

Meditation on the vocation

- A Carthusian

Meditation on the Carthusian vocation

Machine translated assisted - from the French: [Méditation sur la vocation cartusienne](#)

The following reflections written by a Carthusian can certainly enlighten anyone who wants to engage his whole being to God's service, even in another vocation.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE ABSOLUTE

THE WAYS OF THE ABSOLUTE

BEYOND THE ABSOLUTE

Meditation on the vocation - A Carthusian

Does not become a Carthusian whoever wants. To become a Carthusian it is not enough to be welcomed fraternally and receive all the elements of a good formation. Remains in the Charterhouse solely he who has at the bottom of his soul a more powerful calling than all the contradictions he finds in himself and around him. The Carthusian vocation is a work of God. The participation of man is perhaps more essential than anywhere else, but man knows that he is totally unable to build it, left to his own resources.

There is thus firstly a call. This call, purely internal, seeks to accomplish itself through external and institutional means, linked to a framework of which the rigidity may surprise. Once the decision is made, the discovery of the concrete Carthusian life, introduces a universe whose paradoxes are often difficult to accept. These are the steps that one can follow.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE ABSOLUTE

Only he who knows can understand. When God calls, it is something obvious which surpasses arguments and words. When God manifests Himself, there is nothing to discuss; it is very much about Him that is in question, even if we do not find a way to express it. Let us talk about the Absolute, for lack of a better term. This term has its flaws, like any that claims to speak about God, but it sufficiently evokes the character, distinctly from all that we know on our contingent scale, of the deep manifestation of God. It is He and no other. We recognize Him right away, even if we had never met Him. He has no common measure with what we know. He introduces Himself really as the perfection which in an instant captivates the heart. A thirst is born that nothing will be able to quench, except the Absolute. One who has received this wound therefore starts a quest for the way down here, to reach Him as much as is possible. Probably that the means, always will be inadequate to this purpose, but we want to do everything that depends on our self to try to attain it.

1° Give ourselves to God for Himself.

For those who undertake this search, the Charterhouse reveals itself at first sight as the discovery of a world we already knew but had not yet met. It seems it instinctively

finds the words that match the initiated search. There is a sort of connaturality between what we are told and what we would have wanted to say ourselves. Give ourselves to God for Himself. Live only for Him. Renounce everything that is not Him and find only in Him the fullness of what we seek. Not only do we see these written formulas, but have the feeling they are experienced, although even we realize that the framework is miserly in many ways, apparently a little shriveled.

2° A radical break from the world.

But the Charterhouse combines inseparably these intoxicating formulas of union with God only, to requirements of abrupt separation of what the traditional monastic language names "the world". There are there, despite some misinterpretations, neither Manichaeism, neither pessimism, nor contempt for those who make up this world. The world is the all of humanity projected in this great enterprise to cooperate to the work of God the Creator. This is man who strives to God through the multifaceted mirror of the creatures. It is the religious man who radiates the face of the Father in Christ through the thousand forms of the apostolate.

All this is good, all this is a reflection of God, but none of it is God. The choice for God implies as a consequence, that we do not even think of discussing the requirements, to separate ourselves from all that is not Him, as His finest works are nothing next to Him; and He is what we want.

3° Topple definitely in God.

We talked about a seduction of the Absolute. That's really what it is about. Jeremiah's words come to mind: «You have seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced. » The joy of being able to find God makes all decisions easy, even if we must do them thoughtfully, collected and justified. We realize that there are no other alternatives; a huge step must be taken that makes us commit ourselves totally on God's side. We must jump into the void, believe in the Absolute and cut ourselves from everything that is not Him.

4° Resurrect with Christ.

Only Jesus by his death and resurrection was able to achieve this dream in a complete and radical way: to respond with His whole being to God's call, throw himself in Him and find Himself fully within Him. Choosing the Carthusian life is thus therefore to insert oneself in a particularly expressive and effective manner in the Resurrection of the Savior. There is a death, of which we are not always fully conscious in the beginning, but which will gradually spread its effects on the whole man. There is also the birth of a new life, which really puts us into the intimacy of God.

THE WAYS OF THE ABSOLUTE

Once actually having entered a Charterhouse, we discover that the radical choice of God must necessarily be the hallmark of all the concrete existence of the man, sensitive, sociable, fragile and unstable, which is in everyone, and of which we are led to make costly discovery. There cannot be question here to explore in detail this area. It is sufficient to note how this choice, apparently purely spiritual, must express itself dramatically in the space and time where will unfold the existence of the Carthusian.

1° The "limits" of Chartreuse.

Historians who study the birth of a Charterhouse in the Middle-Ages are normally led to a discovery that shocks them if they don't "know". Indeed it appears that the Carthusians, when they had decided to found a Charterhouse on a site, began by determining the "boundaries" around this place, which defined the break between the monastery and the world; regardless of whether these limits were on land already owned by the Carthusians. The clearly pursued goal will be to acquire or be granted privileges that will permit to exclude from this domain any other dwelling. This is a condition considered essential by the first Carthusians. The monastery must be at the center of an authentic solitude; the break between the monastery and the world must be clearly marked. Then, another contour is plotted that sets rigorous limits that monks should not cross if they want to remain faithful to the spirit of their solitude. The novice who makes profession knows that he agrees to remain bound to these limits, which constitute his desert, his solitude.

