A Contemplative Reading of Scripture

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean —
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down —
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?
"A Summer Day" - Mary Oliver

By What Authority . . .

Mark 11: 28

Intellectual and theological rationalism have ruled the way we hear the Scripture.

Jesus used questions to keep spiritual meanings open, often reflecting on a text or returning people's questions with more questions. . . challenging self-righteousness and spiritual arrogance.

If any negative or punitive emotions arise from our interpretation—such as feelings of superiority, self-satisfaction, arrogant dualistic certitude, desire for revenge, need for victory, or any spirit of dismissal or exclusion—this is *not* the Spirit at work, but our own ego still steering the ship.

R. Rohr

2 Peter 1:16-21 NRSV

4 Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature. . .

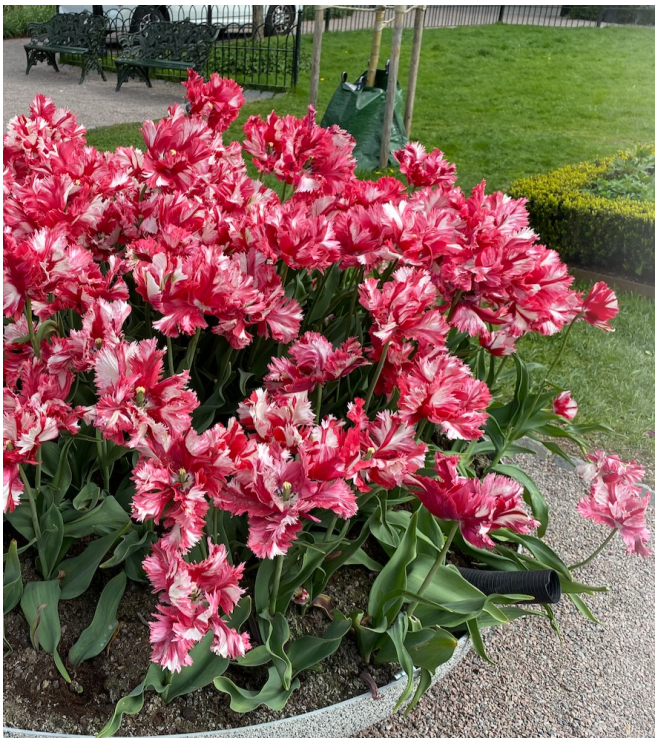
20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

In the past . . .

". . .The Church Fathers "seek to link reality to the experience of faith in their present world."

". . . one needs to have a deep spiritual life in order to appreciate that the Scripture can be understood only if it is lived."

Ivana Noble "Contemplative Reading of the Scriptures in the Context of Ecumenical Retreats."
In *What Does Theology Do, Actually?: Vol.2*, Davis, P.J et al.



In the past . . .

Monastic heritage

Lectio Divina

Lectio – reading

Meditatio – reflecting

Oratio – praying

Contemplatio - contemplating

In the past . .

Medieval Times

"A common emphasis since the end of the twelfth century was the development of various movements that worked on shifting the attention of people from the institution of the church, which was seen as dying, to "spiritual things" or to the age of the Spirit, where the papal church would be substituted by the church of spiritual people. These movements were directed to the individual, to cultivating his or her soul."

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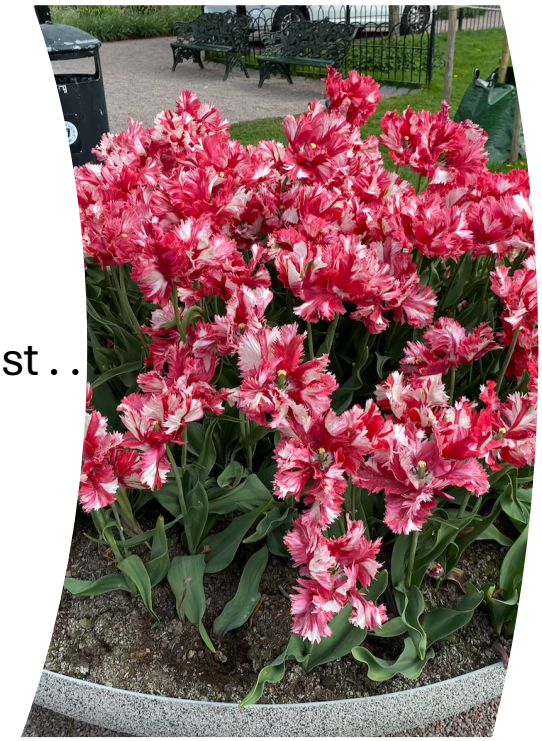
In the past . .



