical or philosophical debate [only]."

The pervasive apathy and disinterest point to former Anglican Bishop, Leslie Stradling's (1997:67) identification of "those to whom spirituality is a comfortable luxury but who contribute little to the world in which they live." Stradling (1997:4) argues that, "A concern for justice, peace and reconciliation, for the victimised and the dehumanised, *demands* a place in our spirituality." Stradling is therefore justifiably scathing in his criticism of spiritual practices that do not find the right place for this concern and those that do not get a right balance between *saying* prayers and *doing* prayers (my emphasis).

This inward-looking phenomenon can be ascribed to the nature and focus of meetings, retreats or workshops which characterises the Schools of Prayer, Quiet Days, Silent Retreats, Ignatian Days, Days of Recollection, as well as Intensive and Post-Intensive Retreats. Here the activities, teaching and presentations are primarily geared towards the self-enrichment of the participant (-s). A case in point is a recent

[1] For a fuller version of these argument see Barbara Leonard's and David Carlson's (1996:988-996) excellent discussion of Rosemary Parse's (1994) theory of human becoming and Jean Watson's (1988) theory of human caring. These terms originated with them.

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Discussion Forum / Community Conversation by Contemplate Outreach (Western Cape) in which the following questions were dealt with:

What? What events or activities are currently happening in your Centering Prayer community as individuals and small groups?

So What? What difference do you think these activities are making in the development of contemplative practice and the process of transformation in your community? Please consider both the positive and negative differences you have observed, for example: new connections made and/or connections lost; deepened practice or less time for personal prayer, etc.

Now What? Recalling Fr. Thomas final words to us in 2018 – "… We are called *to start, not with the old-world contract … but with what we know is the truth*".

An ancillary set of questions explores:

- What is working well that you would like to continue?
- What is not serving you well that you might need to let go of?
- What is emerging for you in your sense of vision for yourself, your small group and/or for Contemplative Outreach as a whole?
- What additional support might be needed to help you live into this vision?

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The tenor of these questions, and the anticipated action flowing from them, bears out the contention that the focus is insular and too focused on self-fulfillment. According to Stradling (1997:5-7) there is no evidence of an actual *desire* to engage with the dispossessed through social activism, thereby engendering a sense of purpose – both individually and corporately – in contemplative activists. This could be perceived as a disengagement from the social project.

The contemplative practice of these activists runs contrary to "A life in the Spirit [which] is a life of *speaking out about what is wrong in our world*, our society, our church, and our community; of *speaking out about the future we are heading for or should be heading for*; of speaking out about how God must feel about the events of our time. This at least is the direction in which we must move if we are to be faithful to the Spirit of the prophets …" (Nolan, 2010:98) (my emphasis). Such a change in focus – an act of prophetic witness – is a deliberate move away from "group solidarity [to] human solidarity" according to Nolan (2010:108).

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We therefore need to question the silence of so many citizens in the face of these crippling situations. In questioning this uncharacteristic silence, we voice a common intention to create transformation for ourselves and for the country, with the poor and their needs being high on the agenda.

For Jansen (2007:49) "social commitment and personal humanity" is one mechanism at the disposal of social activists to speak to the fear and factional interests which mark the current discourse in South Africa. Bishop Eric Pike (1999:1) [2] subsequently encourages contemplative activists to "seek to dispel, in Christ Jesus, the darkness that threatens to envelop us but which we, as a pilgrim people, know we will overcome in Jesus our Lord." This is needed suggests Denise Ackermann (2003:114) as "We … lament the wasted years, the self-destructiveness of sin that destroyed the possibility of true community in our country." Here Ackermann's stance points to the principle of radical availability.

Gerrit Scott Dawson (2001:186), in interrogating the concept of radical availability, reminds active-contemplatives that "heeding God's call can mean *leaving home and all that is familiar*. It can demand our […] security or dare us to place our blessings, even our lives, at risk. *It can also mean simply living where we are but with an entirely new set of priorities*" (my emphasis). Thus they are challenged to the point where they are prepared to *give their bodies to the cross in costly self-denial and sacrifice*, suggests Michael E Worsnip (1991:47). For Jansen (2007:81), it implies "being prepared to travel across some unfamiliar spaces, speak new languages and risk our emotional selves"; thereby immersing oneself like leaven into the secular city (Carretto, 1972:70).

7.3 Activism in the South African contemplative community

7.3.1 Introduction

Ackermann (2003:114) points out with great conviction that we cannot allow ourselves to succumb to numbness and insensitivity. Ackermann (2014:185) is

[2] Former Anglican Bishop of Port Elizabeth, Eric Pike, undertook a 200km pilgrimage of "presence, prayer and protest" from 15-22 March 1999. The purpose of the pilgrimage was to highlight Bishop Pike's and the church's concern over the spiralling violent crimes in the Eastern Cape at the time. His pilgrimage took him from the Sundays River Valley to St Francis Bay with stops in Uitenhage, Motherwell. Gqebera, Van Staden's River and Thornhill. From 20-24 March 2000 he undertook a prayer walk around the greater Port Elizabeth/Uitenhage metropolitan area inspired by the Celtic practice of encircling prayer.

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convinced that our “Saying ‘Yes’ to God is made manifest in tangible actions for justice, peace and freedom”. The communal ‘Yes’ to God, embodies a moral voice and a source of *action grounded in contemplation*.” Petersen (1991:72) subsequently suggests that, “We need to become angry with injustice, angry at oppression, angry at the structures which cripple and maim and harm people.” This is needed, as Peter C Grassow (1991:54) contends, because “Participation in the struggle for justice is the measure against which the authenticity of spirituality is to be measured.”

In light of these pronouncements I propose an ethic of social justice that emanates from contemplating God in the silence; in sum, a contemplatively grounded activism. Like Nouwen (1993b) and Keating (1999a) we withdraw to seek “solitude to restore, in prolonged silence and prayer, the stuff of [our] soul” (Carretto, 1972:73), thus being a *distinctive*, yet *visible* and *active* community. Our activism, then, which flows out of our contemplation, is in essence God’s activism in the world.

This communal seeking of the *visio Dei* in prayer (I Chronicles 16:11), enables active-contemplatives to become discerners of where God is leading them. It presupposes a series of firsthand experiences, analyses of the prevailing circumstances, intensive theological reflection and social activism on behalf of the dispossessed. Their *praxis* should spell out in detail specific ways how active-contemplatives are called not merely to “pray at the dry well of contemplation but to work in the dark marketplace of the world” (Green, 1981:47). It is this creative grace and love of God that exemplify the understanding that “Fidelity to prayer and contemplation moves the transformed person[s] to really see the poor and no longer deny their existence” (Arico, 1992:178). *Facta non verba*!

As we consent to the divine actions of God upon our souls (Keating, 1986:3) we are transformed into the *Pueblo Nuevo de La Resurrection*; a people able to effectively aid the wounded in their struggle for liberation and their cry for justice.

This begs the question, “How can the life, practice and teaching of Keating and Nouwen inform the practice of the South African contemplative community?” I subsequently turn to an exploration of this question; acknowledging that active-contemplatives stand in the tradition of *the monastic vocation*; “a lineage of people called apart from the world in order to be a blessing to the world” (Dawson, 2001:181). Br Michael Downey (1997:73) perceives monasticism as “*a … way of*

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living in search of the face and the trace of the God who comes in Christ. Each day. All ways. *But most often God comes in those we least expect*: *the poor and the weak and the wounded and the outcast*. God comes in the 'other', even in the enemy, those who have wounded [his] heart, harmed me" (my emphasis).

I will now attempt to show how contemplative activists could contribute – through discussion, reflection and concrete action – towards building a more equitable society and a socially cohesive nation. Here the thrust is towards enabling a liberating social *praxis* that will impact the lives of the poor and the weak in positive ways. The aim is to explore how active-contemplatives could participate in the confrontation and, ultimately, the eradication of poverty, suffering and injustice in South African society.

7.3.2 Engagement in the social project

The years between 1976 and 1989 witnessed a groundswell of internal resistance against apartheid where organisations like the United Democratic Front, Clothing Workers' Union, Cape Youth Congress Organisation, Cape Areas Housing Action Committee, Mass Democratic Movement, Western Cape Relief Fund and the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union were pivotal in bringing about societal change – through acts of radical resistance – to a people who were discriminated against on the grounds of race, colour and culture. What is therefore needed in the present climate is another upsurge of public activism from a broad-based alternative movement which can take the lead in the fight against the injustices that are committed against the weak, "invisible" poor and disadvantaged.

