



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 37: The Philosophical Model, Part 1



Helen Frankenthaler, *Red Shift*, 1990

We started this section (Part 2 of the series) on the human condition with the Evolutionary Model, which describes how the human family evolved and how each one of us recapitulates the stages of evolution as we grow from infancy to adulthood. Fr. Thomas says that the ability to use reason, both by the human family and by each one of us, is the door into higher states of consciousness, giving us the capacity to relate to reality honestly and with more compassion and love. He also intimates that our ability to reason brings forth the values of belonging, cooperation and harmony which will help to move the whole human family into higher states of consciousness.

The Philosophical Model develops our understanding of the human faculties – the senses, the intellect, and the will, and how each one functions according to its nature. Like the Evolutionary Model, this model is the ideal of how our powers and faculties work, while the Existential Model is the way human life is actually experienced. The Philosophical Model was largely developed in the middle ages by Thomas Aquinas before evolution was understood. Fr. Thomas helps to bring modern science to our understanding of this model to make it more relevant for our time.

In addition to the active intellect which gives us the ability to reason, we have a passive or intuitive intellect which perceives truth directly without the mediation of reason. This is the seat of our will to God, or our desire to seek that which can only be filled by God. The consistent practice of Centering Prayer helps us to "close the door" (Mt. 6:6) on all of our faculties except our intuitive level through the passive intellect, which has the potential to lead us to divine union, the awareness of the oneness of the human family and the oneness with all reality.

"Lacking the experience of divine union, we feel alienated from ourselves, God, other people and the cosmos. Hence, we seek substitutes for the happiness for which we are predestined but which we do not know how to find. This misguided search for happiness is the human predicament that the Gospel addresses. The first word that Jesus speaks as he enters upon his ministry is 'repent,' which means change the direction in which you are looking for happiness ... Happiness can be found only in the experience of union with God, the experience that also unites us to everyone else in the human family and to all reality."

- Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

## **A Meditation**

"When we work to surrender our own desires, worldview, self-image, and all that goes to make up the false self, we are truly participating in Christ's emptying of himself, as Paul described it. We are emptying ourselves of the false self so that our true Self, which is the Christ life in us, may express itself in and through our human faculties. And we can do this because he handed over his human life to the Father, and at the same time, he handed over the Divine Spirit to the human family... Dying to the false self is the movement from a lower form of life to a higher one; from a lower state of consciousness to a higher state of consciousness; from a weak faith to a faith that is strong, penetrating, and unifying ... The new person that comes to birth in that deep interior rest manifests Christ in the place and time in which he or she lives."

- Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World*

## **To Practice**

- View the video excerpt "The Philosophical Model, Part 1." It is about 27 minutes in length.

- Reflect that this session's video begins by stating: "So, the great issue of the human family at this time is to become fully human, to develop what personhood really means, which is the capacity to relate to more and more of reality honestly, with compassion and love." How is the practice of Centering Prayer changing your perspectives and worldview?

**Resources for Further Study:**

You may wish to read Chapter 12, "From the Inside Out" from *Intimacy with God* (2017 edition), Chapter 14, "Towards Intimacy with God" (older editions).

**Notes and Reflections:**