

## Introduction

This book is a sequel to Richard Valantasis's *Centuries of Holiness*. This first book explored the theory of postmodern spiritual practice based on the Eastern Christian contemplative tradition and refracted for postmodern people living in a complex and demanding world. It is a highly theoretical book that encapsulates a system of contemplative thinking and reflection with deep roots in early Christian and Byzantine sources.

This sequel, *Centuries on Contemplation*, takes a different tack. We wanted to write a book that explored the theoretical and theological underpinnings of contemplation from the perspective of day to day experience. We call this kind of contemplation "tactical contemplation," because we understand contemplation as a series of tactics to be deployed throughout the day to remain connected to God. We do not present a one-fits-all system of contemplation, but a series of reflections that we hope aid people in thinking and living contemplatively throughout their often very active days of work, study, prayer, and just living. We want to provide you ways of thinking about contemplative living that you can adapt to the specific realities of your own life.

The western tradition of asceticism and contemplation has been overly systematized beginning with the Catholic Reformation and continuing until today. The western tradition focuses on "infused grace," the grace of contemplation that comes as a free gift of God for which there is not human activity that can do anything but make the person "receptive" to God's grace. The western tradition is based upon a perceived gulf between God and humans. This is not the case with the Eastern Christian tradition, which begins with the reality that God participates in all that God created. For Eastern Christians, the mind and body may (with some mental and physical work) participate in God. The Eastern Christian tradition maintains that everyone is called to be a contemplative, this is a birth-right of baptism, and that contemplation is the normal activity of anything or anyone God created. There is no gulf between God and creation in Eastern Christian mystical theology. We find this Eastern Christian perspective more approachable and useful in the postmodern context in which we live. It is this Eastern Christian perspective on contemplation that we promulgate in these short essays.

*Centuries on Contemplation* will be written online as a series of weekly postings for the Associates of the Institute for Contemplative Living. Our associates' responses to our writings will guide and direct the way we develop our book. They will be acknowledged as co-authors of the book. So we encourage you to respond to the postings as you wish. We want to make sure this book speaks to you and works in your lives.

The spur to our thinking comes from the Eastern Christian contemplative tradition. Maximus the Confessor (580-662 CE) is an important witness and

theologian of this tradition. Our work with his writings has formed us in our own thinking about contemplation. But together with Maximos, we have read and worked with the various contemplative writers of the five-volumed anthology of contemplative literature, *The Philokalia*, which summarizes and guides the lives of Eastern Christians until today.

The narrative voice of this book presents a challenge. The "I" of these essays reflects a common discourse between Richard and Doug that have formed the basis for our reflection on contemplation. The stories have been told and retold in such a way that the narrative voice has become one voice, so we do not differentiate between Doug's "I" and Richard's. They are one voice, forged in the conversation and discourse that forms the basis for our exploration of the contemplative tradition. This accords with the Eastern Christian tradition of the sayings of the ancient contemplatives whose stories are told and retold under various names, because the important thing is the story not the narrator of the story. We gladly lose our identity as it is swept up in the tradition of exploring and practicing contemplation. The conversation takes precedent over intellectual property, just as it was for our contemplative ancestors.

We ask that you do not duplicate or distribute these short essays without our permission. It's a work in progress and not yet ready for publication before revision. Thanks for your cooperation in this.

Now enjoy, think, reflect, and continue to make the connections, to trace the associations between your life and relationships to God.