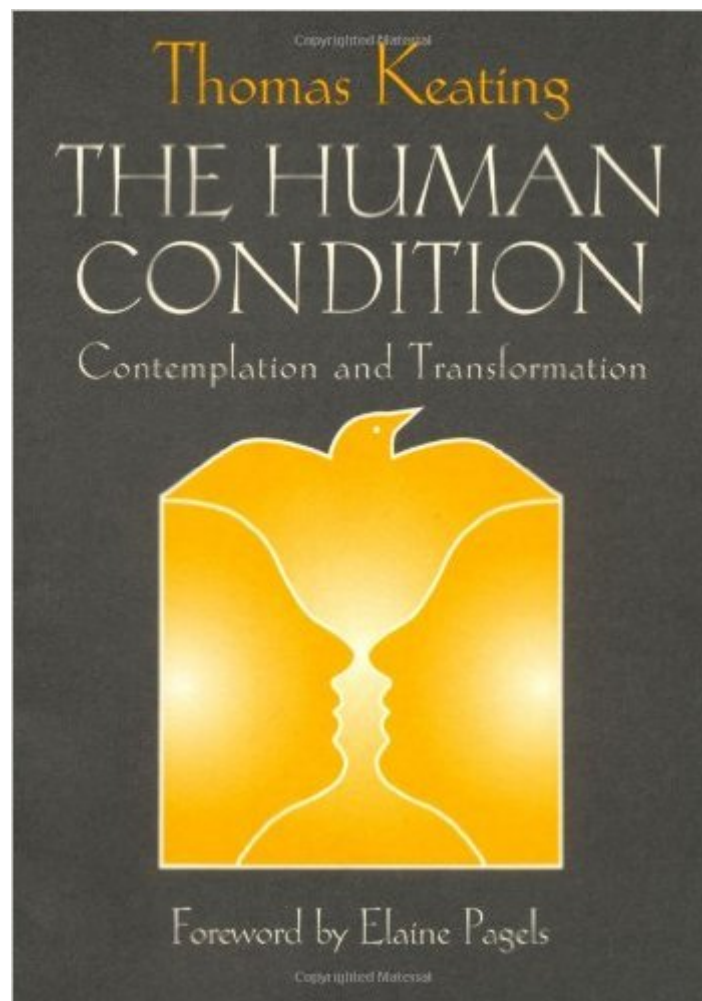


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The Human Condition: Contemplation And Transformation (Wit Lectures-Harvard Divinity School)



Synopsis

One of the founders of the Centering Prayer movement, Thomas Keating offers a reflection on contemplative prayer, the human search for happiness and our need to explore the inner world. The spiritual search for God, he says, is also the search for ourselves. Drawing from Christian mystical tradition, Eastern and Orthodox religions, contemporary psychology, and the recovery model, Keating shows how the practice of contemplation can become a process of psychological and spiritual transformation. And as we move into a global culture, this process is of greater importance than ever. He begins with the great questions of self-knowledge: "Who are you? Where are you hiding?" The seemingly fruitless search for human happiness hinges on the answers to these: "Where am I in relation to God, myself and others?" and "Whoever I think I am, I am not." The contemplative journey is "divine therapy" for the illness of the human condition, a way to open up gradually to our own wounded unconscious. It is an excuse in letting go of the false self, which is the only self we know, and in realizing that God is the only true security. Divine love is the full affirmation of who we are. Writing with simplicity and depth, Keating brings common sense, extraordinary enlightenment, and fifty years of experience to the topic and the practice of discovering the presence of God.

Book Information

Paperback: 45 pages

Publisher: Paulist Press (June 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0809138824

ISBN-13: 978-0809138821

Product Dimensions: 0.2 x 5 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (80 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #54,241 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #89 in [Books > Religion &](#)

[Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Meditations](#) #169 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles >](#)

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Customer Reviews

I ran across this book by accident. I had heard of Father Keating. He was the "Father of Centering Prayer." I never thought very much of that, from comments I heard; so, I never had any interest in its founder. For my money, give me Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Avila and other mystics.

They "have been to the mountain and have seen the other side!" Basically, after the Introduction, there are less than 40 pages to read. I thought I would rip through this, support all my former conclusions and be done with him. I was not only surprised, but humbled to read Father Keating's little book. He is a "kindred spirit" of the "mystics." He is a "kindred spirit" of mine and everyone I have introduced to this book. After "dozens" of referrals, I have had no one tell me this was not a powerful help to them. Right from the beginning, I found myself savoring his words, and realizing that they had to be meditated on and "unpacked." It took me two months to finish this, trying to digest every morsel I could find in it. People who had the same prejudice as me, stand corrected as I do. This man has one goal in mind: to lead us to "the heights," to get us to pray. He wants our prayer to blossom. He is not hung up on his own ideas. He offers Centering Prayer to those who have no practices of prayer. For those who do, he does not want to be disruptive. He tells us "Centering Prayer and other practices that lead us to Christian contemplation move us toward interior freedom. We open ourselves to God and allow ourselves to rest in a silent place beyond thinking...." This interior freedom, he says, is "the gift of God as we let go of our attachments and aversions, our `shoulds'...."

Here are two lectures delivered by the author at Harvard in 1997 (The foreword by Pagels is as long as this review). The first lecture's theme is ' _where_ are you?', whereas the second lecture's is ' _who_ are you?' Keating sees these two questions as accurately dividing the contemplative life, specifically the Christian contemplative life. His writing reminds me of Anthony DeMello. He defines the 'where' question by beginning with the garden story as a revelation of where _we_ are. "At every moment of our lives, God is asking 'Where are you? Why are you hiding?' All the questions that are fundamental to human happiness arise when we ask ourselves this excruciating question: _Where_ am I? Where am I in relation to God, to myself, and to others? These are the basic questions of human life." Then he goes on further, "happiness is intimacy with God, the experience of God's loving presence. Without that experience, nothing else quite works; with it, almost anything works." "This is the human condition - to be without the true source of happiness, which is the experience of the presence of God, and to have lost the key to happiness, which is the contemplative dimension to life, the path to the increasing assimilation and enjoyment of God's presence." I think that summarizes in Keating's own words what he set out to accomplish in this book. From a spiritual perspective, Keating's ideas of 'the divine therapy', our poor emotional programs for happiness, and the false self are quite good, and his descriptions are excellent. My experience with the Divine Hours confirms a good amount of what he says. With the exception of a

stray comment here or there that seem to be unwarranted imports from eastern thinking at odds with Hebraic thought, much of this is solid.

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