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Although mass engagement from the bottom up is still required, my proposal, in contrast, is for an apostolate of engagement with the world from within the context of the Church. The contemplative movements and communities which feature in this study have all been called into existence through the Church. A case in point is the Community of the Resurrection (2017:34) who was founded specifically to "engage with society to help bring about a more just and compassionate world" with its charism aimed at "[living] the baptismal vocation through a commitment to community life, maintained by common worship and *issuing in works that are primarily of a public character*" (my emphasis). Thus, for Trevor Hudson (2007:30) the *ekklesia* is "called to become the place and means where the world's pain can be focused and

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concentrated and shared and even healed."

The church, once so vocal during apartheid, has become uncharacteristically quiet amidst the many confusing and conflicting voices in modern-day South Africa. There is a need for the church to take its rightful place in society, thereby "render[ing] the Church ever more present in the world of their day and more attentive to the dignity of the human person" (Spink, 1993:257). Nouwen (1996:58) likens the church, and by implication contemplative activists, to "a community, a fellowship of little people who together make God visible in the world." This personifies Nouwen's (1976a:39) call for "a solitude of heart"; "being totally a fellow-human-being in suffering" (1987:27). This call by Nouwen (1976a:39) finds a reverberation in Carretto's (1972:74) command that our time in contemplation "must [cause us to] go back among men, mix with them, [and] live [our] intimacy with God in the noise of their cities."

My proposal is an antecedent to Yr Eglwys Nghymru's (Gaelic for The Church In Wales') Vision for church (2014:2, 3) where the church exists as "a place of prayer, a destination for '*pilgrims*' and a place from which we are all sent out changed – being healed ourselves and being channels [...] for those seeking wholeness and healing." This implies a 'more humble' and loving church doing introspection about our preparedness to go where those who suffer high deprivation eke out a living (see *Lumen Gentium* and the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20). This is a call for a fundamental shift from the hierarchical to a more collaborative model of being church.

There is, however, the question of who exercises power in the institutional church and who is excluded. The members of Contemplative Outreach as one "fellowship of little people" exercise their contemplative vocation as independent groups which meet in the homes of facilitators or in church halls. As such their practice is not situated in the "liturgical life" of the local parish. This might account for contemplative activists choosing – if indeed so – to utilise other avenues instead of the church to express their solidarity with marginalised people.

This omission could be overcome if the churches facilitate training opportunities for members where they are empowered in listening and facilitation skills and equipped with techniques to respond creatively to the plight of the *hombré inutil*; all of which is

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aimed at information-sharing and motivational initiatives.

If community implies right social relations then, in Brackley's (1988:37) thesis, it embodies "a commitment to work for a society with no outcasts." This necessitates spontaneous acts where social activists respond to the immense suffering we constantly encounter. It embodies "standing together against poverty and injustice; standing together for compassion and inclusion; standing together against any attempt to reassert the divisive politics […] into public discourses" as Jansen (2007:109) puts it so eloquently. As a consequence, contemplative activists go about their tasks acknowledging that they are erasing barriers while erecting none, thereby creating a supportive community of faith as a context for social activism. In this way our *sacris activismus* (sacred activism) enables the afflicted ones to achieve reintegration and wholeness.

How then can this activism as suggested by the life and practice of Nouwen and Keating be achieved?

A first suggestion for public involvement is for contemplative activists to gather temporarily in "contemplative communities" along the lines of the New Monastic movement, the Northumbria Community, Othona Community and *Communidades de base*. Vanier (1985:1) envisages that such communities could become places of hope in a world of divisions and despair.

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Secondly, specific compassionate service and social justice activities could involve participating in sit-in protests, marches or mass protests where the express purpose is to petition those in government and higher echelons of the country to act ethically and justly. (See for example the activism of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Appendix A). I foresee a movement of citizens, much like the #FeesMustFall, Land First, Reclaim The City, #RhodesMustFall, South African Christian Leadership Initiative (SACLI), Walk of Resistance, ReimageSA, Citizens in Solidarity, #UnityinAction and South African Cities Network which could engage in an urgent public mission on behalf of the *anawim*. This engagement should ideally offer the marginalised "signposts" to ongoing help beyond the confines and restrictions these organisations may face.

Thirdly, members of the contemplative communities are called by their faith to live more simply and justly through self-sacrificial services. This should include moral

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and financial support in line with Merton's injunction that Christian charity is meaningless without concrete and exterior acts of love. For Merton's (1963:89) identification with the poor "can and should go to the extent of leaving all that we have in order to share the lot of the unfortunate." This development of critical consciousness should challenge them to use their *financial* and *physical* resources as means for constructive engagement in the public domain. Examples of this kind of public involvement could include utilising their resources to partner with religious organisations, government institutions and civic associations/social movements that are involved in sustainable projects for the alleviation of poverty. The purpose of these collaborative efforts is to redefine the terms of engagement between society, institutions and contemplative activists.

Here my underlying philosophy is that this collective effort (towards a common vision) can be the catalyst for social transformation. This could be achieved through offering legal and social services (e.g. research and direct participation such as representing the disempowered *pro bono* in court), and access to medical care for victims of crime and abuse. This support for persons who 'live in the margins' could lead to them achieving personal and psychological well-being. Thus, in imitating the simple life-style principle, contemplative activists expedite the collective liberation of the socially isolated. This enables them to find solace in commonality.

A case in point is the outreach work done by Breadbasket Compassionate Ministries, situated in the Parish of St Martin-in-the-Field, Elsie's River, Ons Plek (Our Place), Hope House, U-turn Homeless Ministries and The Warehouse. These organisations provide services which include, but are not limited to, psychosocial intervention, workshops focusing on job creation, safety in society and gender-based violence, networking opportunities, school programmes and substance abuse intervention progammes. Nolan (2010:43) perceives these justice advocacy programmes as a counter-move to indecision. (See Appendix A for a brief summary of the work done by four of these groups/networks).

Fourthly, this third suggestion could be taken one step further. Nouwen's downward way in choosing to live among the poor in Latin America (see *Gracias*! *A Latin American Journal*), thereby experiencing their suffering firsthand even if only temporarily, is a *practical* example of complete identification with the voiceless.

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Fifthly, the establishment of walk-in centres in the parishes/churches as a first port of call for displaced people. Patrick Fermor (1982:89) points out that those who are seeking the contemplative way in the midst of a busy and unpredictable life enter the desert for a spell of healing quietness. These contemplative mystics withdraw into the desert of the heart where they are *still* and *silent* and *praying*. Their *modus operandi* is to withdraw in contemplation and then re-enter the marketplace. Here we acknowledge that their primary task is one of collaboration and communion as they engage the world and each other in social projects.

I subsequently propose a range of compassionate services that would facilitate a move out of their fragile existences for the *anawim*. These could include assisting them in accessing social services when they are unable to do so; either through distance or because of financial constraints. This could be expanded to include offering human rights and justice advocacy on behalf of the afflicted ones in the courts of law (perhaps with the support of the Human Rights Institute of South Africa, the Centre of Applied Legal Studies and Legal Aid branches in the Western Cape), assisting the poor who face evictions, to offering trauma counseling to victims of violent crime. These services embody being a listening, praying presence to those who suffer, thereby showing *loving care* to the outcasts.

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Nolan (2010:35) points out that the Spiritual Disciplines are undergirded by listening and reflective discernment which leads to "compassionate action in the world." The listening-discernment-action model could be likened to a contemplative reflective cycle. This cycle could be illustrated schematically as action → reflection → action. Reflection emanating from their prayer time enables contemplative activists to "open [their] hearts to the global concerns of Christ's heart" (Callahan, 1992:131). Nouwen similarly reflects on the communal dimension of prayer leading to action. Nouwen (1975:21) points out that communal listening and social action help the dispossessed to discard their shackles and affirm their dignity.

Nouwen (1976:145) is of the opinion that, "To pray for others means to *offer others a hospitable place where I can really listen to their needs and pain*" (my emphasis). This "hospitable place" is the sacred place and sacred space we occupy before God as we hold up the weak and their struggles before him. By listening and watching expectantly, we can help the poor recalibrate and turn their lives around; thereby getting them out of their "inner anguish" (Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*;

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Sunday, 7 July 1988).