It would be miserly to see there a sort of instinct of ownership or will of control of power of the Carthusians. Even if these boundary issues have driven them many times in litigation or disputes with their neighbors, we must see in this fierce desire to cut themselves, a bitter expression of the feeling they have really chosen God and nothing but God. This is really the burning of the Absolute in their lives, in a terribly demanding way. Switching permanently in God, as we said, is to involve oneself in God, not only in spirit but also in body. The limits of the Charterhouse, is the concrete sign that we have enclosed ourselves in God. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God," says St. Paul. That is well the intention of the Carthusian: be hidden, force others to respect his anonymity, to be forgotten. But it is also to impose to himself of not being able to wander, of no longer being able to go to his fancy here and there. He anchored himself in God, even in his body, even in his fundamental freedom of a human being who disposes of all the earth which was offered to him by the Creator.

2° The meaning of the vows.

It is obvious that the religious vows are by no means the appanage of the Carthusians. But perhaps we are close to an epoch when only the Carthusians will still have a lifestyle corresponding to the attitude of mind which prevailed in monastic circles, where the vows were born, now perhaps

fifteen centuries ago. Vows in what they have deepest, are modeled closely on the structure of the Carthusian life. The first origins of monastic vows are obscure. However, it seems that they were born spontaneously in response to the instability of many monks, whether instability in the vocation, or wandering from monastery to monastery. The vows were somehow a limit, in the sense that we were talking in the previous paragraph. They mark a break in the life of a monk, so that he is forced to remain fixed in God, by a perfectly free act he poses when he enters the monastery and fixes himself there by profession. Without wanting to deny the legal exaggerations that have developed around the concept of vows, we must know how to recover their deep inspiration. Their authors were probably unaware of it, but they were following a very pure inspiration.

The intention of the person who pronounces his monastic vows is to make to God a really absolute gift of himself. The seduction of the Absolute wants that we try to imprint in oneself something that reminds this Absolute, which prepares us to meet Him. This choice that made us leave all for Him, we want it to mark all our inner being; so a break vis-à-vis the outside world is necessary: the vow of stability corresponding in each to the material and concrete existence of limits. We must especially mark very clearly and effectively the cut between the flight from God to which draws us all our heaviness, and the will of an always faithful love of God: the vow of obedience.

For who looks at things from the outside, the monk finds himself thus constrained in a net of obligations which bind and paralyze him. Such is, one must admit, the way these things are sometimes held out. In reality, it is exactly the opposite. The vows are the impassable demarcation line between the domain of the Absolute, the zone where we want God to unquestionably reign, and all the rest: they are the gateway door to divine freedom.

3° Comparisons.

To better understand the meaning of the radical break imprinted by the solitude of the Charterhouse in the existence of the monk, it can be enlightening to compare it to other forms of solitude.

The hermit. The hermit is certainly the man of solitude, but in essence - and history gives of this a multitude of testimonies - the man of availability for all kinds of subsequent developments. He will become the founder of a cenobitic abbey, he will go preach, we will call him to become a bishop, pastor of souls. He therefore has felt the burn of the Absolute, him also, but did not receive the call to throw himself in Him in a radical and permanent manner. His solitude may, in fact, continue throughout all his life, but it may well also only be a step towards another vocation to which the Lord calls him.

The Camaldolese. Son of St. Benedict, he places his solitude in a context somewhat similar to that of the hermit. It is only a form of praise God amongst many others. Let us not forget,

for example, that the apostles of Poland were the first Camaldolese. There is nothing improper that in the Camaldolese are found teachers, preachers, etc. Amongst them also, will be found solitaries, even recluses. But by itself, the Camaldolese vocation does not imply as a necessity the choice to throw oneself in an exclusive and radical manner into God.

The Recluse. He materially enjoys an often profound solitude. In fact, his solitude is fragile and subject to a variety of contingencies, which are completely outside its control. If we practically consider the recluse, he is always dependent on a community, monastic, canonical, parish, in which he inserts himself, but also of which he depends as much in the spiritual than in the material aspects. This shows how his situation is fragile, even if sometimes it gives him exceptionally favorable conditions.

BEYOND THE ABSOLUTE

Once are acknowledged the limits of the Charterhouse, we find ourselves finally within the Carthusian life itself. That's when the surprises begin, even if we knew in advance that we would be within a community life. We had come in the perspective of a deep esselement, to throw ourselves within the naked divinity. Rather, we are caught in the multiple networks of the obligations of a family life. We thought that we would only find saints around ourselves and we discover with horror the reign of mediocrity. Worse than all that, we realize finally that in ourselves the Absolute has disappeared. There is nothing left of that for which we had come. Is this the sign that we are on a wrong track, or is it a new game from God who makes Himself be discovered under a light of day of which we had not thought of?

1° The entrance into a family.

