

CONTEMPLATION* in
St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria's Spirituality

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"I am not surprised if you do not yet understand the meaning of... contemplation."

(Sermon III).

Anthony Mary speaks *ex professo* of contemplation only in Sermon III dedicated to the sanctification of the feast day, and when he affirms that anger "separates ... from the contemplation of God" (*Sermon V*).

In regard to this, Zaccaria recalls the classic scheme of the *Lectio Divina*: "Meditation, my friend, is not enough. It is necessary ... to pray, and, moreover, to contemplate" (*Sermon III*). In Constitutions XII he refers specifically to the "Reading of Sacred Scriptures," where *Lectio Divina*, as the idiom itself indicates, starts with the reading of the Bible, which Anthony Mary considers, together with the Eucharist, as one of the "extrinsic" expressions of the conversion to God, which take place especially on holidays. Extrinsic refers to "external" practices, against the interior ones. Meditation, prayer, and contemplation belong to this setting.

A similar distinction is found also in the chapter Anthony Mary dedicates to prayer (*Constitutions X*), where he speaks of "exterior or vocal prayer" and of "interior prayer,"

which is expressed in the three grades mentioned above. Zaccaria declares not to be disturbed if his hearers ignore what prayer is and so much more contemplation, since it is easier to limit oneself to meditation only or to mental reflection, "meditation is more familiar to man than prayer and contemplation," (*Famous Sayings*). On the other hand especially prayer and contemplation are much more tied to affection and intuition, and, more than object of theoretic learning, they are the fruit of direct experience, if they are not practiced - the Saint seems to affirm - they will always be ignored.

It is superfluous, finally, to remember that Zaccaria follows the great model of monastic prayer, although he seems to feel the danger of spiritual practice, still true today, we may say, of reducing *Lectio Divina* and, more in general, interior prayer only to the meditative moment. This is due also to the existence of a growing difficulty in passing from "exterior" prayer to the meditative and contemplative one. The first is food for the beginners, the second for the advanced (*Constitutions X*), the third for the perfect. Nor should we forget that "mental meditation" (*Constitutions XII*) and "the loving prayer" lead by their very nature to contemplation, which is "knowledge of love." Anthony Mary could have taken this directly from Gregory the Great, where he affirms: "*Amor ipse notitia*" (*Homiliae in Evangelia*, 27, 4).

The Famous Sayings have a voice dedicated to contemplation.

***Source:** Antonio M. Gentili, Giovanni M. Scalese, *Prontuario per lo Spirito: Insegnamenti ascetico-mistici di sant'Antonio Maria Zaccaria*. Milano: Editrice Ancora, 1994, p. 84-86.