This solidarity with the suffering and the wounded is crucial, as Manning shows. Caddock (2008:8) cites Manning (1975:112), who perceives that, “The Church as the visible body of the Lord is committed to global freedom, to *active participation in the construction of a just social order*, and to stimulating *radicalising the dedication of Christians*” (my emphasis). Although Manning refers to the church, his proposal holds true for active-contemplatives who seek, similarly, to stand where Christ is standing.

Like Keating and Nouwen their lives, teaching and practice become the impetus for transformative activism among the poor in South Africa. Their spirituality is Christ-centered and world-engaging; for, “[t]o be a Christian involves approaching the inapproachable – those from whom people screen their faces – staying with the insufferable: fidelity and love for the poorest and most abandoned” (Polak cited in *Retreats in Faith and Light*, 1988:13). This injunction is actualised when we contemplate God and then live out the spiritual encounter in the secular city. Leech (1992:197) terms this a “spirituality of justice-making” while Goodall (2020:62) terms it a “work of grace, grace to the graceless, freely shown to bring them back to the land of the living.”

Ackermann (2014:29) points out that, “It is by *doing* that we seek justice, equity and respect, and it is by *doing* that we express love [for the afflicted ones].” This is achieved, argues Fr Francis Cull (1998:15) as we “enter into the heart of God who agonises over the actions of His children.”

Consequently, the church’s mission in the world presupposes a conscious decision to be “hospitable circles of inclusivity” (Canham, 1999:23). We envisage that its *praxis*, flowing from situational analysis of the various options, would include appropriate planning and concrete action flowing from it. Like the 1970s and 1980s their activism would equate to *acts of resistance*. Such acts of resistance, followed by further Gospel reflection, will provide the means for contemplative activists to mobilise against, and challenge, injustice. As Ackermann (2003:140) rightly maintains, “Works are not only about personal morality but also about the well-being of one’s neighbor.”

Contemplative activists as members of faith communities hold forth a “Pilgrimage of

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promise" in the face of pain and suffering. A Pilgrimage of promise by its very nature presupposes a movement outwards. It further implies standing – physically and metaphorically – with people and places plunged into poverty and degradation. As "the monastery without walls", our pilgrimage allows us to be fully integrated in the communities where we "move and live and have our being" (Acts 17:28) and *there* live lives of prayer and presence, community and celebration.

The question, then, is "What form should a Pilgrimage of promise take and how will contemplative activists discover the value of pilgrimage into the suffering, need and hope of the disempowered"?

The answer to this question offers two possible solutions. A first step for social/ contemplative activists is to recognise that, in prayer, their cry should be *Da mihi intellectum* (give me understanding). Thus they seek how best to respond to the oppressed as opposed to insular, private prayer that benefits only those who seek after "the consolations of God" (see Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*).

Secondly, I contend, following Hudson (2007:40), that there is a need for these individuals to discover the value of pilgrimage into the suffering, need and hope of the powerless ones. This calls for involvement in *courageous* and *selfless* acts on behalf of the dispossessed as they stand in solidarity with the indigent poor, the weak, the captives and the oppressed, for those on pilgrimage are never *static*. I conclude that these practitioners could live out their contemplative presence to the Divine in the actual realities of everyday life; thereby becoming a self-offering to, and in, the world. Socially engaged contemplatives are living in the Christ consciousness stemming from the "healing silence", thereby acknowledging the fusion between contemplation and action. It is in the creative silence that they are equipped to impact the world in concrete ways.

Thirdly, in the *contemplative silence* we stop to disengage ourselves from the world and summon God's transforming Spirit to embolden us to impact, in a positive way, the world of all those who are "bruised" (see Appendix A for concrete examples).

Like Nouwen's (1986:76) hypothesis, I propose that there is the need to call into being a (new) community in South Africa, and the Western Cape in particular, to "celebrate our shared humanity."

With Bourgeault (2016:49), I assert that, "While the courses of action that emerge

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from each of us may differ, what [is] eminently clear to each of us [is] that *this protective field of tenderness and responsive concern to our anguish is alive and well*, and that we can and MUST turn to it […] daily, hourly, with our very best" (my emphasis). Consequently, my proposal for active-contemplatives, in line with COWE (Report No. 22, 1980:15-16), is to impact the lives of the poor and downtrodden through social justice programmes in one or more of the following agencies:

- Social action groups – often centred on issues like race, *housing*, *poverty, or justice*.
- Support and sharing groups operating on a 'care and share' basis, and *drawing individuals into group life*.
- *Development groups with a holistic emphasis*.
- Renewal programmes establishing locally controlled, often *co-operative*, *service*s to maintain economic independence.
- Cell-groups coming together to develop a deeper […] urban spirituality.
- The spreading of *the simple life-style* movement. [3]
- *New and imaginative forms of training for both professional and lay members of the church*.
- *The entry of Christians into the worlds of labour*, *politics and economics* (my emphasis).

Nolan (2010:144) argues that our private and corporate practice of spirituality is the road to personal freedom. If this assertion is correct, then it should lead to an upsurge of social activism and solidarity with the poor, the voiceless and the imperiled. However, contends Nolan (2010:144) "such activity must be negotiated on their terms that will be comfortable for the poor, and which will liberate their potential to evolve out of their present dilemma without constraining their future."

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored how the active dimension of contemplative spirituality is perceived and practiced within the South African context. This was necessary

[3] The movement seeks to be an alternative society by helping communities seeking to control their own lives regardless of the actions of the state. In this way they show that religion and faith is not purely "other-worldly". The simple life-style movement is embodied in organisations such as those New Monasticism, Othona Community, Northumbria Community and *Comunidade Eclesiais de Base* which were discussed in chapter 3.3.

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because of the myriad of social problems that are so endemic in our society and the apparent lack of motivation to enact change that benefits all citizens, but especially the poor.

I commenced with an introduction (7.1) in which I briefly discussed the present-day social realities in South Africa. Here I highlighted the scourges of poverty, economic disempowerment, landlessness and human rights abuses. This was followed by 7.2 where I posited the idea that there is a need for the South African populace, including contemplative activists, to heed the call to engage in the social project.

Section 7.3 personified the more constructive part of the chapter. I commenced with an introduction (7.3.1) where I sketched the context for this call to public engagement. The presupposition was that social activism would be grounded in the faith and practice of participant members of various civic associations, the church at large and contemplative communities such as Contemplative Outreach (Western Cape). This was followed by practical suggestions (7.3.2) which essentially proposed the way forward for contemplative activists and the South African citizenry, following Keating and Nouwen, to take their activism into the streets. This enfleshed spirituality personifies, fundamentally and inescapably, a communal project. The collaborative efforts of the various groupings hold out the *Spes vitae melioris* (the hope of a better life) for the poor and indigent.

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Thus, for Hudson (1995:91), “We become the person God intends, not inside a private religious zone, but within God’s broken and wounded world.”

Like his female protagonist, I too ask of Guy Chevreau (2004:166):

> “What’s your secret to abiding?”
>
> He thought for a moment and then answered,
>
> “A continuous commitment to begin again” (my emphasis).

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Chapter 8

Concluding remarks, recommendations and limitations of the study

8.1 Introduction

The core task of this thesis was to explore the doctrine of the The Two Lives (the secular and the religious, the active and the contemplative) as embodied in the lives of Keating and Nouwen. The focus chapters of the study were chapters 5 and 6. In these two chapters there was a more thorough exploration of the juxtaposition of contemplation and action. I chose Keating and Nouwen because their spirituality underscores the notion of contemplation for the sake of "the other".

In chapter 1 I addressed the purpose of the study, the delimitation and statement of the research problem. The chapter also highlighted the two contrasting approaches to contemplative life. Chapter 2 traced the development of Christian spirituality which developed over the last twenty centuries. Taking the Desert Fathers as point of departure, I wanted to trace this development along a linear line to contemporary forms of Christian spirituality. In the end I settled for three periods which has a bearing on the present study. Chapter 3 entailed a discussion of the varieties of Contemplative Practices (3.2), chiefly contemplative prayer, centering prayer and *lectio divina*. A further category was that of Contemplative Movements (3.3), i.e. New Monasticism, the Center for Action and Contemplation and the Northumbria Community. The purpose of these explorations was to show that, through their social activism, these movements support, and stand in solidarity with, the poor.