Ignatius of Loyola

Imagination

Struggled with the prescriptive constraints of the church and was confronted by the Spanish Inquisition.

“In this imaginative way of both reading and being religious was contrary to most interpretive traditions and religious institutions, which ‘tended to be closed, restrictive, defensive and prescriptive’ “

J Reek - Poetry and the Religious Imagination, 2016 - api.taylorfrancis.com

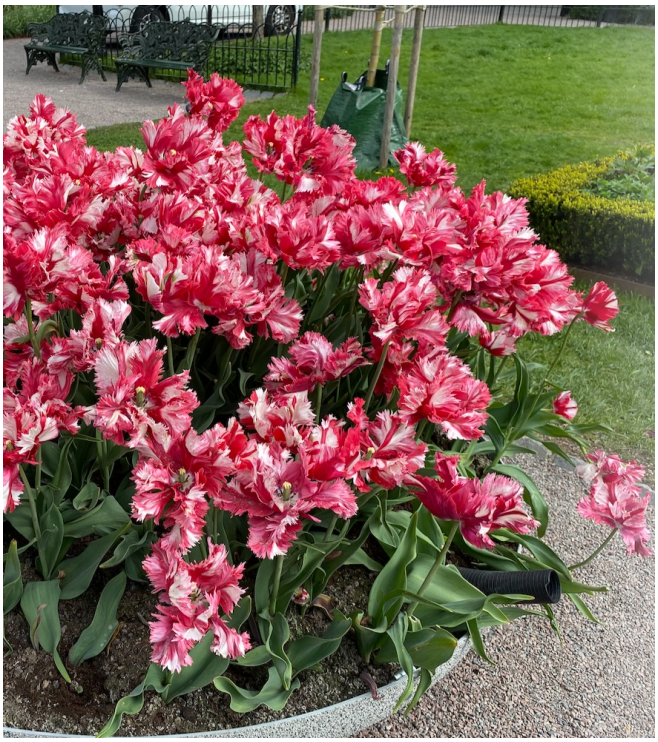
In the past . .

Ignatius of Loyola

Imagination

“What did Ignatius do in this immobility of the body? He was compelled by outside circumstance to turn inside, the outer immobility allowing for an inner dynamism. . . the tough soldier begins to note his affective responses to his reading, an embodied reading, for the emotions are experienced bodily.”

J Reek - Poetry and the Religious Imagination, 2016 - api.taylorfrancis.com

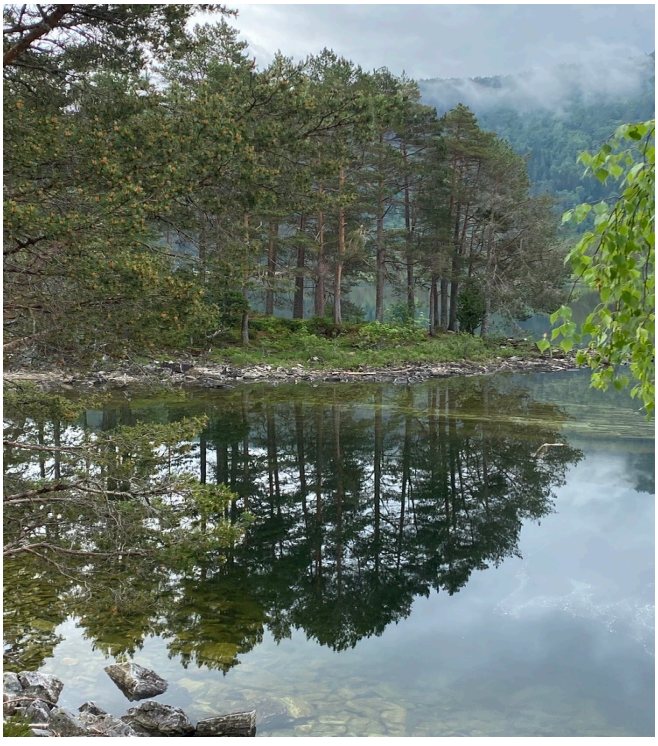


“In what sense does the Scripture speak of a lived experience of God?”