There cannot become in question to live side by side as strangers, when we are so few living in the midst of the same desert, having been attracted by the same ideal. Whoever does not want to enter into the family life is rejected by her and he soon discovers that his cell life finds itself radically undermined by this. If he wants really to pursue his quest for the Absolute, he has no alternative but to consider this family life in its face and to insert himself into it loyally, honestly and wholeheartedly. This social requirement quickly manifests itself as revealing of the very substance of the Carthusian vocation. Nobody can indeed seek God outside of the paths of the Gospel, that is to say the paths of charity. It would be a futile search of the Absolute which would want to dispense in any manner whatsoever with the love of his brothers. But the teaching of Jesus and that of the beloved disciple are formal: the charity which unites the children of God is the same which unites the Father and the Son. Entering in the Carthusian family is entering of even foot in the Divine Family, crossing with the risen Jesus the veil to come into God's presence. But in the Charterhouse, this human image of the Divine Family finds itself limited, reduced, and it only mtakes it full sense that, replaced within the great family of

God's children: the Mystical Body of Christ, His Church. We cannot underestimate the reversal of values that this often involves in the mentality of the new monk. Come to be lost in an Absolute which had totally captivated him, he suddenly discovers that this Absolute is completely different from what he imagined. The Absolute is an image that we makeup ourselves of God: the reality of God is the Son, who is in the Father, who revealed it to us when he told us that the Father loved the Son and that both loved us and would come to us. It's finally a crucifying choice we must do: or the Absolute which fills us by locking us in ourselves, or the relationship which will dilate us to infinity, but at the price of a dismemberment and an overture to all those who surround us, regardless of the affinities we have for them.

2° The kingdom of mediocrity.

There is no need to have lived long in a the Charterhouse to realize that flower there many small miseries, that the usual poverties of human nature are not absent there, even if everyone makes loyal effort to tend towards perfection, of which the Father is the model. This is not new. History shows that the chronicles of ancient charterhouses or the annals of the Order are the reflection of communities where personages of great sanctity or distinction are very rare. The life of most Charterhouses unfolds in a featureless gray life. Disputes with neighbors, small miscellaneous events within the community. A deeper knowledge of the souls permits to discover slowly that those disappointing outwards very often hide treasures of inner life, generosity and an authentic search for God. However there is no denying that these gems are very often caught in unattractive gangue.

Can it be otherwise facing the Absolute? Is it not the ransom even, of a dangerous neighborhood with fire? This one shows all the flaws, all the roughness, all the miseries which in other circumstances would be drowned in the flow of surrounding triteness. To want to face the light of God, is deliberately exposing ourselves to see breaking out in broad daylight all these defects, all these littleness's. They first appear to the eyes of others, and when the light purifies itself, to the very eyes of the person concerned. We first discover the mediocrity of others, then our own. It is a risk that we always take when we aim high. To find ourselves always farther from the term we suffer more intensely.

On a more prosaic level, we must also see there the price of the cut from the world. Insofar as solitude is effective, it deprives us of a multitude of inputs which would introduce within the community a momentum or a renewal, which would mask the mediocrity or would remedy it somehow. There is there a critical choice to make: either choose God and accept that perfection comes first and foremost from the inside, or leave open some doors to the world, so that human resources other than those proper to the desert intervene in their own way. The usual choice of the Charterhouse is the first way. Accepting it deliberately and in full awareness represents a real sacrifice, an extremely costly entry into solitude. It is indeed consciously accepting to see remaining

dormant a part of our human availabilities, so that God can spring from inside. Such an atmosphere can only be suitable to souls who have already acquired a certain level of human maturity and the capacity of a personal autonomy in their spiritual and intellectual activity.

3° Outdistancing the Absolute permanently.

The discovery of mediocrity first in others, and then in oneself is a routing towards an even more confusing light. Holiness, perfection, the virtues, all those notions that, unwittingly, we interpreted as reflections in ourselves of the Absolute, fade little by little. Anything that can make me a center, a nucleus of autonomous crystallization, all that must disappear in order to become conformed to the risen Christ. There remains only the relationship to the Father. Even in his humanity, he acquired the titles of divinity, he is stripped of all created wealth, so as to become nothing other than pure relationship.

That is the direction towards which the monk must gradually orientate to, first in his inner life, then in all his activities, as well as in cell than in community. Learn to never more concentrate anything towards self, but to be taken in the movement of divine love, which has no end and no beginning, no goal or principle, neither limit nor outline, yielded to the breath of the Spirit, without knowing where it comes from or where it goes. These few reflections hint to increasingly disconcerting discoveries of a soul which accepts to be guided by the divine light. But this evolution, which requires surpassing infinitely beyond what initially seemed to us the seductive ideal, is the work of God. It seems that He has cheated us because He leads us to where we did not want to go. But in reality He unveils gradually a truth that we were not able to host early on. This amen of God is the only guaranty of the Carthusians, his only strength on an itinerary where precisely It is to lose all reservation, to no longer have in self any intrinsic source of strength, nor of independent judgment. He must therefore believe in Love, and surrender to It.

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