In chapter 4 I focused on the two contrasting approaches to contemplative life, namely monastic contemplation and contemplative activism. Monastic contemplation has been, and continues to be, practiced by monks and nuns in the cloister. The active-contemplative life practiced by those in holy orders and by the laity, presupposes social action on behalf of the disadvantaged. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 I sought to highlight this contrast. In Keating we encounter the tension of the monk practicing a life of mystical silence in the monastery (*vita contemplativa*) and action in the world (*vita activa*). I pointed out that Keating subscribes to the monastic ideals of *fuga mundi* (world flight), renunciation and self-abnegation. These "institutional

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lifestyles" (Keating, 1999a:11) consist of solitude, the "hermitage of prayer and retreat" (Spink, 1993:248); a seeking after God in monastic silence. Glen Lewandowski (2009:5) in turn perceives it as the "focused way of *life – one mind, one heart*, *intent on God*" (my emphasis).

Nouwen, reasoning along the lines of Kirk (1934:185), practices a contemplative-active vocation where, "In looking towards God, who is All in All, he sees himself to be nothing; in worshipping his Redeemer, he knows himself incapable of redeeming even the least of God's creatures. *The most he can hope for is that God will deign to use him for the forwarding of His high designs*" (my emphasis).

In chapter 7 I explored how the recapturing of the rich tradition of Christian contemplative spirituality could play a meaningful role in informing contemplative practice in the various contemplative communities in South Africa in general, and the Western Cape in particular. I commenced with an introduction (7.1) in which I highlighted the myriad of problems which blight the South African landscape at present. This was followed (7.2) by a social analysis in which I sought to unravel why contemplative activists tend to disengage from the social project which calls them to action on behalf of the wounded, suffering ones. Section 7.3 embodied the more constructive part of the thesis. In it I sought to challenge active-contemplatives to be involved in the struggle for justice on behalf of the poor, since our "concern for the poor impels us to search out the root causes of their wretchedness" (*Constitution of the Marist Brothers*, C 34).

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At the more theoretical level it was a call for renewed encouragement of "an ethic of personal responsibility" (Wilson, 1995:24) where participants promote prophetic action on social justice issues. In this way they discover experientially what a life of active apostolic service entails. Contemplative activists thus become, in the broadest sense, a people continually being reformed (and transformed); *ecclesia semper reformanda*. I proposed that, in the paradoxical interplay of contemplation and action, action will always set up the need for contemplation (see Parker Palmer, 1990:112-122 for a more detailed discussion of this position). This "spirituality of action" (Palmer, 1990:65) personifies acts of resistance on behalf of the poor. We are called, in line with the mission of the Holy Family Association (2013), to participate with others in the creation of a new society. This is done through advocacy, discourse and education with and on behalf of the poor and dispossessed in our midst. Thus

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we practice the authentic values of God's kingdom such as human dignity, respect and justice for all, but particularly for the voiceless. "[A]ctive mystic contemplatives" (Teasdale, 2002:202) are thus moved to respond to Ackermann's (2014:257) call to "justice and simplicity". We do this surmises Llewelyn (1985:32 because those activists who are "ready in the grace of God to face the testing experiences of that quest [for God] to go forward, nothing doubting, [are] on the path to which the Spirit is now calling [them]."

The second millennium has closed, leaving behind a rich tradition of history. The third millennium offers contemplative activists a vision of a future with vast possibilities. Writing in *Everything Belongs*: *The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* Rohr (2003:57) reminds us that, "When we don't know love, when we experience only the insecurity and fragility of the small self, we become restless, violent, and hateful. But in contemplation we move to a different space where we see the illusion of separateness". We are tasked, therefore, maintains Frère Roger (1974:60) "to tell out prophetic intuitions." This is possible because, as the old Latin adage has it, *Cor ad cor loquitur* (heart speaks to heart).

I now turn to a discussion of the primary and secondary research questions.

The primary research question which the thesis sought to unravel was whether or not the views of Thomas Keating and Henri Nouwen on the contemplative life are consistent with their own lives of contemplation. In light of this, a secondary research question was, "How can renewal of faith and practice take place so that active-contemplatives in South Africa are challenged to go out and struggle with the outward world?" My hypothesis was that contemplation invariably leads to action. I anticipated that contemplative activists will not divorce social welfare from spirituality. If they omit "to tend to the flame" (Leviticus 6:6), [1] they open themselves to being perceived as having been "[detached] from [their] own soil … and people" (Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1997: 419; also cited in Richard Avramenko and Lee Trepanier, 2013:13).

In conducting the research, I presented evidence which would support the hypothesis, indicating that contemplation does indeed lead to action. The research method which I followed entailed a literary study. I critiqued and analysed the

[1] This is a reference to the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Flame in the worship practice in Judiasm.

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corpus of Keating's and Nouwen's work, along with contemporary research on their lives, teaching and contemplative practice. The study was undertaken from a phenomenological perspective with the theoretical framework encompassing an inter-disciplinary approach. This included the disciplines of mysticism, spirituality, sociology, philosophy and psychology. The value of this study resides in its singular focus on Keating's and Nouwen's many and varied life experiences, their interpretations of these experiences and the way in which these impacted upon their teaching and contemplative practice.

8.2 Conclusion and findings of the research

8.2.1 Introduction

This study proposes that interiority needs to be complemented by exteriority. In resolving the dualistic tension between contemplation and action, I contend that action flows from, and is complementary to, prayer. Keating's and Nouwen's lives, practice and teaching are emblematic of the possibility for change in society. Keating and Nouwen suggest that it is possible to live in deep reflective and peaceful interior solitude in the midst of the world and its demands (Nouwen, 1997b:69). For Keating who spent most of his life in monasteries, contemplative activism embodies an authentic life of surrender, obedience and humility before the living God; the distinctive spirit of the Cistercian/Trappist Community.

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Downey (1997:68) affirms that, "This is precisely what the monk does. The monk lives for God – or lives his life in the face of the question, 'Who is God?' The monk searches out the answer through a whole way of life. He is a living quest for God" (my emphasis). In contrast, the contemplative activist leads a life "marked by keeping vigil for the God who comes [in the poor], who comes even now" (Downey, 1997:68). This is not the classical *contemptus mundi* of the monastic, but rather a world-affirming, i.e. non-exclusive, principle, linking it to an apostolate of presence. For both monk and active-contemplative, God, this unfathomable and ineffable mystery is worth living for. Nouwen (1997a:55) engages with Downey's presupposition that we are 'marked for life', and proposes that contemplative activists need to have arrived at some *gnosis*, a subjective spiritual expression, to be effective social activists.

Nouwen, through his life and contemplative practice, encourages us to renew and

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restore the shattered lives of the disempowered and weak citizens of the earth. For Nouwen, following Anne Lamott (2017:47) and Fr Richard Wineland (2018:11), this underscores the importance of our need to offer "radical kindness [of] grace, mercy", and "a heart for those who live on the margins, where our Savior himself made his home."

As a contemplative monk, Keating is expected to practice the *cenobitic* life. This presupposes a marked leaning towards *anchoritism*, or disengagement with the world. Voillaume (1964:21) perceives the *anchoritic* vocation as containing "a treasure-hoard of renunciation, of silent self-abasement, of total self-effacement." I subsequently contend that the purpose of the enclosed life is the deepening of prayer. It is a withdrawal from *the world* in answer to the call of God to enable a complete consecration of self to do God's will. Given Keating's Cistercian ascetical tradition, there is an expectation that he would live his vocation in complete "seclusion from all creatures … [if] he is desirous of receiving his guest as he ought" (Blessed Henry Suso, 1910:46). Asceticism is thus not an end in itself, but "a disciplined training of the mind in Christ, to witness Christ in and for the world" (*The Rule* of the Sisters of the Love of God, 1996:19).

According to Mother Mary Clare (1972:4) this personifies "the Godward action of loving adoration and penitence." We can then infer that contemplating God becomes the means of extending his love and action in the world. I therefore posit the contention that Keating, as "one who practices contemplation, [should engage] in the social action that flows from it" (Merton cited in David W. Givey, 2009:109).