Ivana Noble “Contemplative Reading of the Scriptures in the Context of Ecumenical Retreats.”
In *What Does Theology Do, Actually?: Vol.2,* Davis, P.J et al.

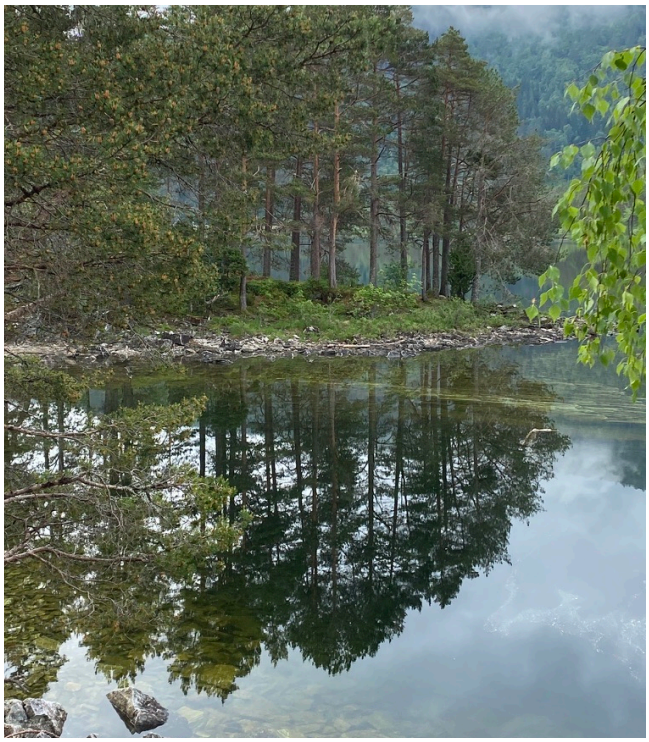
“Contemplation then is reading attentively the scene offered to the spectators as a divine spectacle.”

Kees Waaijman: The Inner Dimensions of Contemplation: Paradigms within the Christian tradition, Stellenbosch Theological Journal 2020, Vol 6, No 2, 437



Contemplating Nature

Where do your thoughts take you as you pay attention to this picture?



Do you have an emotional response?

Contemplating your thoughts, is there an insight that is worth further consideration?

Contemplative Insight?

a) **Sacred texts reveal something of the human encounter with a divine moment.**

b) **It impacted others who remembered, recorded or passed on what they experienced of that encounter.**

c) **Why? What moved people so profoundly?**

1 **As the deer longs for streams of water,**
so I long for you, O God.

2 **I thirst for God, the living God.**
When can I go and stand before him?

3 **Day and night I have only tears for food,**
while my enemies continually taunt me,
saying,
“Where is this God of yours?”

Psalm 42:1-3

What is this human encounter raising in me?

What is my first response?

Is there a conflict rising within me as I read this text?

What is the human emotion in this text?

Do I know that feeling?

What insight is being raised *for me* in my current lived experience?

What is my lived experience of God / Divinity as I contemplate this text?

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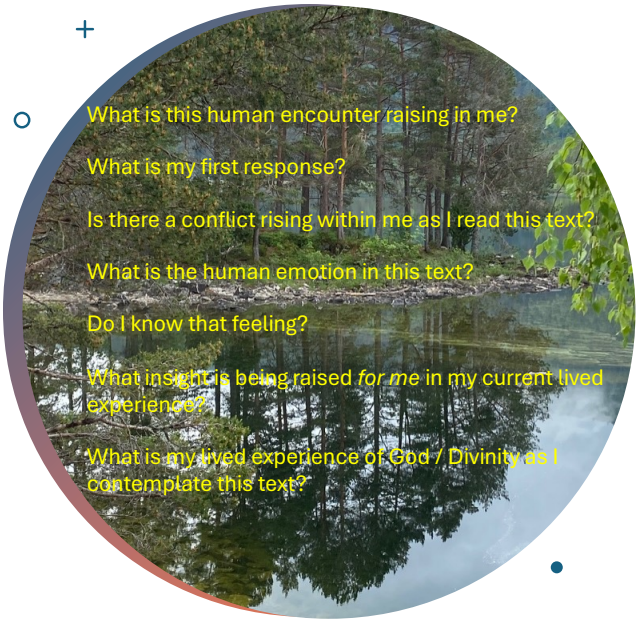
Jesus Heals a Blind Beggar Near Jericho

