

Contemplation – Intercession – Action

Tuesday, July 21, 2020 at 12:09PM

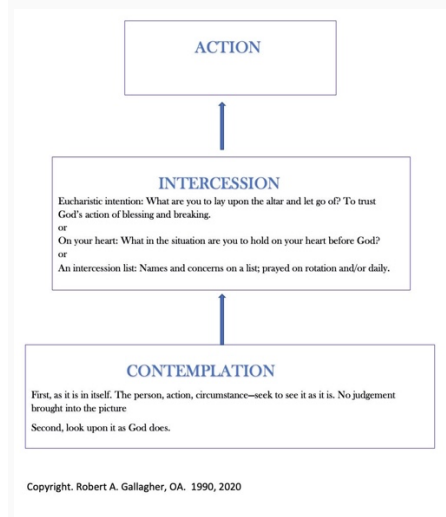
From: Means of Grace, Hope of Glory

<http://www.congregationaldevelopment.com/means-of-grace-hope-of-glory/2020/7/21/contemplation-intercession-action.html>



It's 101 ascetical guidance to make use of spiritual practices that help us ground our action in other elements of the Christian Life—Underhill's understanding that our service needs rise out of adoration and awe; the Christian Life Model that assumes our action needs be in the context of worship and doctrine.

Here's an ascetical model that may be of use. It assumes that our action best rises from contemplation and intercession. Contemplation brings us into a fuller understanding of things and intercession takes us out of ourselves.



[A PDF of the model](#)

Interrelated elements

There may be an organic process involved. We take notice of a person, situation, thing. We consider it—maybe in passing, maybe we ponder. We make judgments in regard to it. We act in relation to it. My attention is drawn to the conflict in Seattle over policing. I read about it. Talk with others. Maybe I do that lightly or deeply. I form judgments about it. I take some action.



Along the way, because I am a Christian with some training in the life of prayer, I engage in certain practices. I contemplate and therefore look more closely, get more information, try to understand the complexity of it, and eventually imaging what stake God may have in the matter. And as I consider my initial judgments I turn to intercession. I intercess for the protesters and the police, for the city councilmember wanting to “defund” and the chief of police alarmed by the likely result of such action. And then I act. Possibly by joining a protest in the streets or sending letters and emails or maybe, I do nothing.

Usually the process isn’t all that linear. I may begin with a strong emotional reaction or an impulse to take some action. And then my formation as a Christian may kick in and I seek to understand the dynamics and facets if the issue. I may wonder if Christian ethics and morality have clarity in this case that places me firmly on one side or another, or, as often seems true, is God nudging me to some third pathway.

The starting place is noticing and reflecting. Henri Nouwen wrote, "Pay attention to the people God puts in your path if you want to discern what God is up to in your life." In the [Order of the Ascension](#) we take a Promise, "To seek the presence of Jesus Christ in the people, things and circumstances of life through stability, obedience and conversion of life." We want to notice and reflect upon the people, things and circumstances of our life.

We can see how our contemplation prepares us for true intercession in Father Ken Leech’s *True Prayer*, “Intercession is simply our co-operation with God in the work of reconciliation. It is like all prayer, God-centered, but in intercession this fact needs to be stressed more strongly, in view of the danger of focusing on the people for whom we pray. In order to intercede we need to be detached from persons, to abandon and narrow personal perspective and to reorient ourselves so that we see the needs of those for whom we pray in the light of a wider vision. In Gregory of Nyssa’s words, we need to learn to see with the eyes of the Dove, to look at reality with the eyes of God. [\[1\]](#)

Action grounded in prayer

Action needs to be rooted in prayer. Action needs to rise out of prayer. That’s a fairly standard assumption about the Christian spiritual life. We see it in Evelyn Underhill’s [Adoration – Awe – Service](#), the [In Your Holy Spirit spiritual map](#), and in [processes of discernment](#).

Consistent, frequent, in harmony

This isn't about the kind of perfunctory prayer that we see in many vestry meetings. The rector begins the meeting with a collect and we move on. There's not really anything wrong with that. Assuming that the parish is a place of steady and sincere prayer; assuming that the walls of the church are soaked in the prayers of generations; assuming that it is a community in which many know "the inner core of silence."

Those are critical assumptions. They speak of a parish culture that grounds us in the Divine Life. A life in which action rises up out of prayer rather than prayer being a support for actions we have decided to take.

Return to the image of the vestry meeting. Is this parish a community in which half of the vestry says the daily office, daily? Or is this a parish in which the worship life of most on the vestry is Sunday worship and that monthly collect at the meeting?

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From Draft of - *Parish Development: models, methods, concepts and skills*. A Shaping the Parish book. Coming in 2021

[1] Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 1980, p. 25