

HOPE and the MIND — Part II

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Zilkia Jimenez

“...take every thought captive to obey Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:5



Summary: Understanding how our minds work will afford us the ability to “take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:5).” In this teaching, we will learn from Dr. Caroline Leaf how the mind works so that we can recognize patterns in our thought-life and take control of our thoughts, surrendering them to Jesus Christ.

Last week, we spoke about the importance of our thoughts and imaginations. And we spoke about how our thoughts affect our emotions, which then move us to act. This week, we will look at how our minds work so that we can learn to control our thoughts and imaginations and so that we can redirect our minds to God.

The transformation of the mind requires much work and a bit of knowledge. In her book *Switch on Your Brain*, Dr. Caroline Leaf, a communication pathologist and clinical neuroscientist specializing in psychoneurobiology, helps us understand our minds. To briefly summarize the book, it speaks about the power of our unconscious mind, our thoughts, memories, and imagination, and how we can control them, bringing peace, happiness, health, and, ultimately, union with God. The author speaks about “capturing” our thoughts before they become a part of our unconscious. In fact, she constantly quotes 2 Corinthians throughout her book: “...take every thought captive to obey Christ...” 2 Corinthians 10:5.

On page 13, she writes:

“You can, through conscious effort, gain control of your thoughts and feelings, and in doing so, you can change the programming and chemistry of your brain.” page 13

What an amazing power God has given us! The ability of each one of us to change the chemistry of our brains is a huge gift!

Dr. Leaf explains in her book that 90 to 99% of brain activity occurs in our unconscious. We make decisions based on what is in our unconscious. When our unconscious is toxic, that is, filled with negative thoughts, memories, and imaginations, we are then unable to control our emotions, and therefore, it affects our choices, our emotions, and even our health. She writes:

“...research shows that DNA actually changes shape according to our thoughts. As you think those negative thoughts about the future—the week ahead, what a person might say or do, even in the absence of the concrete stimulus—that toxic thinking will change your brain wiring in a negative direction and throw your mind and body into stress.” page 35

In other words, toxic thinking will lead your life in a negative direction, causing stress to your mind and body. I think this is something many have heard before, but the Lord wants to take us deeper. So let us continue so that we can understand how we, as victim souls, can manage our way of thinking so that we can enter into a deeper union with the Lord.

Dr. Leaf continues further in the book:

“Our choices—*the natural consequences of our thoughts and imagination*—get ‘under the skin’ of our DNA...changing the structure of the neurons in our brains. So, our thoughts, imagination, and choices can change the structure and function of our brains on every level: molecular, genetic, epigenetic, cellular, structural, neurochemical, electromagnetic, and even subatomic. Through our thoughts, we can be our own brain surgeons as we make choices that change the circuits in our brains. We are designed to do our own brain surgery. This scientific power of our mind to change the brain is called epigenetics, and spiritually, it is as a man thinks, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). The way the brain changes as a result of mental activity is scientifically called neuroplasticity. And spiritually, it is the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2).” page 56

In other words, Dr. Leaf is saying that we are what we think. We are able to literally, physically, and scientifically renew our minds. Romans 12:2 now has a deeper meaning:

“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” Romans 12:2

Saint Paul is giving us advice as to what we are to do. These words are being spoken directly to us... we are being asked to do something here... we are being asked to intentionally work toward “renewing our minds.” This requires us to exercise our free will in order to renew our minds, with God’s grace, of course.

Dr. Leaf goes on to suggest that we are able to change the landscape of our minds by what we focus on. She continues:

“We are directly responsible for what we choose to think about and dwell on, and we make these decisions in the **[privacy]** of our own thinking.” *[emphasis added]* page 45

This is what we spoke about last week. As Fr. Ron taught us... our imagination is our private, secret place, which we are attached to. It is the place we escape to, where we are “directly

responsible” for what we choose to think. Let’s remember the question Father Ron had us ponder: “How much time do we spend in our imagination?”