For Keating (1987:52) contemplative silence and "waiting" (prayer) is integral to social or ethical concern (action). Contemplative prayer is therefore a precursor for action. Keating (1999a:11) refers to this dichotomy as "a question of emphasis and of one's aptitude and vocation from God" seemingly acknowledging that contemplative silence and monastic solitude *do* lead to action.

In a lengthy passage Frenette points to the impact of Keating's contemplative stance. According to Frenette (2008:35):

> *Offering specific intentions from union with Christ* […] has a profound effect. Yet human suffering in contemporary society is profound. *Through incarnational contemplation, the Spirit is also at work in the active restructuring of social*

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> *systems that promote injustice, inequality, and human suffe*ring. […]. So contemplatives *are also called to a more active response to human needs than simple prayer itself* (my emphasis).

Frenette (2008:35) perceives contemporary problems as extremely complex. As such the deepest human abilities and creativity need to be plumbed to find adequate, sustained solutions. This "search" is the impetus that drew Keating out of the cloister and into the world. Thus, for Frenette (2008:35), Keating emphasises "the need for contemplatives to show the fruits of their prayer in the world and to develop new forms of community to support their contemplative life." (See my proposal in 7.3.2 above).

As active-contemplative it is expected of Keating to be similarly involved in the world and its concerns, providing the impetus for social service to the "poor, the weary, the isolated and the oppressed" (Vanier cited in Spink, 1993:xi). Only in this way can his prophetic stance hold true. Despite this noble premise Keating has withdrawn to the enclosed monastery at Snowmass, leaving it intermittently to teach and lead retreats. As Tilda Tillson (2013:6) points out, though, "Keating's dedication to reviving Christian contemplative practices is his choice to live a busy, public life instead of the quiet, monastic life for which he entered the monastery." Thus Keating, following the desert *Abbas* and *Ammas*, offers spiritual direction, counsel and retreats through these practices.

This calls for a less harsh judgement on Keating than those posed by his critics. In response to the question: "What is the alternative to a culture of violence that thrives in so many regions on our planet?" Keating (1996:15) proposes, in a most poignant way, a concrete possibility:

> As we confront the crisis of civilization, culminating in the specter of humanicide, is there an alternative to the present plunge of humanity towards the abyss of utmost violence? There is an alternative. It is the commitment to the practice of charity. In the Hebrew language, the word for charity is *hased* – love that is boundless and everlasting. In Greek: *agape* – love that is totally selfless. In Latin: *caritas*, love that is unconditional. In English: charity or loving kindness – *limitless compassion for suffering at every level of human experience* (my emphasis).

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Nouwen's practice is one of a semi-contemplative apostolate, not a strict life of contemplation. He practices a contemplative-active vocation in which apostolic works (social activism) and formal prayer (contemplative waiting) complements and balances each other. For Nouwen, contemplation cannot be viewed as something apart from the world of everyday life, but rather as a fundamental way of constructive living. He understands contemplation as a mode of being-in-the-world for others. As a consequence, prayer begins when our hearts are open in compassion to the world around us, and we respond to the conditions of the time.

In his contemplative-active stance Nouwen (1993a:40) forsees "the need for a new spirituality; a spirituality that takes the end of things very seriously, not a spirituality of withdrawal, nor of blindness to the powers of the world, but a spirituality that allows us to live in this world without belonging to it, a spirituality that allows us to taste the joy and peace of the divine life even when we are surrounded by the powers and principalities of evil, death and destruction." According to Nouwen, and in line with Chilean theologian, Segundo Galilea (1985:187), "social engagement must be accompanied by an interior process of liberation from self-seeking." For Nouwen, like Merrill (2016:1), "we live our lives poised between action and contemplation, in that silent space of longing, expectation and hope." This calls forth a theology of God that reflects the compassion and mercy of God; something reminiscent of the *Mitis et Misericors Iesus*.

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A question which I posed at the beginning of this study was: Are the views of Keating and Nouwen on the spiritual life consistent with their lives of contemplation? The thesis arrives at two conclusions with regards to Keating's and Nouwen's contemplative practice or stance and their significance for the contemplative community in South Africa.

I conclude firstly that, although there are elements of an active contemplative vocation, birthed from a meditative inner core, Keating's contention that he practices an active-contemplative vocation is somewhat questionable. What is missing is a rigorous self-examination vis-à-vis "the contemplative life", the first half-title of this thesis. In Keating's defense it could be said that "monks are human and human frailty tends to diminish and to distort the wholeness of what is given to [them] by God" (Merton, 1978:28). As such, the tension between contemplation and action in Keating's practice is neither completely resolved nor completely managed. In stating

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this, I'm cognisant of Merton's (1978:28) further premise that "We place exaggerated emphasis on some partial aspect of the [eremitic] life, thus unbalancing the whole."

We then question whether Arico (2002:11) is justified in castigating Meninger – who, unlike Keating, upheld the *usque ad exhalationem spiritus desudant* principle to the end of his life – "for escaping into the monastery and not having the courage to stay out in the real world with real people." Seemingly not!

In contrast to Keating, Nouwen's life, teaching and practice presuppose a spirituality that sides with the poor and the cause of justice on their behalf. Nouwen proposes an active commitment to societal change. This is exemplified in Nouwen's (1976: 177) belief that "[i]ntimate union with God leads to the most creative involvement in the […] world." Nouwen (1978:87) perceives his contemplative action as one where, once,

> [W]e have met our Lord in the silent intimacy of our prayer then we will also meet him in the campo, in the market and in the town square [...]. Thus, witnessing God *acting* upon the world and making him *visible* to each other is the core for both our activism and our contemplation.

Secondly, Nouwen (1975:41) and Lynwood (2001:234, cited in Hernandez, 2012:81) remind contemplative activists that in solitude we can become present to ourselves (contemplation) which enables us to "[be] present with people" (action). For O'Donohue (2003:1), "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) "between the act of awakening and the act of surrender." Activism as solidarity with and development of the downtrodden encapsulates what Nouwen, Lynwood and O'Donohue propose. Thus we awaken to the struggles of the *marginales*, surrender and then act decisively to alleviate their plight. This is possible because, as Merton (1957a:20) contends, "[We] go into the desert, not to escape other men, but in order to find them in God."

Teasdale (1986:35) argues that St Thomas' *contemplata aliis tradere* also encompasses "the wisdom that permits another to understand his or her situation." Consequently, inasmuch as *the poor* is yearning for the compassionate presence of *another*, Nouwen, in speaking to earth's broken humanity, avers that the poor become for us "healers of our wounds, our brokenness and our egoism" (Vanier cited in Spink, 1993:xii). His thesis is revolutionary in that we have a reversal of roles

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to what this study holds forth with regards to *our* anticipated response to *the poor*. This counter-cultural vision is defined by David Rhodes (1999:6) as "good news from the poor."[2]

Nouwen's many volumes on desert spirituality, prayer, compassion and contemplative action speak to the crippling events and situations in everyday life. However, the truly marginalised and dispossessed do not have access to his myriad volumes of writing. Just like Keating's withdrawal to St Benedict's, his withdrawal to L'Arche, Toronto, towards the end of his life means that his activism wasn't exercised at the coalface of (the needs of) society at large.

I support Mother Mary Clare's (1993:69) understanding that "there is a difference between *the call to contemplative prayer* [embodied in Nouwen] and *the call to the contemplative life* [embodied in Keating]." For Mother Mary Clare (1993:69), "Contemplative prayer can be experienced, if God wills it, in any such circumstances as he sees fit to bestow. In contrast, a contemplative life is the life so directed in its simplicity, and separated from the normal distraction of the active world, that it provides the best preparation for carrying out the work of contemplative prayer. For the contemplative community the work of prayer is the expression of their charity."

Therefore, in answering the primary question, "Are the views of Thomas Keating and Henri Nouwen on the contemplative life consistent with their own lives of contemplation?" I come to the conclusion that one would expect of Keating to conform to the teaching of *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002:19) which states that "Monks and cloistered nuns like hermits *dedicate more time to praise God as well as to prolonged silent pray*er." If the summation that contemplation is not a withdrawal from the world's realities but a dialogue with them, then Keating fulfills this injunction through his writings, seminars and retreats. In this action Keating separates himself from the *common life* (as monastic) to a call into *service* (as active contemplative). Similarly, Nouwen, following *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002:19) would "… *offer to God the joys and sorrows*, the hopes and petitions of all people and *contemplate the face of Christ which they recognize in the faces of their brothers and sisters* …" (my emphasis).