35 As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting
by the roadside begging. 36 When he heard a crowd
going by, he asked what was happening. 37 They told
him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth[d] is passing by.’ 38 Then he
shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on
me!’ 39 Those who were in front sternly ordered him to
be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, ‘Son of
David, have mercy on me!’ 40 Jesus stood still and
ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he
came near, he asked him, 41 ‘What do you want me to
do for you?’ He said, ‘Lord, let me see again.’ 42 Jesus
said to him, ‘Receive your sight; your faith has saved
you.’ 43 Immediately he regained his sight and followed
him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw
it, praised God.

Luke 18: 35-43



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PAY ATTENTION

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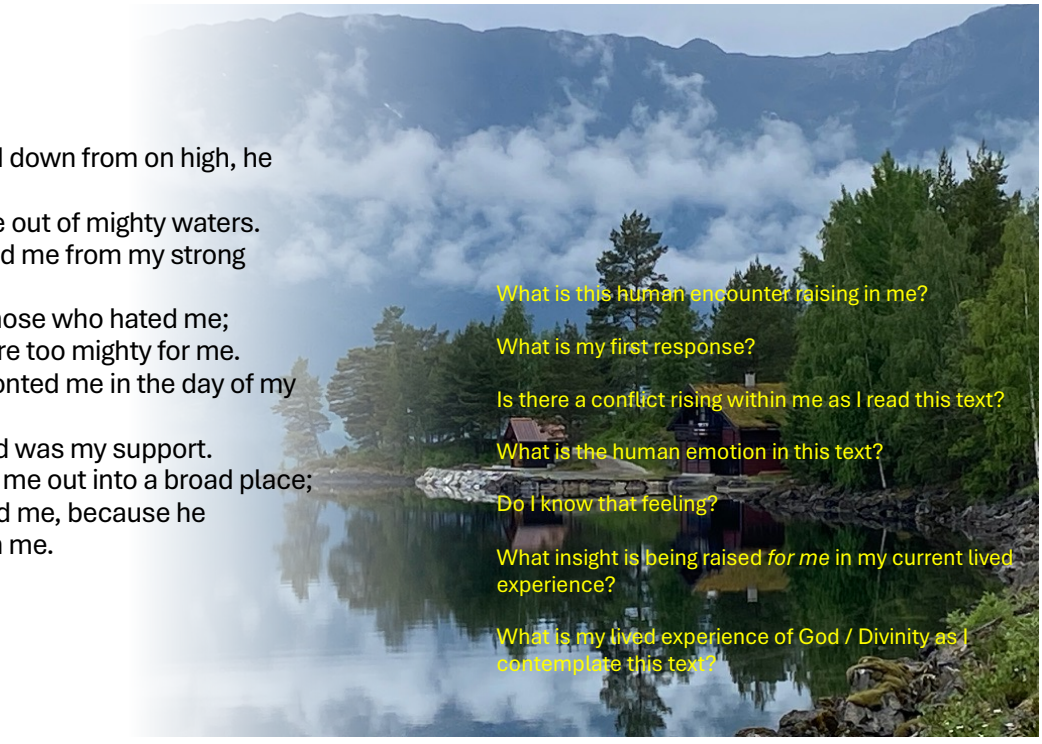
Psalm 18:

16 He reached down from on high, he took me;
he drew me out of mighty waters.
17 He delivered me from my strong enemy,
and from those who hated me;
for they were too mighty for me.
18 They confronted me in the day of my calamity;
but the Lord was my support.
19 He brought me out into a broad place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.



Philippians 2:1-4

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.