Dr. Leaf goes on to make a very important point here that is also very united to something the Lord has taught us in Love Crucified:

“As you think, it is important to make a distinction between who you truly are—the real, multifaceted, unique you—and the person you have become through toxic choices.” page 45

This is united to what we have learned in Love Crucified about having become who we are not due to our wounds. Our minds have been plagued with all sorts of thoughts we have been collecting since our mother’s womb. All of us have been wounded to some degree or another. These thoughts are now in our unconscious. The Lord wants us to focus on His Words and His Voice through Scripture and His messages to our Community. He wants to help us change the landscape of our unconscious mind, allowing for greater peace, trust, and HOPE. In the end, a greater union with Him.

On page 72 of the book, Dr. Leaf writes:

“The ability to [**quiet**] your mind, focus your attention on the present issue, capture your thoughts, and dismiss the distractions that come your way is an excellent and powerful ability that God has placed within you.” *[emphasis added]* page 72

These words are so united to us as well. Being able to quiet our minds—to enter silence, is an ability God has given us. Being attentive to everyone He places in our lives is an ability God has given us. And being able to capture our thoughts before they enter and control our minds, is an ability God has given us. But...Dr. Leaf continues:

“In the busy age we live in, however, we have trained ourselves out of this natural and necessary skill. Natural because it is wired into the design of the brain, allowing the brain to capture and discipline chaotic rogue thoughts; necessary because it calms our spirits so we can tune in and listen to God. When we are mindful of catching our thoughts in this way, we change our connection with God from uninvolved and independent, to involved and dependent.” page 72

According to Dr. Leaf, this ability to enter silence, to be attentive, and to capture our thoughts has been lost due to our current cultural atmosphere. But as she also mentions, these skills are necessary, and we can regain them so that we can enter a greater union with God. The words “involved and dependent” on our God means entering a greater union. And this is what our Lord desires... a greater union with Him.

Dr. Leaf also speaks about the importance of paying attention to how information enters our minds. She explains that we experience the world and express ourselves through our five senses. She writes further in the book:

“Information comes through the five senses, is received consciously by the conscious cognitive level, and then passes into the non-conscious metacognitive level where—if you have paid attention and started thinking and choosing—it becomes a physical thought as a result of genetic expression...this newly built physical thought will in turn, impact your conscious cognitive...our five senses activate an emotional response almost immediately, but if we don’t take the time to process them, the unprocessed emotion will dominate (page 128-129).”

This is where silence is crucial. Silence of the imagination, silence of the memory, silence of interior conversations, silence of self-love, silence of the will, silence of our senses, silence of judgment, silence of the heart, silence of the spirit, and even silence of speech and silence of body (refer to Women's 2023 Retreat) are all essential in the process of the transformation of our minds. Entering this deep silence will afford us the ability to capture rogue thoughts and redirect our thinking to Christ.

“Thoughts are real, physical things that occupy mental real estate. Moment by moment, every day, you are changing the structure of your brain through your thinking. When we [HOPE], it is an activity of the mind that changes the structure of our brain in a positive and normal direction.”
page 19

Therefore, when we hope... when we intentionally choose to capture negative thoughts and choose to hope instead, our thinking changes direction. We are redirecting our thoughts, discarding those which do not please Him, to thoughts of Him. Last week, we read a message in which God Himself shows us how to redirect our thinking to “think ONLY of Him.” Let us remember what He told us:

*“Begin to forget about yourself, and **try to think only of Me and My passion of love.** As I continue to suffer present in the Eucharist, **I think only of souls and pleasing My Father. My gaze never leaves you, My little one.** Try to mortify your flesh so that, more and more, you **think only of Me and pleasing our Father as one with Me in the cloister of Mary’s Heart.** This practice will help you greatly during the time of great suffering that approaches quickly.” 11/2/23*

Also, last week, I mentioned words that I felt the Lord speak to my heart, where He said to me, “Praise My Holy Name. Praise always and in every situation.” Those words are so united to this message above because praising our Lord’s Holy Name in every situation naturally means that He is on top of minds, constantly. Therefore, when we praise God, when we constantly thank Him, we are thinking of Him... our thoughts are redirected from negativity and distraction to thoughts that are only of Him, as He asks of us. And really, all we have to do is *remember* our Lord... *Remember* all He has done in our lives and what He has spoken to us.