Herein, then, lies the inconsistency for me in the life, teaching and practice of

[2] See also Grassow's contention on page 223 of this study about the rôle of the poor in society.

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Keating and Nouwen.

Essentially Keating and Nouwen propose that in the life and activity of active contemplatives, as well as in the shuttered seclusion of the monastic cell, contemplatives are challenged to “wash the feet of the world” (John 13:1-17) through compassionate service. Keating and Nouwen would concur with the anonymous author in his exhortation:

> Think not upon what you are, or have been, but upon what you would be (*The Cloud of Unknowing*; Johnston, 1973:20-22).

Thus, in addressing my hypothesis that contemplation leads to action, I conclude that action has to be rooted in the encounter with God in “healing silence”; the fruit of which issues in concrete acts of justice in the world. This epitomises the dynamic of contemplative prayer as transformative action in the marketplace. This two-fold engagement presupposes personal encounter with others and participation in the ongoing struggles, trials and fears of the dispossessed. Contemplative activists are tasked to become prophets who are willing to reveal the “compassionate face” (Luke 7:13, Matthew 9:36) of Jesus through “wrestling prayer” and “purposeful action” (Hudson, 2007:40). However, my experience and participation in the programmes of the various contemplative communities in the Western Cape in particular, does not support my hypothesis fully as I have shown in 7.2 above.

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8.2.2 Limitations and recommendations for further study

Due to the nature and structure of the research, I had to rely on documentary search and personal observation to come to final conclusions about the outcomes of this study. I therefore wish to suggest two areas that could be explored for future studies.

A first recommendation is to conduct qualitative research to explore the viability of “Communities of Hope” (Bowman-Eadie, R & Dodds, G; 1998 and Cimperman, M; 2020) as a model for effective social activism. Nolte and Dreyer (2010:11) identify communities of hope as a possible solution to “the cries and crises of the poor”. For Nolte and Dreyer (2010:12), “Faith communities, wherein [the poor and marginalised] are accepted for who they are and where they are integrated and understood, can become signs of hope, transformation and healing.” It is in these contexts that there is a need for “participative community” according to psychiatrist Earl Loomis (1961:68) where we can serve as conduits of God’s grace and compassion.

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Cameron Smith (1980) highlights the positive dimension of participative community. Smith (1980:39) suggests that "What at least in part is required is the painful business of creating oases of friendship" where we can serve as conduits of God's grace and compassion. These oases of friendship form the foundation of the "Communities of Healing and Prayer". The latter is a movement of loving connection with one another and the source of our being. It is "a community of people, one by one, becoming God-conscious and God-expectant." It further implies "a community […] needing to develop welcoming and accepting hearts" according to Robert (Bob) Pitcher (1999:122-123). Communities of Healing and Prayer ultimately lead to Communities of Hope. These Communities of Hope reveal how an encouraging spirit can function in a community by alleviating suffering and bringing about transformation and wholeness. Loomis (1961:68-69), speaking of participative community, indicates that:

> In Christian community the individual is seen as a whole being. The community suffers together with him [sic] whether he suffers in an aspect we call spirit. Whatever their genesis, the wounds of the individual are those of the community, and healing that is a forgiving kind, an accepting-in-spite-of, goes on.

Pato (2000:96) [3] in interrogating the concept of community perceives this as an "upholding of neighbourliness."

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A second recommendation is to look at programmes in the national and international arena where social activists campaign for the welfare of the disempowered. There are diverse practical concerns worldwide that stimulate contemporary social justice endeavours on behalf of the most vulnerable in society. These include Faith in Leeds (UK), The Cry for Renewal, Project *Via Crucis* solidarity network, Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Houses, Sojourners Community, *Communidades de base* in Latin America, The International Centre for Transitional Justice (New York), Goliath Business (New York), Intentional Discipleship (London), UNICEF and the World Social Forum (both United Nations initiatives).

These international initiatives create projects and alliances between other institutions

[3] Interestingly, as Pato (2000:93) points out, "[In] African religion there is no separate community of religious people, because everyone who participates in the life of the community automatically participates also in its religion."

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in society where each is enriched by the other. They represent those supportive communities so needed today to relieve the plight of suffering humanity in the third Christian millennium. Social movements such as these under discussion here are tasked with a universal quest for liberty, dignity, equality and opportunity for every human being. Their mandate is to reinvigorate civil society with meaningful public-private partnerships for the benefit of the poor, those “who have deviated from the normal line of progress” (Nouwen, 1978:58). Their *praxis* hinges on a creative spirituality of engagement, thus enabling an emerging new society in the third millennium.

The global village has conscientised us to the reality that the different religions co-exist alongside each other. In view of Keating’s inter-religious work, a third suggestion, logically, is the incorporation of other faith traditions in future studies of the same nature as the present one. William James (1917:383) points out that all religions have two things in common, namely 1) the awareness that there is something ‘wrong’ about human nature, and 2) that this ‘wrongness’ can be overcome or corrected by making the right connection with a ‘higher’ power or being.

Paul T Harris (2001:16) correctly intimates that “no religious tradition, no particular age, no particular culture or gender has a monopoly on the spiritual wisdom of silence in prayer.” Christian contemplative practices should ideally include awareness of the teachings of other faith communities, since some of the proponents of the active-contemplative vocation discussed in this study, have benefitted from the practices of other faiths. In stating this I’m calling for neither a confluence nor syncretism of all the religious traditions.

The 1984 Encyclical, *Dialogue and Mission* (focusing on dialogue between religions), provides critical insight into the inner struggles of those who cannot deny their own faith, but who want it to be lived in an understanding of others. For contemporary contemplative activists there is a new-found awareness of a powerful sense of community which links us all together. As a consequence we cannot ignore the claims of pluralism any longer. [4]

[4] A good start is the excellent studies, *A declaration Towards a Global Ethic* (1999), *Threshold 2000*: *Critical Issues and Spiritual Values for a Global Age* (2000) and *Testing the Global Ethic* (1998). The latter publication was launched at the University of Cape Town during the Parliament of World Religions that was held in Cape Town from 1-8 December 1999. It serves as the starting place for wider dialogue and debate in the search for a consensus on moral-ethical issues and spiritual

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In Clements's (1997:12,104) estimation, "[P]luralism has been accepted as the new social reality […] therefore we cannot be exclusivist about religion anymore". Catholic theologian David Tracy (1981; cited in Nolte and Dreyer, 2010:19), similarly "encourages faith communities to accept pluralism as part of a new global society."

The perceptions of Clements and Tracy about religious pluralism could provide the impetus for further studies in the future; *not necessarily undertaken by me*. Such studies would take cognisance of all faiths and traditions and invite these to share their experiences and concerns vis-à-vis prayer and social witness. As Keating (2016b) and Teasdale (1999) contend "the common ground is greater and more enduring than those aspects which divide."

Having noted Tracy, Keating and Teasdale, I nevertheless support Hebe Welbourn's (2002:141) notion that, "Whoever we are, we need spiritual companionship, direction and a tap root to a central tradition." As such, this study is unapologetically "root[ed] to a central tradition", i.e. Christianity. However, I also acknowledge Fr John Farrelly OSB (1991:2) who maintains, "I write as a Christian, but as one who thinks that mysticism is not restricted to Christians."

How then can Christians "[look] for threads of communality", as Lindahl (1999:67) proposes, to increase awareness of the value of inter-faith co-operation and to explore how such endeavours can be more effective? The Interfaith Center of New York (1999:2) proposes a course of action that could include:

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Calling for justice and moral values in the political and economic spheres of society,

1. By supporting peace-building efforts in areas of conflict, both in local communities and in the nation,
2. By working together to relieve suffering and poverty,
3. Through dialogue aimed at increasing mutual understanding and to overcoming religious intolerance and prejudice.

Nolan (2010:62), writing in a different context, encourages active contemplatives to "do this by exploring together in practice, study, and research *a common option*

values for the future. The International Interfaith Centre (IIC) in Oxford, England, supported this ongoing discussion through the publication of *Testing the Global* Ethic, edited by Marcus Braybrooke and Peggy Morgan; both IIC trustees. The contributors, from several faith traditions, were asked to respond to the question: "Is there enough agreement in the teaching of the religions for their members to have a common message to the world at the start of the new millennium?"

