



Humor and Contemplation

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Have you ever considered the relationship between laughter and contemplation? Or should we say between good humor and contemplation? It may be a fruitful exercise. When people speak of contemplation the idea often comes across that it must be quite an awesome business. Awareness of God, of his presence, of union with him, ecstatic moments and all that; not the kind of happening that we would usually associate with a good laugh. And yet perhaps for most of us a good laugh is one of the commoner describable experiences nearest to the experience of God. What does this mean? Well, genuine ecstasy is very close to genuine joy and genuine joy overflows and expresses itself almost spontaneously in genuine laughter. A good laugh is a wholesome and a holy thing. In laughter we experience a closeness to each other that is unique—at the level of spirit it could be said that a smile and a laugh (or loud smile) unite people in a quite extraordinary way. We are taken up at once into the wonder-filled joyful awareness of both *being* and of *being-in-God's-careful-powerful-hands*. We see the other person as highly lovable and for a moment a beam of the greatness of that person and the greatness of God slips into our consciousness.

If laughter is close to ecstasy this is why pseudo-laughter, mockery, scorn, sarcasm, jeering, obscenity and so on are particularly wrong. They are not wonder at what *is* (a glance behind the humdrum veil that covers things) but the creation of something that *is not* (an image of someone that is false, that degrades, cheapens or defiles the person in some way).

Surprise is close to some kinds of humor (many jokes depend on surprise). Often this surprise involves a sudden view of the incompetence of Man: the effort that he has made to make himself seem so totally secure — so Godheaded — has casually been brought to nothing by some chance letdown event. As we realize the letdown we laugh because we are aware, in some implicit kind of way, that we can never fall out of God's hands, we can never be let down or fail to be loved by our all-competent, creating, saving, safety-netting God. This kind of implicit awareness of being in God's all-competent hands is probably what the gift of humility is all about. The gift of being able to see ourselves and others in a correct light — without exaggeration or distortion. The gift of being able to face ourselves and thank God for what we are; not covering up our blemishes but being quietly aware of them, genuinely sorry for our own part in them, and calmly confident that God can do something about them, and *will* in his own good time. Perhaps this is why the arrogant rarely have a good laugh, they cannot afford to take lightly the cracks in their all-competent selves.