This past Sunday at Mass, a song was played during Communion that helped me to understand this concept much better. The chorus of this song, Remembrance, goes like this:

*Lord, we remember you
And remembrance leads us to worship
And as we worship you
Our worship leads to communion
We respond to your invitation
We remember you*

In the end... it is all about being in communion with our Lord,... to enter a deeper union with Him... to console His Most Sacred Heart, to be ONE with Him in His sufferings. When we remember Him, it leads us to worship Him. When we worship Him, it leads to a greater union of hearts.

The unconscious mind is quite powerful and we must come to understand the workings of it in order to understand our emotions and, most importantly, understand God's power and might in creating us. Entering a deeper silence will help us control our emotions and move us to a greater hope. Because,

“An undisciplined mind is filled with a continuous stream of worries, fears, and distorted perceptions that trigger degenerative processes in the mind and body. We cannot afford not to bring all thoughts into captivity to Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:5). Page 76

This entire exercise is very difficult; however, as we find ourselves doing the work of capturing our thoughts and holding them captive by discarding damaging thoughts and choosing to hope and think “only of Him,” we will find greater peace (2 Corinthians 10:5). This is a work of the will and a work of the mind, and it begins with surrendering our thoughts and free will with regard to our thinking...this part is absolutely essential.

Once again, these messages are so important for this teaching. Let us dissect these messages a bit more and try to understand how the Holy Spirit possesses our minds, hearts, and faculties.

“My flame of love is the Holy Spirit. Through My Path, My flame of love has possessed your minds, hearts, and faculties so that it is no longer you who live but I who live in you. In this way, I live in you as you live in Me, and the Father lives in us. Do not be afraid to be sent out as My heralds of HOPE to usher in My era of peace. Do not be afraid to confront the forces of evil as My Light, for it is the light of My holy remnant that will conquer the forces of darkness. Believe that you are the light of the world and hold the power of God.” 5/26/14 #68

“My Flame of Love has now possessed your faculties. You now live in peace in the darkness of faith without My sweet consolations. My flame of love has now possessed your faculties of sight, touch, hearing, and speaking. It is My Spirit in you who sees into the hearts of others; it is God's touch moving through your hands; you live now in the “silence” of the Trinity, and your words are wisdom and understanding itself.” 5/26/14 #67

As we have been reading, all the information we receive in our unconscious comes through our five senses... our faculties. Now, if the Holy Spirit truly possesses our minds, hearts, and faculties, then not only does He speak, gaze, and touch through each one of us, but He also serves as a filter, if you will, as we receive all the information that enters our minds through our faculties. This is the meaning of being no longer two but ONE.

Thus our prayer now must become one of surrender, but also one of petition in which we ask the Holy Spirit to act as a filter in our minds. We must ask the Holy Spirit to filter out all thoughts that do not glorify our Lord. He ought to be the only One allowed in the secret place of our imaginations. We must beg Him to keep out any thoughts that do not please Him, that do not glorify Him, and beg for the grace for us to only allow hope to enter our minds and hearts. Our prayer must be the prayer of surrender from St. Ignatius of Loyola:

Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, Lord, I return it. All is

Yours, dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me Your love and Your grace, for that is enough for me.

Ignatius Loyola

Next week, we will talk about WHY it is so important to exercise our free will in order to control our thoughts and imaginations and enter a deeper silence so that the Lord can continue to transform each one of us.