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taken by all classes and races for all the oppressed" (my emphasis). As such, contemplative activists in South Africa would be required to address the deeply rooted spiritual, theological and moral issues that plague South African society at present. These actions on behalf of the poor let them hope again; hope in a future that is not a foreign land. In this way contemplative activists will work towards social healing for all. This vision personifies another *kairos*; a historically specific call to engage in social activism in the struggle for a new hope for the destitute, lonely and disempowered.

Alan Paton (1948:236) concludes his epic novel in these poignant words; words which nevertheless hold out so much hope:

> *Cry, the beloved country, these things are not yet at an end. The sun pours down* on the earth, *on the lovely land that man cannot enjoy*. He knows only the fear of his heart (my emphasis).

Such a sentiment echoes Alfred Lord Tennyson's vision in *In Memoriam*, 1850 (see 1974:104) where:

> Behold, we know not anything;
>
> I can but trust that good shall fall
> At last – far off – at last, to all,
>
> And every winter change to spring.
>
> ("In Memoriam", Section LIV, Ll. 13-16).

Like Rahner (1965:41), I conclude with the Latin phrase: *Grandis nobis restat via*. *Venite et gustate*, *quoniam suavis est Dominus*!

8.3 Final Conclusion

The objective of this study was to enable contemplative activists to "understand better the function they fulfill in society, thereby equipping them to identify and respond faithfully and fruitfully to mission opportunity" (The Foundation for Church Leadership, 2012:10). Here mission is understood as social justice on behalf of the poor, marginalised, oppressed masses; with contemplative activists seeking their wellbeing in the process. This opens the way for a deeper realisation of mutual co-birthing between the *hombré inutil* and active-contemplatives.

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This collaboration between the *anawim* and those social networks which seek their wellbeing is calling forth a new social ethos where, according to Wallis (1995a:7), "a community-based, values-centered, and solution-oriented approach" is the preferred *praxis*. Implicit in Wallis's (1995b:6) approach, is the call "to live a spirituality of engagement with those who suffer." It is a conscious decision "to be near the least, the forgotten and ignored, so [we] can be a sign of hope and love for them" (Teasdale, 2002:xxxi).

The study proposes that interiority (or Godwardness; Dom David Foster OSB, 2012:7) needs to be complemented by exteriority. In resolving the dualistic tension between contemplation and action, I contend that they are not separate entities, but are interconnected. This is a deliberate counter-cultural position in opposition to the narrow, inward-looking principle of *Chacun selon son gout*. [5] Montaldo (1999:5) is thus correct in asserting that "unless we change our hearts and become new beings by inner work [contemplation], our outer work [action] with and for others in community contributes only to prolonging the endless cycle of bondage and despair experienced by the downtrodden."

In line with Fitzpatrick-Hopler (2001:55), I propose that this study is a call to "live a contemplative life in the marketplace with the support of a community [of contemplative activists]." The latter becomes, in Vanier's (cited in Spink, 1993:xii) thesis,

> little oases of love, peace, joy, and forgiveness, not hidden away on mountain tops, apart from others, but in and with others, integrated into villages and city neighbourhoods; little signs of love, support and faith for neighbours […].

As we consider how best we could assist the urban poor, it serves us well to remember that "the initiative comes from God, and it is he who invites all men [sic] to collaborate with him" (Leo-Jozef Cardinal Suenens, 1979:10). In the words of the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston, 1973:106), we are to wait with modest courtesy ('not imprudently strain') for God's initiative." Karen Lattea provides the rationale for ministry to the urban poor as we "imagine [this] different future." Lattea (1995a:41) purports to "… live in the city to *be a witness against violence and injustice*, *and to experience firsthand its human and structural dynamics*. As a result,

[5] *Chacun selon son goût* is a mutation of the French *à chacun son goût*. *Chacun selon son goût* translates as, "to each his own".

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diminished dignity and the pressures of poverty are not merely concepts to me" (my emphasis).

Such an active-contemplative stance is crucial for, as philosopher Ken Wilber (2002:xv) writing a Foreword to Teasdale's *A Monk in the World* instructs us, we need "to carry [an] awakened spirituality into the world, thus integrating inner life with outer life, drenching both in a radiance from the realized heart that allows grace the room to do its divine work. A more balanced, a more complete, a more 'integral' spirituality – uniting both inner and outer" is the resultant outcome.

Wilber's perception of contemplative activism or "a spirituality of struggle" (Petersen, 1991:61) therefore implies an *inner* struggle in prayer which opens out into *outer* works of justice in the marketplace. Put differently, it is a life of action which, couched in contemplation, is a witness and presence among men (Carretto, 1972:75). In this regard Petersen (1991:66) reminds us that "there needs to be a wholeness, an integrity that comes from within us." For Petersen this is a fundamental requirement in our activism since all persons ought to be treated as bearers of *imagio Dei*.

Teresa of Avila (*Autobiography*, see 1960) reminds us that "Christ has no body on earth now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which he looks out with Christ's compassion on the world; yours are the feet with which he walks to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world now." Nouwen (1997c:95) adds, "I want you to speak with my mouth, see with my eyes, hear with my ears, touch with my hands."

Consequently, the present study is a call to people to *reconstruct* society and social relations; although the term reconstruct in itself is loaded. This reconstruction must go beyond superficial gestures of goodwill that provide only temporary relief to the poor. It presupposes a determination to persevere in the spiritual journey and to trust God that he would give us the grace to do so. We are to be what the stranger was to Nouwen (1988:2) in his observation, "A stranger had walked into my home and, without asking me for anything, was showing me my own house."

Dare we believe that just action, born out of contemplation, will be the preferred option for active-contemplatives as they grapple with the issues of the day? Involvement in just action is to commit one's life to and with the *marginales* in our

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midst through "our natural societies, in our social milieu, in our groups, structures, events, and history. It is to become inwardly involved, so that we may live the total reality of life" in our fractured world surmises Quoist (1971:160).

"Spirituality", in all its possible meanings and nuances, surmises Lombaard (2008:96), "*remains open to the future*, *continually adjusting to fresh impulses*" (my emphasis). I surmise that the future is already here, it is just unequally distributed (William Gibson, 1992; [6] cited in Tim Chatterton and Georgia Newman, 2017:1). This is the clarion call to active-contemplatives to be truly present to the poor. In this way they offer the marginalised and downtrodden the possibility of moving them out from the fringes and into the mainstream. The latter would engender an "explosion" of social good across the "land". Peter S Grassow (1991:57) is therefore justified in hypothesising that, "[I]f Jesus is to be found amongst *those who are poor*, *who are weak*, *who have no social standing*, and if Christian people are to be found here, *praying and working for the struggle*, *then renewal will come to this land*. *It is through the struggle of the powerless that Christ will minister to the whole nation*" (my emphasis). [7]

Consequently, argues Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf (1996:213), "there can be no justice without the will to embrace." For Volf (1996:213) there cannot be "justice between people who are not willing to make space for the perspective of the other, embrace the other and see the other as belonging to oneself." For Volf (1996:213), "*Justice is partial*, *biased*, *in favour of the weak*, *oppressed and marginalized*" (my emphasis).

Finally, as contemplatives-in-action, we affirm all the aforementioned guidelines and echo the pontifical blessing, *Urbi et orbi*, 'to the city and the world'. Carmelite nun, St Edith Stein (Blessed Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, 1992:95-98), reminds contemplative activists that, "Your compassionate love takes you everywhere […]. The eyes of the Crucified look down on you – asking, probing. Will you make your covenant with the Crucified anew in all seriousness? What will you answer him?"

[6] In a 1992 article Scott Rosenberg of the San Francisco Examiner attributed the original quote to William Gibson who said, "I've said many times the future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed". See www.quoteinvestigater.com. Last accessed 2020/07/26.

[7] Worsnip (1991:47); Dawson (2001:186), Jansen (2007:81), Nolan (2010:144) and Merton (1963:89) have similar perceptions of the rôle of the poor in society. Their respective theses are cited on the following pages of this study: Worsnip (196), Dawson (195-196), Jansen (196), Nolan (205) and Merton (20).

