

Vulnerability and Centration in Contemplation

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As a network of people from all over the world, we seek to see change in the violent and hurting situations in our world through the power and intention of contemplative time together. We are purposeful about evolving the world through Love.

There are three stories entering my heart awareness as I engage prayerfully with this reflection. The first is the sad fact that on Christmas Eve I came down with a heavy cold, twice testing negative for COVID, yet possibly positive. The second is the sad condition of many parts of the Eastern States of Australia post flooding in 2022 and the journey of the floodwaters along the river Murray to the Fleurieu coast of South Australia where I live. The third is the amazing commendation Jesus gave to a woman seeking healing for her daughter even when she knew that common law denied her access (*Matt 15:21-28*).

I have never slept through a Christmas Day before in the way I did this year after my throat became dry on Christmas Eve. These weeks later, I still suffer a dry cough and some soreness and congestion in my throat. Yet somehow through these days of enforced rest and isolation, there's been a sense of health within the illness. There's been time to absorb Kerrie's new book, *Love's Oneing: A Book about Contemplation* and to revisit retreat learnings in a slow and heart-warming way. I was counting the days to full bodily health yet revelling in the time for receiving the gift of contemplation with all its benefits.

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My home base in Port Elliot, South Australia, is a small and cosy cottage on a sandhill which enables contemplative conversations and regular practice of being grounded in and centred in Omega. In normal times, the sea view from my window is a translucent aqua blue and the sand a warm off-white colour that invites a stroll along the beach. This centring down which comes whether in stillness or in motion flows into my days as I mingle locally with other contemplatives and join electronically the vast array of similar seekers across the globe. These are days of unprecedented international civilisation as

technologies allow the kinds of contact and celebration of which my grandparents would never have dreamed.

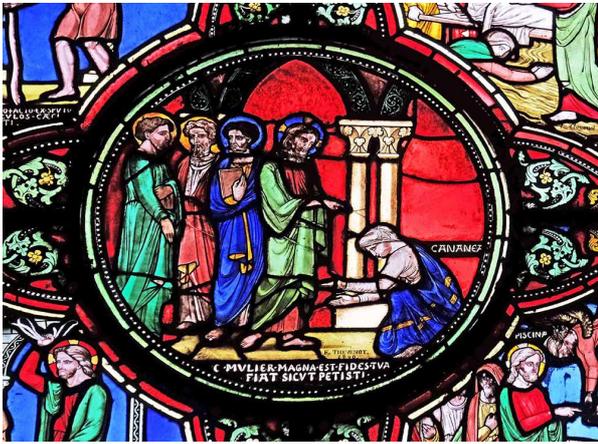
But in these two weeks, the sea has gradually grown darker and darker, and the sand is littered with dirty foam as the floodwaters bring the effects of their erosive powers to our pristine coast. There is little sense of

¹ Abstract soul art watercolor painting illustration by Benjavisa Ruangvaree. Adobe Stock Image, licence held by Ann-Maree O'Beirne rsm.

² The beautiful Horseshoe bay beach at Port Elliot, South Australia, on 27th August 2019
By Darryl. Adobe Stock Image, licence held by Ann-Maree O'Beirne rsm.

invitation to join the murky waters for a cooling, health-giving swim. There's a huge sadness for all those in the East of our continent who are in clean-up and restore mode after devastating loss. And now also in the North West of our Continent. Add to this, the flow of information focussing on suffering such as we see from Ukraine and Russia, injustices bringing starvation and death to so many across the globe, and cruelty as domestic and racial violence grows can have the effect of detracting from a contemplative and centring practice. Their very de-centring power militates against the outcomes we seek, yet somehow strangely contributes to the prayer and its focus.

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Turning to scriptures that show Jesus, the New Human, faced these kinds of events in his life. We hear him turn to a woman, a Canaanite outsider, seeking relief and healing for herself and her daughter, and remind her of the status quo: 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel'. Yet still she came and knelt, contemplatively, and with full heart continued to ask his help. The disciples had tried to turn her away, and he first held true to the rights of the 'children', the 'chosen'. Her reply stunned them all: 'Even the dogs, *despised creatures*, eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table'. Jesus commends her for 'great faith'. Her daughter is instantly healed in keeping with her contemplative act of faith. There

ensued, no doubt, a great celebration, together with a huge sense of inclusion and being valued. A 'May you be' moment.

Praying with these three scenarios, I have come to notice three movements in the stories and in my prayer practice. They draw me into this work of intercession and unifying love across irreconcilable boundaries that does the work of bringing healing. The movements correspond to the three principles described by Teilhard de Chardin as centration, decentration and super-centrationⁱ.

In the visit of my common cold over Christmas New Year, I am forced to centre on the needs of my body for rest and nutrition. The decentring comes with a lack of appetite and the chosen isolation during which I realise how healthy I am compared to others who suffer across the globe. I do more than tolerate the cold. I let a super-centration remind me, in the words of Thomas Berry:

"Through our contact with the natural world we learn that the universe throughout its vast extent in space and throughout its long sequence of transformations in time is a single multiform celebratory event. Our role is to enter into this celebration in a special mode of conscious self-awareness, for this celebration is the divine liturgy, the purpose of all existence, a celebration begun in time but continued through eternity."ⁱⁱ

³ Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois church in Paris, France by Zatlatic. Adobe Stock Image, licence held by Ann-Maree O'Beirne rsm.

These movements also relate to flooding from extraordinary rainfall on the East Coast of Australia during 2022 and continuing to bring devastation and tragedy to the whole length of the Murray Darling Basin, and now to the North West. Of course, my heart has gone out to all who have suffered loss. I can offer this compassion as I go first to the deepest place within. Then I allow the waves of compassion to flurry forth all along the length of the Murray River and across the Kimberly, right into my retirement resort. Yet, I hold the hope of super-centration as we heal from these natural disasters and face the responsibility we have for stabilising and strengthening the noosphere in a way that affects us all and all Earth's creatures.



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Teilhard invites us to move from a centred place, where calm and comfort are generally present, and to allow this de-centration to become intentional and of broad sweep. This second movement in our prayer hour moves us to the kind of welcoming that does not deny the horror of these crises among us but embraces and empathises with those undergoing the suffering. From here to a third movement, super-centration, one in which the celebration of the whole can be held in hope. We feel the vulnerability, just as much communally as personally, we empathise with those who suffer, and we are drawn into super-centration: 'I am in the Whole and the Whole is in me'.

Christ came to the woman who knew herself to be an outsider, and yet deep within knew herself also to be deserving of his help just as she knew Jesus to be empowered to bring healing. She held him true to his unfolding vocation. Her daughter, even at a distance, was healed and she was commended for her great faith.

Teilhard reminds us:

Christ appeared in our midst and let himself be seen and touched for a moment before vanishing into the depths of the future, there to draw us into one. Christ will come again, but only if the whole of Humanity lifts its arms in expectation.

–The Divine Milieu, adaptedⁱⁱⁱ

As we continue our practice of contemplation, separately and within the noosphere, we hold out our arms in expectation and continue to practise together in ways that are bringing health and genuine celebration to our world. This has the potential for us to work together to harness the energies of love.

ⁱ See Kerrie Hide, 2022. *Love's Oneing*, A Book about Contemplation, Chapter VII. London: Australian Macauley Publishers.

ⁱⁱ Thomas Berry, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, 2009. *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*,. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Teilhard de Chardin, 2001. *The Divine Milieu*. Harper Perennial. See also <https://archive.org/details/TheDivineMilieu>