**Chapter 7: Humility**

January 27, May 28, September 27

*The Prophet indicates this to us, when he shows that our thoughts are always present to God, saying: “God searches hearts and minds” (Ps. 7:10); again he says: “The Lord knows the thoughts of men” (Ps. 93[94]:11); likewise, “From afar you know my thoughts” (Ps. 138[139]:3); and “The thought of man shall give you praise” (Ps. 75[76]:11). That he may take care to avoid sinful thoughts, the virtuous monk must always say to themselves: “I shall be blameless in his sight if I guard myself from my own wickedness” (Ps. 17[18]:24).*

*It is best to see these words in the context of loving mystery. The Divine Life searching the mind and heart, knowing our thoughts, is not about an invasion of privacy or the overseeing of psychological performance. God, as Love, respects the reality of our freedom. Being loved by Love is the freeing of our freedom.*

God, is already within all experience. This can provide us with the gift of a greater knowing, one that is beyond the limitations of ego-view. This knowing is a wisdom that arises from the depths. It is a wonderful mystery that we are all already a part of. And as self-consciousness recedes and consciousness grows, we *become* this wisdom. God has given everything for this to happen. Divine Love is always fully present, fully attentive to us and all creation. God has emptied Godself. To be open and receptive to this fully given God-life is to allow personal, uncreated love to have love’s way with us. Together we become, in Christ, Christ. In this mystery we live our unique being. Benedict wants Paul’s experience of this to be ours as well: ‘it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20a).

All this requires humility. If we are too caught up in our own ego-view, then the knowing of wisdom will never bloom in us and who we are will not be wholly present in the world.

This is reason enough why the Desert Mothers and Fathers ask us to carefully watch our thoughts, to observe them (not think about them) as they rise and fall; to be simply conscious of our experience of them: their complexity, intensity, when they become internal verbalisations, when they move about as the general energy of emotion[[1]](#footnote-1). In all this is the Holy One loving thought and emotion into a deeper clarity.

Not over-thinking is avoiding ‘sinful thoughts’, that is, avoiding a pattern of thinking that becomes its own source. This is ego being its own limited notion of wisdom.

Sin here is not a moral commentary on our inner state. It is more about a general ‘falling short’ of how we can be with the energy of thought. We think too much and name thinking as who we are. ‘I think therefore I am’ is perhaps the greatest illusion of our time. It takes humility, courage, and grace to look past this thinking. Here, meditation is vital. It is the mantra that guards the heart from the tyranny of over-thinking.

Community also helps over-thinking. The practicalities of living together provide daily opportunities to look past unnecessary thinking. This thinking no doubt still floats around in us. However, being attentive to the washing, on hospitality, cooking and alike can all assist in the undoing of our tendency to think too much.

Community is the event of coming to know ourselves *as we love others*. People need to be committed to each other for this to happen. In this commitment we realise our capacity for both relationship and self-knowledge. One cannot happen without the other. And as community develops and as we meditate together, we eventually realise that we are coming to know others and ourselves with God’s knowledge. This is wisdom.

That is why, ever since the day he told us, we have never failed to remember you in our prayers and ask that you should be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding and so be able to lead a life worthy of the Lord; a life fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every kind of good work and growing in knowledge of God, empowered, in accordance with his glorious power, with all strength to persevere and endure, giving thanks with joy to the Father who has made you able to share the inheritance of God’s saints in light. (Col 1:9-12, RNJB)

1. See, for example, Evagrius, *Practikos*, 50/29-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)