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On 15 May 2015 Njabulo Ndebele, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, presented the Fourth Peter Storey Commemorative Lecture in the Chapel of Christ the Servant in Epworth. The title of his paper was, “Can we tell a new South African story?” It is my hope that we all can say a resounding “Yes!” Crockett (1995:34) subsequently expresses this hope: May the God of Life accompany us as we walk this holy ground with each other. *Venite, et ambulemus in lumine Domini* (Come and let us walk in the light of the Lord).

Spahn (1996:1) subscribes to the principle of “the integration of a contemplative spirituality and a healing response to the pain and crises of today’s world.” Like Spahn (1996:1), Sr Ednée (1999:1) and Nouwen (1966:13) I attempted to “show how service is prayer and prayer is service.” In this way we move the *locus* of our prayer from the silent encounter (contemplation) to the valley where the *marginales* exercise their quest for spiritual solace (action).

We are all sojourners on pilgrimage to some distant place leaving us little time for deep, critical reflection. It is my hope that this thesis will, 1) give impetus to more concerted efforts for social activism aimed at alleviating the plight of the poor, 2) contribute to making the writings of the mystics – both ancient and modern – more widely known among, and appreciated by, the contemplative community in South Africa, 3) challenge active-contemplatives to “a deeper and more creative engagement with the wider human community” (McKanan, 2007:7) as opposed to staying and practicing their communal life within the confines of their Community, and 4) be a catalyst for ordinary Christians to begin to explore the richness of contemplative prayer as action in the world; resulting in large numbers of ‘solitudes’ pervading our cities.

We end this study in the well-known *el Camino Santiago de Compostela* pilgrim’s cry: *E ultreÏa e suseia*, *Deus adiuva nos*! (Onwards, upwards, God be with us!)

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Appendix A

Breadbasket Compassionate Ministries

Breadbasket Compassionate Ministries was started in February 1986 by Robert and Penelope Marankey as a “Haven of Rest for the weary, destitute and hungry” in the larger Elsie’s River area consisting of Epping Forest, Salberau, Elnor Estate, Norwood Estate, Balvenie Estate and Clarke’s Estate. The ministry was intended as a drop-in facility where the poor could receive a meal once a day on Monday and Friday. This was expanded to a feeding scheme in the late 1980s and early 1990s to include a soup kitchen at Elnor Primary School and Norwood Primary School. This contact with learners in turn led to the identification of families who were living in extreme poverty. These were offered a weekly food parcel which was collected on a Friday or Saturday afternoon. Apart from the feeding scheme the organisation also collected gently-worn clothing for redistribution to the poor. A final outreach was the creation of a “Christ Room” (*Catholic Worker*, Issue 4, No. 8, December 1936) in the Marankey home where victims of trauma could spend the night en route to whatever ‘destination to wholeness’.

The Parish Church of St Martin-in-the-Field evolved out of this endeavour since the imperiled ones who frequented the Food Pantry voiced their need for spiritual care and counselling. The outreach-among-the-poor had to be suspended in 2006 after Penelope Marankey was diagnosed in February 2004 with Multiple Sclerosis. She has been paralysed since then and bed-ridden since October 2010.

Currently Very Rev. Canon Marankey tutors English Language and Literature to first year university students and teaches English Home Language on a voluntary, non-remunerating basis, to matric learners in a small facility at his home. The ‘open door’ policy has remained a feature, though, with the poor offered assistance when and if it is needed. In this way the pioneering work of Breadbasket Compassionate Ministries continues.

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Ons Plek (Our Place)

Ons Plek (Our Place) is geared towards helping young homeless women prepare for a normal existence after life on the streets. Situated in Mowbray and Woodstock, the organisation was established in 1988 as an intake- and stabilisation-shelter for girls.

Each of the young women is expected to assist with the general running of the facility. Duties include household chores, cooking and shopping. Their education includes bridging classes and skills development based on individual psychological and intellectual assessments. Those who qualify – based on age and ability – join the formal school system while those who are unable to do so, are taught language, basic mathematics and life skills to help them cope on reintegration into society. A social worker provides social services to assist in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

U-turn Homeless Ministries and The Warehouse

As the acronym "U-Turn" suggests, this NGO in Kenilworth, Cape Town, enables homeless people to turn their lives around.

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U-turn provides meals from their on-site facility to those who live on the streets. It co-ordinates a 'life change' programme – focusing on life after homelessness –as well as an alcohol and drug rehabilitation project. The organisation has partnered with multiple service centres where the indigent can exchange U-turn vouchers for goods and/or services.

They use a unique strategy of utilising the services of occupational therapists, instead of social workers, to assist those who live on the streets. As an ongoing outreach, U-Turn monitors the developmental journey of the homeless once they have 'exited' the system. These initial outreaches to homeless people have as their ultimate goal the end of homelessness.

The Warehouse offers similar services as U-turn, but includes an extensive warehouse where the indigent ones are provided with clothing and other apparel in order to be more presentable when they interact on the streets with citizens. The

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Warehouse was established in 2003 through the Anglican Parish of St John the Evangelist in Wynberg. It exists to serve the South African church network in its response to systemic poverty, injustice and division. Since 2003 The Warehouse has been working with churches at the coalface of these challenges, inspiring, equipping and connecting them to to participate in effective transformational development.

Through their varied services both U-turn Homeless Ministries and The Warehouse provide a way out of poverty, unemployment and inequality. In this way they are transforming Cape Town's public and/or communal spaces; those places where the homeless sleep at night or congregate during the day.

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation [1]

The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), established in 2000, is a pan-African organisation that works collaboratively with governments as well as inter-governmental and civil society participants to contribute towards building fair, democratic and inclusive societies across the continent, through transitional justice and peacebuilding interventions.

IJR addresses concerns such as our individual and collective vulnerability. It promotes fair, democratic and inclusive societies, offering the poor assistance in their search for hope and inspiration to endure in the midst of hurt and struggle. Its aim, ultimately, is to promote and build fair, democratic and inclusive societies.

Its employees and/or members provide mechanisms which interface between the Institute and the relevant stakeholders. This is done through workshops, seminars, presentations and active involvement in public affairs. The Institute is part of a broader consortium of organisations which include Afrobarometer, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) in Ghana and the Democratic Governance and Rights Unit (DGRU) at the University of Cape Town.

One of their chief focuses is an exploration of what constitutes the essence of the human spirit and the determination to overcome adversity.

An unstated aim of the Institute is encapsulated in the slogan, "We search again for

[1] "About the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation", 2016:iii.

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hope and inspiration to endure challenging circumstances”.

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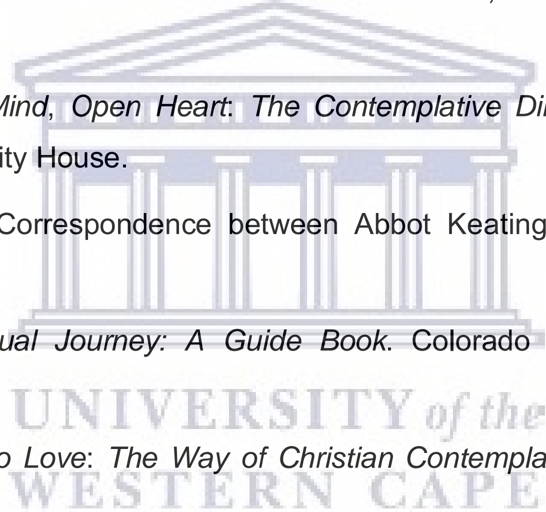

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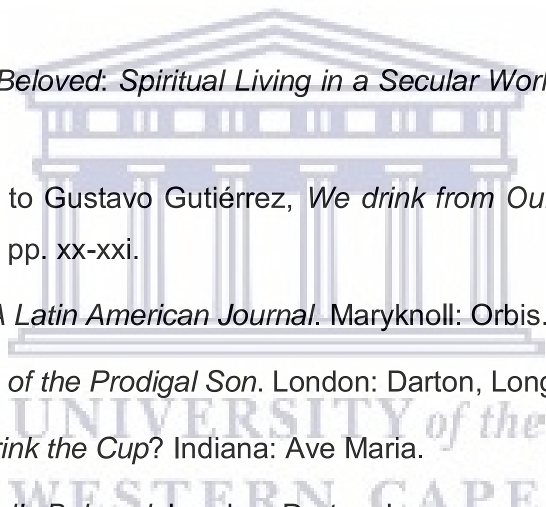

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